

Stories of the New Geography

The Refugee Tales

ABSTRACT *The Refugee Tales* project holds a distinctive place amongst 20th and 21st century responses to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The project comprises collections of tales published in textual editions alongside a politically embodied campaign to call an end to the practice of indefinite detention of asylum seekers in the United Kingdom. The tales that are told take the form of an established writer giving voice to those that are caught up in this inhuman process. Some of the oral narratives come from refugees, some from care-workers and supporters, and some from those caught up in the institutional processes of bureaucracy. These tales are heard and rehearsed on an annual walk that appropriates the pilgrimage route to a new geography that contests political space and its confinements. The project as a whole captures the spirit and purpose of Chaucer's work. While engagement with textual detail is intermittent, but probing where it appears, this body of work, as Chaucer's did, gives voice to those whose voices are unheard. *The Refugee Tales* pick up on how Chaucer integrated a narrative about England into an international geography—though with a difference. While Chaucer sets his stories chiefly outside the shores of England for literary purposes, *The Refugee Tales* appropriate the space of England to create a borderless nation that is hospitable to persons from Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and in fact a whole international diaspora of nations whose people have become displaced. *The Refugee Tales* takes its inspiration from Chaucer not to produce a quaint exercise in medievalism or to update his work as a solely intellectual exercise. This project engages minds, body, creativity and political will. International in its remit, it frees the Father of English poetry to kick over the traces of borders that would separate nation from nation, children from parents, and human beings from each other. *The Refugee Tales* digs deep into the spirit of the medieval past to face up to a pressing and urgent global challenge.

KEYWORDS: Chaucer, Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Medievalism

Custance travels 4,500 miles between Rome, Northumbria, Syria, and back to Rome. The glue on the seams of an inflatable boat melts fast in the scorching sun. Dead eyes stare glassily from the Mediterranean Sea. A boy is in prison. They go in first with their fists, then with a black rod on his ribs, his shins, and his ankles until things start to break and burst. A removal center where the light is on 24 hours a day, where there is no sheet on the bed and nothing else in the room, and where security checks on you every fifteen minutes. A return ticket to the border authority where you have to report three times a week costs £24. Your Azure card cannot be used on public transport. You have to walk.

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You have to walk. The scenario I have just sketched is drawn from some of the stories in the recently published *The Refugee Tales*, volumes one and two.¹ *The Refugee Tales* project is both text and action. It is a “Walk in Solidarity with Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Detainees.” Begun in 2014 by the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group, it is a response to the silence that surrounds indefinite immigration detention in the UK. There have been three walks: in 2015, from Dover to Crawley via Canterbury; in 2016, from Canterbury to Westminster via Dartford, and in 2017, from Runnymede to Westminster. The walkers are detainees, asylum seekers, and former refugees who travel in company with writers, politicians, care workers, and supporters. Inspired by Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, writers read their stories about the experiences of refugees at the various stopping points in the journey. While in 2016 and 2017, some detainees told their own stories in an open forum, in the published versions each tale is a collaboration between an established writer and a person caught up in the undue process of indefinite detention. The tales record real experiences. Out of the silence that barricades a detainee in time and space, a story is told and shared. It is heard on the move; it is read in a book.

Refugee Tales holds a distinctive place in 20th and 21st century engagements with Chaucer. It is not an academic enterprise, though some of the writers hold tenured jobs in a university, or have an affiliation to higher education. It is not a tourist excursion in the fashion of the Canterbury Tales Visitor Attraction or the Royal Shakespeare Company’s dramatization of the *Tales* for the popular stage.² These tales are a literary response with a live social agenda and purpose that sets them apart from other contemporary textual responses to *The Canterbury Tales*: there is no sustained re-telling of any of Chaucer’s tales by updating their plots and characters.³ Storylines do not travel across. *Refugee Tales* denies the pleasure of spotting coded resemblances between Chaucer’s tale-tellers and updated narrators. In *Refugee Tales*, the stories are too telling for the game of allusion.⁴ These stories are too true, and while the titles of the tales follow a Chaucerian format—“The Interpreter’s Tale,” for instance—neither the tellers nor the persons in the tales are modelled on specific Chaucerian characters. You cannot spot

1. David Herd and Anna Pincus, eds., *Refugee Tales I* (Great Britain: Comma Press, 2016); David Herd and Anna Pincus, eds., *Refugee Tales II* (Great Britain: Comma Press, 2017). The opening paragraph recounts details from “The Lawyer’s Tale” (RT1, 118); “The Unaccompanied Minor’s Tale” (RT1, 22); “The Witness’ Tale” (RT2, 44-45); “The Detainee’s Tale” (RT1, 60); “The Abandoned Person’s Tale” (RT2, 27). When released from a detention center, a person is given an allowance of £5 a day. It takes the form of a top up card, called an Azure card, that can be used only in designated outlets and on certain products. It cannot be used on public transport (“Afterword,” RT2, 119).

2. The Canterbury Tales visitor attraction is a stone’s throw from the Cathedral in St Margaret’s Street. It is an interactive tour through Chaucer’s tales. The experience of this popular attraction for an academic audience is discussed by Stephanie Trigg, “Walking through Cathedrals: Scholars, Pilgrims, and Medieval Tourists,” *New Medieval Literatures* 7 (2005): 9-33. *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer was adapted by Mike Poulton and shown originally by the RSC at the Swan Theatre, Stratford upon Avon (2006).

3. There is not space here to compare *Refugee Tales* with the huge number of twenty and twenty-first century Chaucerian responses. For comparisons, there is Steve Ellis, *Chaucer at Large: The Poet in the Modern Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), Kathleen Forni, *Chaucer’s Afterlife: Adaptations in Recent Popular Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003) and *The Global Chaucers Project* (<https://globalchaucers.wordpress.com/>).

4. Linda Hutcheon notes that one of the pleasures of adaptation comes from repetition with variation, “from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise,” from *A Theory of Adaptation*, with Siobhan O’Flynn (London: Routledge, 2013), 4.

the resemblance between the Unaccompanied Minor, the Lorry Driver, the Deportee, the Support Worker, the Smuggled Person, and any of the pilgrims who assemble in the Tabard or who overtake the company as it travels.⁵ The generic “types” of tale-tellers are real people who are alive (some miraculously so), and in a number of cases, their tales have been scored into their flesh and bone. There are no names in the titles because it is simply too dangerous to put them in. Anonymity is vital: “[y]ou never know where . . . The UK Border Force’s eager beavers might be lurking.” They could appear “In a London Church on Mothering Sunday where the priest is giving a sermon on Moses and his Mother.”⁶ (Or in Bradford, perhaps, where an eight-year-old child fast asleep in bed wakes to the nightmare of the light suddenly switched on, “and the big man in uniform was standing there.”⁷ On the other hand, in Croydon at 6 AM, August 12th, 2012, when the UK Border Agency showed up at the door of a former Nigerian journalist who worked for the BBC World Service. You worked in Britain for 28 years, paying tax and national insurance. You were not dressed. They were acting on a tip-off.⁸

Refugee Tales is also set apart from closely contemporary responses to Chaucer because of its ongoing radical account of what it means to take a journey. In closely contemporary responses, the journeys are completed.⁹ With *Refugee Tales*, the journey has not ended. Three walks have been undertaken; two volumes of tales have been published.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the story is incomplete. For the majority of the tellers, there is still no place to call home. Indefinite detention is still enshrined in the practice of how the UK treats refugees seeking asylum. The work of the walks goes on.

And what comes out of Southwark
Is a whole new language
Of travel and assembly and curiosity
And welcome.
. . . . every step sets out a demand
And every demand is urgent
And what we call for
Is an end
To this inhuman discourse.¹¹

5. There is one exception: Constance in “The Man of Law’s Tale” turns up in a different setting in “The Migrant’s Tale” and “The Lawyer’s Tale.” I discuss these later.

6. “The Mother’s Tale,” *RT2*, 96 and 101.

7. “The Dependant’s Tale,” *RT1*, 85.

8. “The Appellant’s Tale,” *RT1*, 71.

9. In each of the following, the updated Canterbury pilgrims reach their destination: Ana Lydia Vega, “Eye Openers,” *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories*, eds. Stewart Brown and John Wickham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 333-343; Marilyn Nelson, *The Cachoeira Tales and Other Poems* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005); and Patience Agbabi, *Telling Tales* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2014).

10. Since the writing of this essay, there has been a fourth walk in 2018: from St Albans, Hertfordshire, to Westminster, London. A third volume of essays will be published as a record of the walk. In 2019, the walk will be from Brighton to Hastings.

11. *RT1*, viii and x.

Talking and walking are inseparable in the *Refugee Tales* project. A new language creates a new geography. The project realises in text and action Michel de Certeau's theoretical account of the practice of walking: "a process of appropriation of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian."¹² Put simply, the act of walking can tell a narrative that contests those fictional pathways that keep us in our place. If you displace accepted geography, you can tell different stories from those that our maps foreclose. Tales yet unheard are bodied forth with every step. The declared intent of the Refugees Project is to share "stories of the new geography."¹³ The project reconfigures the terrain of the Weald of Kent to create a political carnival or "a spectacle of welcome."¹⁴ A welcome is what the displaced are denied. A spectacle of community walking across the landscape in supportive solidarity remaps the journeys that the displaced and the isolated are forced to take.

The route of the walks is symbolic in practice and in cartography. While overt verbal correspondences to the text of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* are intermittent (and sparing in volume two), the project appropriates Chaucer's structural model of the storytelling journey to follow a model that Chaucer has already set in place. Pilgrimage trails in the Middle Ages followed set paths: London to Canterbury; England to Santiago de Compostela. Chaucer's does not. His pilgrims never reach Canterbury. The Parson's homily on the destination of the Heavenly City of Jerusalem is no substitute for a spiritual terminus except in the realm of allegory. This fusion of the religious and the secular is apparent from the start. What inspires the pilgrims "to go on pilgrimages" (I.12) is "nature" that "priketh them . . . in hir corages" (I.13): the onset of spring; the re-awakening of the natural world and sexual desire. On a route of penance, the pilgrims tread a "litel moore than paas" (I.825). The place names on the route mingle transcendent significance with the mundane. "Caunterbury" (I.16; I.22) gives way to the Tabard (I.20; I.719) in the salubrious suburb of Southwark. Thereafter, location is haphazardly signalled, seemingly arbitrary. "The Caunterbury Weye" (IX.3) is signposted by The Watering of St. Thomas (I.826); "Depeford" (I.3906); Greenwich (I.3907); Sittingbourne (III.847); Rochester (VII.1926); "Boghtoun under Blee" (VIII.556); "Blee" (Blean Forest) (X.3); "Bobbe up and down" (Harbledown) (X.2). Cathedral city keeps company with forest, town with hamlet. Vast swathes of the Kentish countryside are left unaccounted for.¹⁵ No clear spiritual guidance emerges. Not only do the pilgrims never reach Canterbury, marooned forever somewhere on the edge of Blean Forest, they never get back to their promised supper at the Tabard. They never return home "from every shires ende."¹⁶

12. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 97. Walking is a "space of enunciation" (98) which changes the organisation of space and terrain both geographically and in language: "Every story is a spatial practice which may affirm, suspect, try out, transgress or respect the trajectories it speaks" (115); and "what the map cuts up, the story cuts across" (129).

13. RT1, vii.

14. RT1, vii.

15. All quotations from Chaucer are from Larry D. Benson et al. eds., *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Ruth Evans suggests that these place names are symbolic because they record an ideational journey, not an actual pilgrimage. See "Wayfinding in the Middle Ages," in Valerie Allen and Ruth Evans, eds. *Roadworks: Medieval Britain, Medieval Roads* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 129-37, 129.

16. *Canterbury Tales*, I.15.

Chaucer alters the customary value of The Canterbury Way. The path remains recognizable, culturally legible, but its significance is changed.¹⁷ The *Refugee Tales* follows in the pilgrims' horse-steps, though with a difference. The route of the Canterbury pilgrimage becomes charged with current political purposes. First, its starts and ends are altered. As David Herd explains in his "Afterword" to volume two, the inaugural walk, from Dover to Crawley via Canterbury, was framed by the location of detention centers: the Dover Immigration Removal centre situated on Dover's iconic white cliffs, and the Brook House and Tinsley House Immigration Removal Centre at Gatwick Airport.¹⁸ In 2016, Canterbury was the starting point, but the walk ended at Westminster, the seat of political power and government administration. Westminster was the final destination of the 2017 walk, though its start was Runnymede, site of the signing of the Magna Carta. Talks about the absence of "due process" in indefinite detention punctuated the 2017 walk. The departure from the terms of Magna Carta was overtly signalled in physical journey, and in text. Herd quotes the following clauses:

39. No free man is to be arrested, or imprisoned, or diseased or outlawed, or exiled, or in any way destroyed, nor will we go against him, nor will we send against him, save by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land.
40. To no-one will we sell, to no one will we deny or delay, right to justice.¹⁹

Not only Chaucer's textual geography is appropriated. So too is the physical landscape of the south of England. Herd explains the symbolic sense of the walk: "[w]hat it aims to do, as it crosses the landscape, is to open up a space; a space in which the stories of people who have been detained can be told and heard in a respectful manner."²⁰ The meaning and power of detention centers is changed. Far from places of locked doors, endless corridors, and indefinite detention, where you cannot communicate with the outside world, they become markers of a journey in which people are free to walk and to speak. As the project walked, it reclaimed the landscape of South East England for the language of welcome and shared the experiences of migration, all to show in all its horror what indefinite detention means.

The Walk reorients the conceit of pilgrimage in ways that recall Chaucer's fusion of the spiritual with the secular. In a blend of political and recreational values, the inaugural walk followed part of the pilgrims' path between London and Canterbury as it traversed the North Downs Way. Crossing the county borders of Kent, Hampshire, and Sussex, it rendered the lines drawn on a bounded map permeable. The North Downs Way is a public right of way. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers walked on pathways ancient and modern designated to be open to all.²¹ Not hiding under the axles of lorries, or squashed into a leaking boat under the scorching

17. To use Henri Lefebvre's term, the Canterbury Way is "an appropriated space" that Chaucer puts to a different use from its normative value, Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, transl. David Nicholson Smith (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991), 166-67.

18. *RT*2, 113.

19. "Afterword," *RT*2, 120.

20. *RT*1, 115.

21. They re-enact the social practice of highways in the Middle Ages. As B.P. Hindle comments, "medieval highways that run through open terrain rather than through towns may be considered a right of way as much if not more than as a physical entity. Travellers could ordinarily expect to be able to move around or alongside obstructions even if doing so took them into private land," *Medieval Roads*, 2nd edn. (Princes Risborough: Shire, 1989), 6.

sun, or held in a windowless room indefinitely, these were persons free to walk: “to make a spectacle of welcome/This political carnival/Across the Weald of Kent./People circulating/Making music/Listening to stories/People urgently need said.”²²

The North Downs Way is a leisure route. In 2017, a significant part of the Walk was along another one: the Thames Path. The lunchtime talk on Day 4 was held at the London Wetlands Centre, Barnes. A guided tour of this leisure spot followed the talk. Migrants and detainees whose movement is circumscribed by reporting to detention centers were free to move along paths and spaces marked out for pleasure. In the stories of the *Tales*, that appropriation of recreational space is shown to be impossible. “The Lorry Driver’s Tale” comments wryly on the difference between the liberal intellectual holidaymaker, returning in their car from France with their sprigs of lavender and their duty-free items, and the lorry journeys of those that are displaced:

They think that illegals should be allowed in, but when they say “in,” they do not mean *in their car* . . . It’s not as if the Border Force ever look in the boot of a family motor—but that isn’t how liberals think. They’re intellectually fearless rather than actually brave.²³

The mode of transport does not matter. It is one law for the refugee and another for the tourist:

He hasn’t earned the right to go where his feet lead. To follow the vision his sight affords.

Unlike of course, the skiers, the flyers, the cheap holidayers

The backpackers, gap-trackers, experience-receivers,

The lunches in suits who discern over croutes.²⁴

By setting out “over a landscape gathered/Step by step . . . we call our commons,” by appropriating leisure routes such as The North Downs Way and the Thames Path, *The Refugee Tales* creates a new geography to appropriate a space for the telling of stories that badly need to be heard.²⁵ The Project is an act of radical enunciation. The strategy is not wholly dissimilar from Chaucer’s own in *The Canterbury Tales*, only its agenda is much less fictionally open-ended. Its determined intent is to make audible and mobile persons locked out of due process and indefinitely detained.

Deep within the Refugee Tales Project is a proposal that the language of national space be re-read, that we read back through to find the expression that gestures Outwards.²⁶

22. “Prologue,” *RT1*, x.

23. “Prologue,” *RT1*, 26.

24. “The Deportee’s Tale,” *RT1*, 100. Lefebvre comments critically on the transformation of the perimeter of the Mediterranean into a leisure-oriented space for industrialised Europe. It sets it apart as a “non-work” space, not just for vacations but also for convalescences, rest, retirement, and so on (*The Production of Space*, 58). That Mediterranean space is simply not available for displaced persons. Rather it is a dangerous space of displacement.

25. *RT1*, vi.

26. *RT1*, 139.

The Refugee Tales read back to Chaucer not by finding 21st century equivalents to his pilgrims, nor by finding a modern idiom to retell versions of his tales. Instead, as Herd explains, the writers respond to “what they found in Chaucer: a deeply complicated geography . . . that intervenes deeply on any assumption of a national frame.”²⁷ Both volumes of *Refugee Tales* redraw borders. They redefine them within England, and they extend their frames well beyond its shores to open up a pan-national geography where text (if not people) are able to travel freely. A line circulates throughout Patience Agbabi’s sonnet sequence “The Refugee’s Tale”: “[t]he story depends where you put the frame.”²⁸ All the stories in the collections position their geographical frame beyond and outside the lines drawn on known global maps. Their textual borders are open, open in a way that recalls Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, but on another track entirely.

Chaucerian geography situates Englishness within an international arena. The *Canterbury Tales* begin in an Englishness that is steadily traversed by international reference points. *The General Prologue* lodges in Southwark the pilgrims who have travelled from the end of every shire in England. Initial local locations are precise: the Tabard is “faste by the Belle” (I.719), and the pilgrims amble off just two miles away at the Watering of St. Thomas (I.826). We learn the native origins of some of the pilgrims: the Wife from Bath; the Shipman from Dartmouth (I.389); and the Reeve from Baldeswell in Norfolk (I.619-20). The Pardoner is from the Rouncivalle hospital by Charing Cross (I.670), and he plies his trade from Berwick to Ware (I.692). Yet, even in the *Prologue*, the local habitations of England are opened up into a geographical frame of reference that is international. The Pardoner is a hot foot from the court of Rome (I.671), the Merchant is anxious about the free passage of trade between Orwell in East Anglia and Middleburgh in Holland (I.276-7). He wears a hat made of beaver fur from Flanders (I.272). The excellence of the Wife of Bath’s weaving surpasses that of Ypres and Ghent (I.448), and the Shipman is skilled in pilotage from Hull to Carthage (I.404). There are references to Gotland and Cape Finistere (I.408), to Bordeaux (I.397), Brittany, and Spain (I.409). Alison’s pilgrimage jaunts take in Jerusalem (I.463), Rome, and Bologna (I.465), Galicia and Cologne (I.466). The Squire has fought in the Hundred Years’ War in Flanders, Artois and Picardie (I.86), and the Knight has fought both in Christendom and in heathen lands (I.49). No one has ridden further than he (I.48). His travels encompass Russia, Lithuania, Prussia, Granada, Algeciras, Morocco, Turkey, and the “Grete See” of the Mediterranean.

Dryden may have dubbed Chaucer “the Father of English poetry,” but *The Canterbury Tales* themselves are overwhelmingly outward facing.²⁹ While the first three fabliaux are set in Oxford, Trumpington, and London, and while the Wife sets her tale in Arthurian Britain, and the Summoner in Holderness, Yorkshire, the locations for all the other story tales are beyond the shores of England. It is Athens for the Knight; Syria, Rome, the Mediterranean (and Northumberland) for the Man of Law. Four tales are set in Italy: the Clerk’s at the foot of Mount Viso; the Merchant’s in Lombardy; and the Physician’s

27. “Afterword,” *RT1*, 139.

28. *RT1*, 131.

29. Dryden names Chaucer so in his *Preface to Fables, Ancient and Modern* (1700), in *The Works of John Dryden: Volume VII, Poems 1697-1700*, ed. Vinton A. Dearing (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000, 33-342).

and Second Nun's in Rome. France is the setting for the Franklin's: Brittany, (with a clerk based in Orléans); and for the Shipman's, St Denis, a town north of Paris. *Sir Thopas* and *The Pardoner's Tale* are set in Flanders. Much, much further away, the Squire tells a tale set in Tsarev in the Mongolian Empire, the Prioress in Asia Minor. *The Monk's Tale* compasses the Garden of Eden to Macedonia (2656) with stops on the way that include Palmyra (2247), Rome (2361), Armenia and Egypt (2338), Syria and Arabia (2339), Cyprus (2391), Milan (2399), and Pisa (2416). Riding along the Canterbury Way, the stories of Chaucer's pilgrims take us on a global tour. In the exchange and the listening of tales, England has no borders. It affords textual hospitality to nations and persons from across the sea.

The writers of the *Refugee Tales* follow in Chaucer's map with an altered perspective and purpose. David Herd's "Prologue" begins his act of welcome: "North of Dover/That where the language starts/Now longen folk to goon on pilgrimage."³⁰ Mingling modern English with references from Chaucer's text, "The Prologue" describes how the walkers spread out

Along the North Downs Way
Which makes it just a question of scale . . .
Chaucer's pilgrims crossing
Palatye and Turkye and Ruce
Across the Mediterranean
Dark these days
Not like wine
Crossing through Flaundres
Through Artois
Crossing the water at Pycardie
And all the while finding stories
And all of them
Gathering one night in London . . .
And so we stop this night
And the Host steps up
And he says
Listen to this story
Whan that April with his shoures soote
And the room goes quiet
And a voice starts up
And then the language
Alters.³¹

Herd's "Prologue" collapses time, text, and geography. The walkers annex the landscape of Chaucer and the panoramic borderless territory to make visible in the South of England an embrace of peoples that the current political climate disallows. The same textual strategy recurs, though less extensively, in volume two. Herd writes of how a person's story "Be

30. *RT*1, vi.

31. *RT*1, viii, and x.

accorded/Its place . . . Occupying the landscape—in the heat of the sun—Out of Canterbury.”³² Only, it is not Canterbury where the 2017 walk started, but Runnymede, the site of the signing of the Magna Carta. Chaucer’s tales, and by extension, the current landscape and language are rendered politically hospitable.

In volume one, writers are drawn to “The Man of Law’s Tale.” The plight of Custance, set adrift on the sea between Rome, Syria, Northumbria, and back to Rome again, is a version of a migrant’s tale. Rather than updating the story, they mine Chaucer’s tale for telling phrases and diction to make it yield up a different sense.³³ In “The Migrant’s Tale,” Dragan Todorovic records the story of Aziz from Daraa, Syria. Quotations from “The Man of Law’s Tale” draw parallels between his journey and that of Constance. Aziz is smuggled from Syria via Egypt and then marooned in a trawler on the Mediterranean for days. Then there is news of a new boat which the smuggler promises will take them to Italy. A second boat arrives, smaller than the first. With 139 migrants on board it moves impossibly slowly:

For days, for years floated this creature across the eastern Mediterranean, and into the Strait of Gibraltar—such was her fate. Often, she expected to die; Place her in the same ship in which she arrived here [. . .]. They push her ship out to sea and forbid her ever to return.’ O Custance, well may your spirit tremble. Well may your dreams be sorrowful.³⁴

Snippets from “The Man of Law’s Tale” punctuate Aziz’s narration throughout “The Migrant’s Tale,” but just when the strategy starts to feel predictable, Todorovic supplies a shockingly cruel twist:

Who could describe the joy and sorrow that now filled the hearts of Custance, Alla and the Emperor. I shall make an end of this tale, the day is fading fast . . . And so in virtue and charity they all liv’d. They were never parted, except by death itself. And farewell now. My tale has come to an end.³⁵

“The Man of Law’s Tale” has come to an end. Aziz’s has not. For him, there is no such happy ending. The stories of the two migrants, one medieval and one current, part company: “Aziz’s story is not over. His family is in Daraa and his wife is losing patience. He is afraid now she would take her children and embark on one of the death boats.”³⁶ When Aziz finishes telling his story to Todorovic, he stands up to take a glass of water. Only then does the writer realise that the suit he thought too big for Aziz is the right size after all. It is just that when Aziz sits down, he shrinks “as if expecting a blow.”³⁷ The tense is present continuous: ongoing. The voice of the Man of Law, heard periodically throughout the tale with his pious moralising and his smug conclusion, falls silent. “The Migrant’s Tale” is no fiction after all. Moreover, its teller provides no trite conclusion.

32. “Prologue,” *RT*2, 1.

33. The *BBC Canterbury Tales* (2003) updated six of the *Tales* to a modern setting. In the Man of Law episode, also, Constance washed up on the eastern shore of Britain as a Nigerian Refugee who faced hostility from the community and from her Caucasian mother-in-law.

34. II.799–802; *RT*1, 7.

35. “The Lawyer’s Tale,” *RT*1, 12; II.1065–71; 1114–17, and 1156–9.

36. *RT*1, 12.

37. *RT*1, 12.

Stephen Collis's "The Lawyer's Tale" also embeds quotations from "The Man of Law's Tale" into the narrative:

Sea journeys are signs of rejection, betrayal, treachery, homelessness . . . a ship in which They han hir set and bidde her lerne saile (II.44), or in which she arrives at a straunge nacioun (II.268) where she may yet again be bounde under subjeccioun.³⁸

The tale moves between recording the harrowing details of an asylum seeker sleeping in a phone box all winter, eating food from the floor that the street market left at the end of the day. Then it moves to commentary on how immigration laws and restrictions are part of what turned the migrant crisis into a humanitarian disaster: "instead of deterring migrants, these laws make smuggling operations more profitable, more professional and far more brutal."³⁹ Collis sets his sights on the collusion of the legal profession in exacerbating such suffering. He observes how Chaucer's Man of Law tells us precious little about the law himself:

The General Prologue only notes his desire for property: "Al was fee simple to hym" . . . It remains unclear what Constance's story means to him either personally or professionally. The Man of Law remains "terra nullius," a spurious empty zone to claim, desire stretching its hands out towards the unclaimed lands of claimants from their own lands torn.⁴⁰

"The Lawyer's Tale" creates a political geography out of fragments of "The Man of Law's Tale" to protest how the rights of individuals are delimited within the order of the state. The law remains callously indifferent towards those lives it seeks to control:

The lawyer
Looking out to sea
Croons April in
Cruellest soliloquy
Ship that fleteth
In the Grete see. (I.264)
To make submissions
In courts of peine and wo.⁴¹

Embedded in a tissue of reference to Chaucer's *General Prologue*, the Man of Law's Tale, and T.S. Eliot's "Wasteland," the crooning lawyer is superciliously detached from the suffering in the courts that he has helped complacently to create. He speaks a different language from the asylum seekers. Reprising the Man of Law's narrative disclaimer that he can equal Chaucer, "I speke in prose/let hym rymes make," Collis captures the gap in discourse between those seeking asylum and those responsible for the legal process that prevents them.⁴² The testimony of those cast adrift on the sea is too fanciful for the discipline of the law:

38. II.270, *RT*1, 107.

39. *RT*1, 118 and 113-114.

40. I.319, 107-108.

41. I.264; I.1065; 1070; 108.

42. I.96; *RT*1, 115.

Asylum seeker
Oft have you to rely
On oral evidence
As to what
Wilde wawes wol ye drive
Or what awaits in
The place ye shal arrive.⁴³

“The Lawyer’s Tale” puts Chaucer’s framing lawyer back into the story of the voyage. The Sergeant of the Law, with all his fees and robes at the Parvys, St. Paul’s, is called to account.⁴⁴ Collis exposes a political geography in which “we” are all involved: all sides are all in the same boat, as he puts it.⁴⁵ The only way “we shal [not] drenchen in the depe” is to refuse that complicity in state legal apparatus and instead “reach out to another/and pull them onto the/shore/of this straunge nacioun.”⁴⁶ Collis turns the “straunge nacioun” of Chaucerian Syria into England; an England transformed from a rigid, callous legality into a community of acceptance onto a shore “that is no nation at all.”⁴⁷

“The Lawyer’s Tale,” like Herd’s “Prologue,” appropriates the textual space of Chaucer to depict a political landscape that challenges the hostility with which asylum seekers are treated. Neither tale shirks from depicting the reality of those horrors, but each holds out hope in refashioning an inhospitable terrain into a borderless nation. “The Migrant’s Tale” is less sanguine. The political geography that opens up in the corner office in Birmingham does not bind up the separations between husband and family, and does not erase all the years of suffering that Aziz endured. His imprisonment is still too terrible to tell.

A person’s story
Be accorded
Its place.⁴⁸

“Place” along Chaucer’s Canterbury Way opens out into an international arena of fictional storytelling. Seven hundred years later, the South East English space of the North Downs Way and the Thames Path open up into a new global vista. At first sight, *Tales* both ancient and modern appear to share a similar spatial arc, occupy a similar textual space. In practice, however, *The Refugee Tales* project parts company with its Chaucerian model. The relationship between “home turf” and foreign lands is reconfigured. “Abroad” is not just a textual space within which to situate story so that it takes on an allure, a welcome break from the familiar and the near—the known. In *Refugee Tales*, textual hospitality, lived and told, follows a crueller path: the hostile, far-flung distances of protracted, fearful uncertainty.

43. *RT*₁, 119.

44. I. 310; 317.

45. 118.

46. II.455; *RT*₁, 121; II.268; 121.

47. *RT*₁, 121.

48. “Prologue,” *RT*₂, 1.

The stories told across South East England encompass Damascus, Amman, Egypt, Italy, Libya, Malta, Turkey, Syria (these just in the first Tale of volume one, “The Migrant’s Tale”). Italy, Libya, Turkey, and Syria recur across both volumes alongside Khartoum, Gedaref, Rheims, Arras, South Africa, Vietnam, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Israel, Nigeria, France, a former Soviet country, Greece, Rome, Scandinavia, Holland, Germany, the Mediterranean, Senegal, Darfur, Benghazi, Paris, the Sahara desert, Eritrea, Sudan, Mecca, Rome, Jerusalem, Albania, Georgia, Sri Lanka, Congo, Iran, Bangladesh, Rwanda, Catania, Palermo, the Calais “jungle,” Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Austria. The sheer range testifies to the arduous, tortuous journeys that many of the original tellers of the tales had to endure. Shunted to one place, they are forced to move on to another, and then back again and forward to somewhere new. While some of these places represent the start of journeys, the remainder are all transitory stops. This map of constant movement between eclectically connected places charts lives that are shuttled to and fro in danger. They are moving back and forth on journeys they are compelled to take, or undertake only as a last resort, separated far from family and friends, where the next boat or lorry might turn out to be their last, “he saw a Sudanese/try to ride an articulated lorry upside-down and die. He hadn’t asked how.”⁴⁹

England is represented by Southwark, Birmingham, Maidstone, Ruislip, Central London, Bradford, East Croydon, Folkestone, Wales, Piccadilly, Canterbury, Old Trafford, Leeds, Cricklewood, and Manchester. Some of these places, such as Birmingham, Manchester, or Leeds, are the locations where the Tale is narrated to the writer. Ruislip is the home of the Lorry Driver. Southwark and Canterbury are nods to Chaucer. East Croydon, Folkestone, Cricklewood, Glasgow, and Central London are all sites of administrative centres or offices of the Border Agency. Only two of all the Tales feature a final destination place that could be thought of as representing anything like home. Wales (eventually, after a very long haul), and over many years, becomes home in “The Dependant’s Tale.”⁵⁰ Manchester becomes a place where the Smuggled Person finds a welcome in what feels like a home.⁵¹ For the rest, there is no rest.

In the books, that narrative space is populated by detention centers. They feature in all but three of the 13 Tales in volume one and all but three of the 11 tales in volume two. Apart from Lampedusa, Italy, all of them are in the UK. Alongside numerous references to “a centre for the detained,” the names recur like an insistent footfall heard behind you in a darkened alley: Lunar House, Croydon House (sometimes just abbreviated to Croydon); Barry House, Glasgow; Crawley; Colchester; Electric House; Brook House; Tinsley House; Colnbrook; and Yar’s Wood. These are precise places, yet they are not precise in the way that Chaucer’s narrator so carefully tells us the location of the Tabard. For the refugees, these are not places of merry community where the “chambres” are “wyde” and where everyone is “esed atte beste” (*Canterbury Tales*, I.18-19). These centers of indefinite detainment or centers for immigration removal are the places where no one wants to stay, even as they stay there indefinitely. As the refugee in “The Arriver’s Tale” explains, “Do you know what limbo means? It means the edge of hell.”⁵²

49. “The Walker’s Tale,” *RT2*, 38-9.

50. *RT1*, 90-1.

51. “The Smuggled Person’s Tale,” *RT2*, 106.

52. *RT1*, 39.

That state of being indefinitely and often arbitrarily detained, permanently pending, creates a political geography that departs radically from the substance of *The Canterbury Tales*. The collections chart the lives of those in endless suspension, forced to wait or forced to move against their will:

... the detention centre is burned down. They have to put you somewhere
So they put you back in prison. "I am not a prisoner, I'm only a detainee"
you tell them, but it takes four months before they release you ...
A return ticket to the place where you have to report is £24. You
have to report three times a week. You cannot work.⁵³

The stories in *Refugee Tales* are crammed with images of waiting, or of confinement, or of restraint. Prisons have massive doors; detention centres have endless locked corridors accessed only with serial security codes. Windows are barred and perspexed; they keep out the air.⁵⁴ A playground is enclosed by high walls.⁵⁵ Airports have barbed wire fences; the van is caged, or if you are in a car going to Heathrow, you are handcuffed.⁵⁶ Furthermore, there are the warrens and blind alleys of bureaucracy, or the "freedom" to move on an Azure card that does not allow you to use public transport (and you have no regular access to a toilet).⁵⁷

Small boats carry more people than they can hold: 85 on a dinghy that is only 11 meters long, or 500 crammed together so that you have to stand.⁵⁸ People are too numerous for the spaces that were never designed to carry them: "under a rusting jeep;" in a crate in a lorry; underneath the wheel arches, or in the engine compartment; packed in cartons of washing powder; under seats in trains; hidden amongst all the canisters in the boot of the car; and squashed into cattle trucks.⁵⁹ The geography of space in these tales is a textual map of relentless movement, stasis, and entrapment. Chaucer's map of travel is appropriated to tell a very different set of stories from those recounted in play on the freeway to Canterbury.

"Geography intervenes, a salience of stories."⁶⁰

While the texts of the tales chart a harsh geography, the tales as action and as a collection of shared voices change the terms of a debate about migrancy that criminalises human movement. The "Prologue" to the first volume announces:

53. "The Abandoned Person's Tale," *RT2*, 27.

54. "The Detainee's Tale," *RT1*, 49 and 55.

55. "The Dependant's Tale," *RT1*, 87.

56. In sequence, these examples are found in "The Detainee's Tale," *RT1*, 60; "The Dependant's Tale," *RT1*, 89; "The Deportee's Tale," *RT1*, 100.

57. "The Witnesses' Tale," *RT2*, 51; "The Support Worker's Tale," *RT2*, 77.

58. "The Soldier's Tale," *RT2*, 88; "The Walker's Tale," *RT2*, 37.

59. In sequence, these are found in: "The Unaccompanied Minor's Tale," *RT1*, 17; "The Detainee's Tale," *RT1*, 60; "The Lorry Driver's Tale," *RT1*, 30; "The Interpreter's Tale," *RT1*, 67; "The Deportee's Tale," *RT1*, 104; "The Smuggled Person's Tale," *RT2*, 109; "The Walker's Tale," *RT2*, 36.

60. "The Interpreter's Tale," *RT1*, 64.

It is a declaration . . .
We set out to make a new language
That opens politics
Establishes belonging.⁶¹

“Set out” is to be understood in three senses: to embark on a journey; to determine; and to lay out new terms. The harsh geography of the content of the *Tales* harbors glimmers of hope. A new topography takes form. The tales recount experiences of migrants that dominant discourses prevent from being heard. Although a writer mediates each tale in the majority of cases, this is to protect the original teller. As “The Appellant’s Tale” recounts: “in the interests of security, you wished to remain anonymous,” or in “The Walker’s Tale,” his “own real name could hurt him if I were to speak it here.”⁶² Names may be withheld but the experience of the migrants themselves are transmitted, told to someone who wants to listen. In contrast to how the migrants are muted, or written out of legal and bureaucratic discourse, the tales open up space for their voices, and their language, to be heard:

The possibility of trust
In language
To hear the unsaid spoken
And then repeated
Made unambiguous and loud
Set over a landscape gathered
Step by step.⁶³

These are stories told and shared so that people will listen to a new discourse. From the steps that are taken a new pathway takes shape. “The Walker’s Tale” features a refugee who “walks on, every day a step, a fall deferred in a new life.”⁶⁴ “The Appellant’s Tale” gives voice to the experience of a refugee who is able to tell his story to a listener who has ears to hear and the willingness to transmit that experience without distortion or prejudice: “patiently, you tell it, step by step.”⁶⁵

The *Refugee Tales* project enables lives to be told about differently, to change their terms. The *Tales* hold conventional narratives to account. Journalism is one of the discourses interrogated. As “The Refugee’s Tale” wryly observes, “maybe the fictions in the newspapers/were detained by the facts.”⁶⁶ Chris Cleave’s “The Lorry Driver’s Tale” holds up journalistic coverage to scrutiny. A restaurant critic travels in the cab of a lorry driver coming back to the UK from France. He records the conversation to form the basis of an article to report on the migrant crisis. Deceived by the UKIP banner on the driver’s lorry, and his tales of migrants hiding in the axles and in the engine compartments, he fails to see that the driver is in the process of smuggling. The co-driver is not an Italian but a Syrian

61. “Prologue,” *RT1*, i and v.

62. *RT1*, 69; *RT2*, 40.

63. “Prologue,” *RT1*, vi.

64. *RT2*, 40.

65. *RT1*, 70.

66. *RT1*, 131.

refugee. He makes it across the border, disappearing into the night as the food critic and the driver eat fish and chips, the gulls screaming above “distracted at all their liberty.”⁶⁷

The journalist, oblivious to what is going on around him, has his words already. He invites his reading public to “have their say, using the hashtag #stowaways.”⁶⁸ He is able to turn out fine-sounding phrases that feature nicely turned antithesis and plays on sense:

“It’s as if these lorries have space for 40 tonnes of cargo but no
Room for basic humanity.”

“Nice. Did you write that one before you came out?”⁶⁹

“It’s a short trip in a long vehicle.”

I sighed. You do write this stuff in advance

“It was going to be my title for the piece.”⁷⁰

Glib journalism fails to see what is under its nose. More content to hone his rhetoric than to watch and to listen attentively, the journalist relies on his pre-prepared copy. It is an insouciant discourse that the *Tales* challenge. Witness “The Detainee’s Tale” as told to Ali Smith:

You speak as if you were picking your way over broken glass.

Here’s what you tell me. It’s all in the present tense. I realise

Afterwards, because it is still all happening.⁷¹

The satirised journalist writes his own words that he has cooked up beforehand. The writers of *The Refugee Tales* listen in the present and find the shape that best preserves what they have been told: the stories that do not get heard.

“The Detainee’s Tale” holds up for scrutiny another prevalent discourse that works to distort the experiences of refugees as actually lived: the discourse of public management speech. In her visit to the detention center, Smith notices the bright information posters that proclaim “in words and symbols how people of all origins, ethnicities, religions and sexual orientations will be treated equally here.” The placards contain inspirational messages about good teamwork and care. There is a jolly painted sign announcing “PROPERTY CHECK” and Disney jungle characters on the walls. Cold comfort for a detainee who can make himself understood only with the aid of a battered Vietnamese/English dictionary. The cheerful public facing posters are a grim façade. They cannot plaster over the starkness of the closing six words of the tale, the only words uttered by the detainee in a tone of muted anger: “I thought you would help me.”⁷²

The searing plaintiveness of those six words is rendered all the more acute when placed alongside all the numerous occasions in the *Tales* where refugees are subject to hostile speech acts. They are promised boats that do not appear. They are informed that they must move on, or they are misinformed. Repeatedly they are given orders. They

67. “The Lorry Driver’s Tale,” *RT1*, 34.

68. “The Lorry Driver’s Tale,” *RT1*, 30.

69. “The Lorry Driver’s Tale,” *RT1*, 31.

70. “The Lorry Driver’s Tale,” *RT1*, 34.

71. “The Detainee’s Tale,” *RT1*, 50.

72. “The Detainee’s Tale,” *RT1*, 62.

are constantly being interviewed with questions that do not make sense—for five hours at a time by three different people.⁷³ They are shouted at. Linguistic action is withheld from them. Written permission is repeatedly refused to the Witness in “The Witness’s Tale.”⁷⁴ The Dependent is not allowed to talk to his parents when his family is suddenly taken away in the early hours of the morning.⁷⁵ At 3am, the Deportee is sworn at when they come to arrest him: “[s]hut the fuck up mother fucker.” There is a rare moment of escape from such hostile discourse for the subject of this tale. Someone called Jim would come and visit him, and “Spoke to ask not where he’s from, why he’s been here but how he is, who he is. Jim was the first” to ask human questions, questions that respect another person’s dignity.⁷⁶ How foreign they must have sounded to the Deportee after all the interrogations this 14-year-old child suffered who had walked from Afghanistan into Pakistan.

Herd writes that the principal motivation for the *Refugee Tales* project is to bring an end to “the withholding of people outside the skin of language.”⁷⁷ The model of the Chaucerian narrator who tells the stories mediated by other people is appropriated to humanize migrants into a new linguistic skin, but not as Chaucer fashioned it:

Roads are tongues, but this is no easy Chaucerian stroll: its feet aren’t poetic: they blister, trip over the wrong end of the stick, get lost.⁷⁸

Repeatedly in these tales, refugees are tripped up and lost, especially in language. As a result of detainment, they simply do not have access to means of communication. Aziz is unable to advance his case because his mobile stops working and there is nothing he can do about it.⁷⁹ The appellant is left in a room for 12 hours with no telephone reception. He signs a form that signs away his rights because he was unable to call his solicitor.⁸⁰ Desperate for legal help, the witness leaves unanswered messages until his coins run out.⁸¹ Alice is left bereft of legal help because the solicitor never bothers to respond to her friend’s email.⁸² Detention centres prohibit visitors taking in pen and paper.⁸³

Deprived of practical means of communication, refugees cannot even gain access to legal procedures. Once—or if—they do, they are locked out of the legal discourse that determines them. They are not allowed to attend the hearings in person that evaluate their right to stay, with the consequence that they are unheard at their own hearings.⁸⁴ The narrator of “The Barrister’s Tale” cannot even give Omar a reassuring smile because the

73. “The Arriver’s Tale,” *RT1*, 38.

74. *RT2*, 46.

75. “The Dependant’s Tale,” *RT1*, 86.

76. “The Deportee’s Tale,” *RT1*, 99 and 102.

77. “Afterword,” *RT1*, 140.

78. “The Walker’s Tale,” *RT2*, 31.

79. “The Migrant’s Tale,” *RT1*, 11.

80. “The Appellant’s Tale,” p.72 and 79.

81. “The Witness’s Tale,” *RT2*, 47.

82. “The Friend’s Tale,” *RT1*, 94.

83. “The Barrister’s Tale,” *RT2*, 55.

84. “The Arriver’s Tale,” *RT1*, 39; “The Walker’s Tale,” *RT2*, 40.

hearing is over a video link.⁸⁵ The hearings are not a court of record.⁸⁶ A judge asks a series of questions but no one is writing them down—or the answers.⁸⁷ An appellant is faced with “mirages of legal Latin babble”—shades here of Chaucer’s Summoner who drunkenly spouts “*Questio quid iuris*” when all his philosophy is spent, parroting legal discourse like a senseless jay.⁸⁸ The spoken tales of asylum seekers “are attended to . . . only for inconsistencies.”⁸⁹ They are not believed.⁹⁰ The officials “officially, never heard anything.”⁹¹ Then there is the labyrinth of forms: filling in the wrong one, or not being able to read the form in English.⁹² John, in “The Lover’s Tale,” is rendered speechless by his linguistic disablement: “the system is a bit . . . [h]e doesn’t have the words.” The narrator, Kamila Shamshi, has none either, “and neither do I.”⁹³

Not having the words. The linguistic imprisonment of the refugees is intensified because bureaucratic discourse fails to attend to their place of origin. They, and their experiences, are constantly mistranslated both in language and in place. Ian Duhig reminisces about the time that “translate” meant “carry across”

like a tune between lines. “Lili Marlene”

Or the Syrian exile Adonis’ poem “Music” borne into the English language
By Matthew: “In this house an immigrant lives and his name is meaning.”⁹⁴

The wistful stanza fades away. Old songs, or Syrian poems, do not translate into the Walker’s experience. Mistranslation is the norm. It is to challenge that mistranslation that the “Prologue” to the *Tales* heralds the “listening to stories/People urgently need said . . . This new language we ask for.”⁹⁵ This new language tries not to mistranslate, or at least to be on the lookout lest miscommunication occurs. In “The Migrant’s Tale,” Aziz speaks to Todorovic through an interpreter. Wanting to learn about his childhood in Syria, Todorovic asks Aziz what his favorite toys were. When an answer comes back about basketball, the narrator realises that the interpreter must have used the word “game” for “toy.”⁹⁶ Harmless, perhaps, in a context where a listener is determined to understand: confusing a toy with a game when the listener is alert enough to recognise the difference allows the gap in understanding to be noticed and addressed. Translated to a legal context, however, such gaps in mutual understanding are not in game, but in deadly earnest.

Carol Watts’s “The Interpreter’s Tale” tells us why. There are two epigraphs to the Tale:

85. *RT*₂, 40.

86. *RT*₂, 18.

87. *RT*₁, 140.

88. “The Walker’s Tale,” *RT*₂, 40; *Canterbury Tales*, I.635-646.

89. “The Walker’s Tale,” *RT*₂, 38.

90. “The Refugee’s Tale,” *RT*₁, 128.

91. “The Deportee’s Tale,” *RT*₁, 99.

92. “The Support Worker’s Tale,” *RT*₂, 81; “The Voluntary Returner’s Tale,” *RT*₂, 65.

93. *RT*₂, 23.

94. “The Walker’s Tale,” *RT*₂, 32.

95. *RT*₁, vii and viii.

96. *RT*₁, 1-2.

He may not spare, al though he were his brother;
 He moot as wel seye o word as another.⁹⁷
 You duty is to interpret *everything* that is said
 Home Office, *Code of Conduct for Regional Interpreters*.⁹⁸

Between the two quotations lies a minefield. Chaucer's forms part of a passage in "The General Prologue," where the narrator pledges that he will record the words of his fictional narrators with the utmost fidelity. The narrator is under obligation. But, when it comes to the task of an interpreter, "everything that is said" is revealed to be a utopian dream of seamless communication between unequal partners. Watts writes that the words of an interpreter form "the skin of another's arrival": the experience of a refugee, word for word, "my word for hers."⁹⁹ An ear wants to find a meeting place in a word, to catch in sound that switch of the heart before translation. Only, sounds are treacherous. The "c" in the language of a refugee to pronounce the word "uncle" sounds like the "k" "in our maternal brother 'ako.'"¹⁰⁰ Watts puts a harrowing spin on Chaucer's proverbial "brother." If testimonies do not match up, if "maternal brother" is substituted for "brother," the story is altered. If you seek asylum you cannot have two different words for the person who gave you money to leave; the evidence does not stack up, or it stacks up against you. Unless the interpreter takes action, the migrants cannot communicate from within their own skin. "The Interpreter's Tale" spells out the dilemma faced by those so dependent on another person's tongue:

A simple sound c: hearing hope for equivalence in families.
 A simple sound c: as if we begin from the same generous
 Place in body and language.
 A simple sound c: is her distress.
 Her whole body may be ransomed by it.¹⁰¹

"C", however, is far from a simple sound. As a letter, or before the vowels "e" or "i," it is pronounced with sibilance, a palatal alveolar fricative [s]. As a consonant, in the word "ako," the word for "maternal brother," it is a velar plosive [k]. The refugee's distress lies somewhere between the ridge of the mouth and the back or the front of the tongue.¹⁰² Its expression depends on recognising minute changes in articulation and breath. Only then can the interpreter hope to sound to the letter what the refugee has said. Get it wrong, and she will not be believed. Chaucer's "brother" may be a false friend.

The final words of the Tale return to the Home Office's injunction:

Your duty is to interpret everything that is said
 Find composure
 Listen

97. Geoffrey Chaucer, "Prologue to the Canterbury Tales," l.737-8.

98. *RT*1, 63.

99. *RT*1, 63.

100. *RT*1, 65.

101. "The Interpreter's Tale," *RT*1, 65.

102. In a palato-alveolar articulation, the tip of the tongue is close to the alveolar ridge while the front of the tongue is concave to the mouth. In a velar articulation, the back of the tongue reaches towards the soft palate.

Speak
Everything is at stake each time.
Everything.¹⁰³

If a reader is able to read two languages, both medieval and modern English, they are able to hear that the interpreter has two voices speaking at once: Chaucerian and contemporary. This is the “other” voice:

Whoso shal telle a tale after a man
He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan
Everiche a word, if it be in his charge.¹⁰⁴

Reprising her earlier tactic of updating the Chaucerian “brother,” here Watts takes the word “*everiche*” into a new verbal geography. To interpret everything that is said is no longer a fictional sleight of hand that creates narrative space to forge a bravura display of storytelling. There is no room in Home Office bureaucracy for poetic license. “Everything” is as slippery in sense as “c” is in sound. For a refugee speaking their testimony, everything is of extreme importance, because everything, each time, is at stake. For words to be communicated in the sense in which they are intended, the interpreter’s “charge” is to supply the correct reference from the sum of all things. They need to supply the precise referent for the sounds of the touch of a displaced person’s tongue. How do you supply the correct reference when you are listening to the slightest variation of breath that you may not be able culturally to hear?

Translation is a “charge” freighted with a deadly degree of responsibility that is at the farthest remove from Chaucerian poetic ventriloquism. Watts invests the Chaucerian narrator with a new political onus. The effect of the tale, however, is not only to bring home to a reader very forcibly the “linguistic prison house” in which a refugee may be imprisoned.¹⁰⁵ Words can be unlocked if there is the sensitivity, the patience, and the skillful listening ears to hear them and then to speak them.

The “Prologue” effects a more hopeful series of translations. It is threaded with snippets of Chaucerian diction whose sense is altered to make Chaucerian English yield up new sense. The *Refugee Tales* are told by “some who hath holpen.”¹⁰⁶ St. Thomas Becket, who helped sick pilgrims heal, silently becomes the writers who tell the stories of the walking refugees. Chaucer’s spring birds who “make melodye in every holt and heeth” is the backdrop for people being picked up and detained “arbitrarily.”¹⁰⁷ The “sondry londes” and “the shires ende” become the geographical arena in which the stories are being told “en masse” and “people will listen.”¹⁰⁸ In a room in Shepherdswell on the first night of the inaugural walk, silence falls. The Host steps up (this is Herd), but no Harry Bailey. Herd

103. *RT1*, 68.

104. “The General Prologue,” 1.731-3, *my emphasis*.

105. *RT1*, 67.

106. “General Prologue,” 18; *RT1*, vi.

107. “General Prologue,” 9 and 6; *RT1*, vii.

108. “General Prologue,” 14 and 15; *RT1*, ix.

alters the language of the opening words of Chaucer's periphrasis to give them an urgent and keen sense of political agency.

And a voice starts up
And then the language
Alters
Sweet
Tender
Pierced to the roote.¹⁰⁹

The spring showers of Chaucer's "Prologue" become the healing balm of storytelling to address major social injustice. Language becomes healing rain. The welcoming ground becomes the hearts and ears of the listeners assembled. The endeavor is "to make [Chaucer's] English sweete."¹¹⁰ Herd appropriates a comment about the lisping lascivious Friar, to declare an agenda for the refreshment of English discourse.¹¹¹ "How badly" he writes, do we need English to be made sweet again; English that has been rendered hostile by an act of law.¹¹² For the hostile terms of the Immigration Acts and all their attendant bureaucracy to be transformed into a discourse of solidarity, re-translation of their terms is needed.¹¹³

"The Appellant's Tale" lingers on some key terms in the process of detention. As the appellant speaks "STAY," Herd writes it down. He muses on the meanings of the word. To remain in the same place. To live somewhere temporarily as a visitor or a guest. However, in Scottish, or South African, it means to live permanently. Stay also means to stop or suspend or to postpone, as in a stay of execution, as in a check on judicial proceedings. But stay can also mean to secure or to stand, from the Latin, or from the German to be firm. For the Appellant, when he speaks the word "STAY" he means it as a request to stay permanently in the same place. That should be the end of the story. However, it is not. As the story of endless detainment and arrest and false starts prove, there is nothing firm or stable in the capitalised "STAY" that the Appellant speaks. For him "STAY" is a series or endless postponements and temporary accommodation.¹¹⁴ One such place is Colnbrook, the detention center near Heathrow. Just as the symbolic route of the Walk changes the sense of the detention centers, so here Herd shows how the connotations of the name harbor a more welcoming sense than the name of the detention center might suggest if we do not attend to the possibility of its language: "Brook meaning stream . . . Brook meaning, tolerate, allow."¹¹⁵ By re-arranging the senses of words, by providing a new kind of transla-

109. Herd plays on the sense of "tender" in Chaucer by relating it to French "Tendre" to hold and "to attend" (ix). For the quote, see *RT1*, x.

110. *RT1*, ix.

111. "General Prologue," l.265.

112. *RT1*, ix.

113. The 2012 Immigration Act is available at www.parliament.gov.sb/files/legislation/Acts/2012/Immigration%20Act%202011 (last accessed 30 August, 2017). The 2016 Act is at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immigration-bill-2015-16> (last accessed 30 August 2017).

114. *RT1*, 74-75.

115. *RT1*, 77.

tion from the kind that the refugees routinely experience, a deeply hostile environment of inhuman discourse is made to sound welcome and compassionate.

A different telling emerges, but that is only half the story. Listening is crucial. No new topography can take shape unless our hearing changes. Herd remarks that to tell another person's tale, "one has to listen at length and very closely; at such length, in fact, that the experience being relayed grafts onto, and alters 'the listener's language.'"¹¹⁶ Many writers reported that by having collaborated in the way that they did their relation to language was significantly altered. This leaves its mark on a number of the tales. Michael Zand's "The Chaplain's Tale" defamiliarizes Standard English prose. There is no punctuation in the form of capital letters or grammatical stops or pauses anywhere in the piece. It begins and ends with "inaudible words."¹¹⁷ Conventional grammar is refused: "the only language he could now trust was you see very good because outside his brothers outside of the walls . . ."¹¹⁸ The relationship between speaker and translator and reader is deeply disturbed because there is no stable relationship between the internal reference of the words inside the text and the world of a reader. To where does "outside" refer? And who is the "you"? Sounds such as "mmm" or "rrr" sit alongside proper nouns that a reader may recognize, but it proves impossible to determine the relationship between them.¹¹⁹ Zand's tale ungrounds the reader's world. We are plunged into a half recognisable sequence of words and pain: "a deep guttural phh" in a tale full of broken sounds and sentences, the building and breaking of walls, and a desperate attempt to write poetry on stone.¹²⁰

Agbabi's "The Refugee's Tale" is written in a series of 15 sonnets. The last is an amalgam of lines taken from each of the previous fourteen. Agbabi appropriates the conventional space of the sonnet form by turning a passage of words marked out by the number fourteen into new territory. She adds new room, an extra stanza, to defer and to extend the boundary of the form that the sonnet normatively contains. Hospitality extends to The Refugee's narration. An experience that may be unfamiliar to readers steeped in conventional forms of verse becomes extended, changed, but nevertheless, it is understood. Agbabi's diction vacillates between Standard English and nonstandard forms that might be heard to be closer to the voice of her Coptic interlocutor. This is from the final sonnet:

I thought I forget but some things you never forget
The day they imprison my husband, he is not eating.¹²¹

Tenses become less familiar. Standard English structure would have the pluperfect "I had forgotten" instead of the present tense "I forget." The second line uses the present tense "imprison" when we might expect a preterite and a continuous progressive present for the past tense of eating. Not only does this force a Standard English reader to adjust their grammatical horizons, but it also forces them to realize that for the speaker of this

116. "Afterword," *RT1*, 121.

117. *RT1*, 13 and 16.

118. *RT1*, 15.

119. *RT1*, 14; *RT1*, 15.

120. *RT1*, 13.

121. *RT1*, p.132.

tale, like the Detainee in the tale told by Ali Smith, the past is not a grammatical tense at a remove from present experience. Past suffering continues into the present, into their now, the now of their telling. In a conspicuously present use of the present tense narration across both volumes of stories, the writers of *The Refugee Tales* repeat unambiguously and loudly the ongoing trauma of the persons whose experiences they record.

This kind of listening is radically different from the “hearings” to which the persons told in these volumes have been subjected. Hearings in which their subjectivity is ignored, whether through mistranslation, bureaucratic form filling, and, most crucially, simply not being allowed to be present when the accounts of their displacement are told for them. Hubert Moore’s “The Visitor’s Tale” also defamiliarizes conventional English expressions to call attention to the new kind of language that is required to be able to substitute attentive listening for the crudely interrogative hearings of the combined forces of the police, Border Agencies, and the Home Office. He tells the story of Victor whose story is so traumatic that his words were transformed into “taut, wordless experience.”¹²² How do you listen to wordlessness? Moore’s poem “How to listen” re-arranges the auditory perception of the body. We need to hear with the ears, of course, but not with the nose, whose pernicky bony cavities distract our attention. Call our attention back to ourselves, so we are picking our nose, putting our feet in the door, fingers making their point. We put ourselves in the way of the person to whom we are supposed to listen. We obstruct them. Instead, we need to reconfigure our own listening responses, to become aware of different parts of our body to provide unobstructed auditory channels:

Listen with the hollows of the body:
the ears, yes, and the eyes and the mouth
and, I recommend, the undersides
of the knees. Is the listener sitting?
Well, under the knees, unseen, concave,
a cradle, that’s where the wild-eyed
stories will come.¹²³

The listener needs to find unfamiliar spaces in their familiar body to create a cradle to nurture and to hold the stories they are told. They need to recognise that conventional hearing apparatuses may miss the point, or substitute their own point for the narrative that uncurls in front of them. Only by putting normative responses aside can a refugee’s tale be held. A listener’s body must be hollowed out afresh. Only if it can learn to withhold its own bony, sharp predictable responses, can a refugee’s story truly be given the “hearing” its wild eyes deserve.

The stories of *The Refugee Tales* will have been told to a single listener.¹²⁴ For a new language to emerge, they need to be repeated, told again, in company—shared. The initial

122. *RT1*, 45.

123. “The Visitor’s Tale,” *RT1*, pp.44-45.

124. “The Unaccompanied Minor’s tale is an exception. It was improvised and developed in workshops with unaccompanied minors living in Canterbury (*RT1*, 24).

process of collaboration becomes a collective endeavour especially because it is an integral stage in a public space of social action:

What the walk enables . . . is the circulation of stories. Not just the *Tales* but the stories that come up constantly in conversation as the walk takes place—it being just such circulation, of people and stories, that the immigration legislation appears determined to prevent.¹²⁵

The sharing of stories between those drawn from such different walks of life opens up a space in which the stories of those who have been detained can be told and heard in a respectful manner. The circulation of stories and the discursive space they open contests the policy and the language of what the authors of the 2012 Immigration Act have called “a hostile environment.” Herd details exactly what that hostile environment means for people who are displaced.¹²⁶ “Hostile environment” references an article that appeared in *The Daily Telegraph* on 25 May 2012. It is an interview with Theresa May, then Home Secretary. The journalist observes how, when called on to talk about the goal of the Immigration Act, her language becomes “uncharacteristically vivid.” May declared, “The aim is to create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal immigration.” Two-thirds of this article is taken up with the “problem” of immigration. Breathtakingly, the final third discusses “the other side of the immigration coin . . . the trouble some Britons have getting back into their own country” and the “maddening ordeal of standing in line while staring at empty immigration desks.”¹²⁷ Did Chris Cleave have this article in mind when he created the satirical portrait of his journalist in “The Lorry Driver’s Tale”? How do you compare waiting in line at an airport when you are returning from a business trip or a holiday with what Rachel Holmes describes calls “temporary indefinite detention”? How do you measure time that is both “temporary and indefinite . . . waiting indefinitely to be removed imminently?”¹²⁸

The circulation of stories in *The Refugee Tales* project creates a counter-discourse in language and in space. The really hostile environment is turned in “a space of appearance.” Drawn from the work of Hannah Arendt, Herd deploys this term to describe the “picturing of a better place.”¹²⁹ Arendt argues that the public space of appearance can be created when people come together in the manner of speech and action. They form a polity, a space that is fragile space because it exists only through the performance of deeds or the utterance of words. It must be continually recreated by action. Its existence is secured whenever actors come together for the purpose of discussing and deliberating matters of public concern. It might develop slowly out of the efforts to change some specific legislation or policy.¹³⁰ The collective efforts of the Project in walking and talking and in writing and publication are to create exactly such a polity, a space of appearance that is counter to the hostile environment of immigration law in the UK. What the 2016 Immigration Act set out to do according to Herd was:

125. “Afterword” *RT2*, 114–15.

126. “Afterword,” *RT2*, 115–17.

127. “Theresa May interview: ‘We’re going to give illegal migrants a really hostile reception,’” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/immigration/9291483/Theresa-May-interview-Were-going-to-give-illegal-migrants-a-really-hostile-reception.html> (last accessed 25/08/17).

128. “The Barrister’s Tale,” *RT2*, 55.

129. “Afterword,” *RT2*, 122.

130. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 196–99.

To stop people appearing. It is what indefinite detention seems designed to effect. Detention separates people out so that, in a literal sense, they are not recognised—so that the fundamental claim they have to due process is not allowed to become real.¹³¹

The project attempts to bring people together, to reclaim that space of appearance. The fragility of that space is more apparent in volume one than volume two. In volume one the inaugural walk has taken place, and the collective endeavour of storytelling has been shared orally and in print. The lives, however, of the subjects whom the stories depict only rarely picture a better place. The Dependant does finally find a family home in Wales, and he goes on to be a law student at the London School of Economics.¹³² The woman in the final “Refugee’s Tale” whose story is believed does “begin to heal,” though the final image of the sonnet sequence is meeting her husband at the airport “broken, bleeding.”¹³³ There is a perceptible change in volume two where there are some places that do offer a better picture. “The Support Worker’s Tale” features a day center where the workers “welcome them and they welcome us.” There is a mutuality of recognition and action: “we open doors and they open doors.”¹³⁴ Josh Cohen’s tale narrates a space of appearance that opens up the first Sunday of the month for three hours in London.¹³⁵ It is a better place for the displaced, where they can come and talk and eat pastries with “Sunday leaguers, choristers, Minecrafters, bloggers, watercolourists, kitchen gardeners.”¹³⁶ They share space, they share stories, and they share food. The Church in “The Mother’s Tale” provides, albeit temporarily once more, a better place for the displaced. Marina Warner quotes the sentence “that the Prime minister spoke a few years ago when she was Prime minister.”¹³⁷ Instead of a really hostile environment, Warner pictures “a gathering place to people too afraid to go out on the streets . . . a sanctuary.”¹³⁸

In the final tale of volume two, the Smuggled Person finds a welcome in a supporter’s home. Too afraid to go in and make himself “at home” as requested, he waits shyly in the hall. Such surroundings are unfamiliar to him. He is offered tea. Then comes the distress. He has lost his story, the story that he carried so carefully with him all those miles on the longest and the most traumatic of treks. He is distraught. He goes into the cellar, a place that the owner of the house is afraid of. It is there that he finds his tale again in the form of a wounded bird. It is a thrush without a song; the man is its song. The Smuggled Person asks the woman to hold the thrush while he drinks a glass of water and eats a piece of bread. The house owner is frightened of birds too. But she takes it to the back door and, because the door is already open (so different from all those locked heavy doors of both volumes), the bird is able to fly away. It takes its lop-sided flight, one winged and full of hope, across the backs of terraced houses, to shared chimneys. Its future route remains undetermined, but it is free to roam. Found, and shared; set free, the man’s story can travel.

131. “Afterword,” *RT2*, 122.

132. *RT1*, 91.

133. *RT1*, 122).

134. “The Support Worker’s Tale,” *RT2*, 82 and 88.

135. *RT2*, 74.

136. *RT2*, 75.

137. *RT2*, 97.

138. “The Mother’s Tale,” 101-103, and 98.

One day, perhaps it may return maybe even to a home. The Smuggled Person finds “a better place” in a house in a Manchester street of terraced houses he is invited to call home. He recalls all the times Anna, the woman who accompanied him there, has visited him in the dark, windowless detention centre. Her voice had been his lifeline. She brought him food. The final image of the thrush’s song; the story set free, pictures what is perhaps an even better place:

Wasn’t it something, to be able to walk together out of the house and up the street, up the street with the red brick houses and the slate roofs, the terraced street with shared chimneys, the birds lined along the rooftops, or walk with Anna along this quiet street, side by side.¹³⁹

This is a walk in solidarity. A walk where you do not have to look back over your shoulder in case someone is following. A walk where you feel safe on the streets of a metropolitan city. Where the setting is welcome. The houses join and the chimneys are shared. Side by side, you walk.

In creating a space of appearance, and a polity out of the structural model of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, *The Refugee Tales* project reads back into Chaucer’s work a community of fellowship and common purpose. While such a reading edits out the competition that inaugurates the storytelling completion in the first place, gliding noiselessly over the rancorous conflict that lurks beneath the surface of the *Canterbury Tales*, and which often cannot be contained (the bitter retaliation of the Reeve on the Miller, for example, or The Host wishing he could cut the balls off the Pardoner). It is a reading back to Chaucer that is sensitive to the social resonance of his narrative dynamics. Paul Strohm has argued that Chaucer binds his pilgrims into a polity, a discursive community in which social diversity is recognised and reconciled for the common good. Chaucer creates a public space hospitable to different social classes with diverse social impulses: “a project of representation and conciliation . . . in the environment of lessened risk provided by a literary work.”¹⁴⁰ It is to this idea of *The Canterbury Tales* that *The Refugee Tales* responds: to its founding principles and to its model and structure rather than faithful engagement with the details of the text. Chaucer’s “narrative diaspora,” to use David Lawton’s term, enables an assembly of communication in which voices, even if they are fictionalised or even satirized, are at least heard.¹⁴¹ By establishing the narrative voice as a reporter, the narrative of *The Canterbury Tales* creates the illusion of hearing about the pilgrims first-hand. Steve Ellis’s observation on the relationship between voice and commentary could serve almost as a definition of the agenda of *The Refugee Tales*: “These are persons whose stories you would have to tell to understand them—or who would have to tell their stories.”¹⁴²

139. “The Smuggled Person’s Tale,” *RT2*, 112.

140. Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press, 1989), 140-41, 164. Quotation drawn from 167.

141. David Lawton, *Chaucer’s Narrators* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1985), 100.

142. Steve Ellis, *Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales* (London and New York: Routledge), 30.

When *The Refugee Tales* reference back to *The Canterbury Tales*, they cue the remembrance of a social polity in which a storyteller mediates the experiences of others. Figures such as Chaucer's fictional Miller, or the Wife of Bath, need an agent of representation if a story that might illustrate their social perspective is able to emerge. The writers of *The Refugee Tales* are also agents of representation. Their narration gives mediated expression to what might otherwise not get to be heard. In the move between the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Refugee Tales*, the fictional world of Chaucer has become realized into the telling of real-life incidents and experiences. Moreover, in the process of that re-telling, real-life experiences have been molded into creative narratives.¹⁴³

Importantly, however, on the cover of both volumes, the writers or narrators are not listed as "authors." The Tales are "as told to." Four names are cited in each volume, followed by the words "and many others."¹⁴⁴ Association with Chaucer grants the project cultural clout, but it is no exercise in Chaucerian "medievalism." Each cover sports what looks, at first sight, a decorated initial "R" of the kind you might encounter in a medieval manuscript. What look like fronds or decorative twining foliage travel down the left-hand border and across the bottom of the cover. Closer inspection reveals that the chequered background of the initial is a chicken wire fence. The plant tendrils turn out to be the ugly knots of barbed wire. The Roman numeral II on the second volume is imprinted within an image of red sealing wax. Medieval decoration is not packaged to sell a romanticized view of the aesthetics of a distant past. These are the uglier and more urgent visual signs of the present. Hitching a ride with Chaucer, however, allows this new storytelling collection huge cultural anchorage. It allows the tales to assert their place within an established English literary canon in which Chaucer can hold a place as a founding father. It is a compelling way of providing substantial hospitality to migrant narration that has no place to tell itself.

As a literary response, *The Tales* appropriate Chaucer by inserting his text into a different context.¹⁴⁵ I would argue, however, that it is an appropriation that preserves the social spirit and the openness of *The Canterbury Tales* and its willingness to embrace diversity and give voice to the unheard. *The Refugee Tales* is not just a literary response. It is "trans-medial." The Walks, the public lectures and ongoing informal discussions are vital to the project as a whole. The website has a section called "Get Involved" calling for volunteers and making suggestions for political action. Emails are regularly sent to supporters and participants advising of interim walks and urging them to write to their MPs about indefinite detention.¹⁴⁶ The project is active on social media sites, especially Twitter. *The Canterbury Tales* has become actively collaborative in that its new audience is

143. What has occurred is a double ontological shift. Hutcheon uses the term ontological shift to describe the process of adapting a historical event or an actual person's life into fictional form (*Adaptation*, 17).

144. Ali Smith is the first name cited in Volume 1 and Jackie Kay in Volume 2, presumably because these are the writers with the highest public profile. All profits from the sale of these books go to Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and Kent Refugee Help.

145. "Appropriations are transformative adaptations that remove parts of one form or text (or even the whole) from their original context and insert them in different context that dramatically re-shapes their meaning," from Timothy Corrigan, "The Layers and Movements of Adaptation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*, ed. Thomas Leitch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5-6. Online accessed 28th August 2017.

146. <http://refugeetales.org/>.

invited to participate.¹⁴⁷ In all of its public forms, the project creates an extended polity, a space of appearance to effect political change. I can think of no other closely contemporary response to *The Canterbury Tales* that emerges from, and calls for, this kind of engaged, ongoing political participation. If I were to have to characterize the project's response to Chaucer, I would be obliged to use the term—which seems such an arid thing to do—“realization.”¹⁴⁸ *The Refugee Tales* realize *The Canterbury Tales*. They understand them; they make them real.

This of course begs another question: real for whom? Is it for those academics and students who have the competence to read Middle English, and who are able to navigate the specialized expression of institutionalized literary discourse? Does this enable the liberal academic to be “intellectually fearlessness without being actually brave” (as Chris Cleave terms it so eloquently in “The Lorry Driver’s Tale”)? Is writing about refugees and medieval studies a conscience-salving exercise that reassures us that medievalism is not simply an exercise in nostalgic aesthetics? Or might such engagement spur us to think how the transport of texts back and forth between cultures and times might be effective political action to redress injustice in the world in which we now live, and allow us to align maligned academic study of the past with critically informed intervention into dilemmas of the present?

I posted a previous version of this essay on Twitter. The organizers of *The Refugee Tales* project replied to invite me to speak on next year’s walk. Their Twitter account has 8,987 tweets; it follows 3,649, has 3,933 followers, and 16.6K likes.¹⁴⁹ It brings together globally famous actors, poets, writers, politicians, lawyers, campaigners, academics, and members of a public that may not hold any institutional power, nor who are stakeholders in any culturally dominant discourse. This intra-medial activity creates community. Twittersphere is a space of appearance that the new geography of *The Refugee Tales* calls for. If, (and that is a hugely utopian ‘if’), refugees are able to have access to a Twitter account then they can be part of the conversation. But even if not, the project enables participation that is terrestrially, not just virtually, egalitarian. While there may be theoretical anxieties that textually, the voices of refugees become subaltern, not truly speaking but being spoken for, it is important to remember how *The Refugee Tales* is also a physical, bodily realization of *The Canterbury Tales*. The space of appearance that Chaucer’s framed stories inspire is textually discursive, and geographically and interpersonally felt. Migrants walk with us, talk with us. Institutional separation and fear, discursive traps and legal macramé, are unraveled in international conversation.

147. In this regard, the project bears resemblance to the ways that new media—interactive blogs, videogames, transmission between devices—has blurred what might be thought of as the lines between adaptation and participation. See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) and Michael Ryan Moore, “Adaptation and new media,” *Adaptation* 3 (2010): 179-192: “adaptation becomes a strategy of participation,” 183.

148. Names and terms to calibrate what counts as an “adaptation” and to describe the kind of “adaptation” are legion. Hutcheon comments that because of the complexity of what is understood by adaptation, people keep attempting to coin new terms to replace “the confusing simplicity” of adaptation. But most end up admitting defeat . . . however straightforward the idea of adaptation may appear at the surface, it is actually very difficult to define” (*Adaptation*, p.15).

149. Figures accessed 28/10/2018.

The Refugee Tales are walked in game and in earnest. Physically, we walk with blisters, sore tendons, sun-braided faces, and rain-soaked cagoules. We lie in church halls on thin mats, with cold taps for showers. We dance to African drums and sing international lyrics from our hearts. With unwashed hair and floral chains of Canterbury Bells, we cook breakfast together. We walk in conversation, sharing languages and snacks. We listen to each other, not through pernicky twiddling of our nostril hair, waiting to see who more interesting is coming next through the door, but from the cradle of the underside of our knees. Verbal and physical geography are reclaimed. Migrants and asylum seekers walk alongside those who want to fight for an end to indefinite detention. We do not all have equal access to the power of words. But side by side we walk, and we share our stories in solidarity. That is what I mean by realization. ■