

# **Migrations and Home: The Elements of Place**

*Migrations and Home: The Elements of Place*

Edited by Simon Richard Wilson

Foreword by Joel Berger

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**Foreword: Who We Are**  
**Connections by a Migrations Scientist**

As a scientist who studies migration, I frequently offer public lectures. I want to offer conservation outcomes. I want to inspire. Most frequently, the purity of unadulterated science fails. A human face and heart are needed.

So I do not tout the data on the spectacular journeys of Monarch butterflies. I do not discuss the movement of humpback whales. I fail to offer up the boring minutia about millions of migrating crabs. Instead, I try to connect. And this is precisely what this anthology does too. It connects.

*Migrations and Home: The Elements of Place* offers a fascinating and emotionally positive portal to the world of movement— movement of our hearts and spirits through the lens of refuge and conservation. Seasons pass. Animal pass. Plants jump and the wind churns. We live, we breathe, and we reshape the planet. Within the pages we find refuge and calm. Encounters. Reflections grow deep. And challenges arise from growth of our planet from a home to few human souls to that of eight billion. This is a volume about splendor and quiet, about stars, and sun, and earth, about water and rocks, and about the species that rise or sink in this complex milieu. We can imagine the past when plants and animals moved around the planet – in the air, in the oceans, and across unfettered landscapes.

This is not the dry, empirical view of a scientist; nor is it a compendium of actionable conversation. Instead, deep, global poetic justice and injustice are intertwined in the poems' tendrils. In *Migrations and Home* we see through the poets' eyes images of movement across the Earth in all its hope and intrigue. The poetry within fascinates, shapes, and inspires. It challenges us to think, to consider our past, and our future. *Migrations and Home* is a beautiful reflection of who we are.

—Dr. Joel Berger, Chair of Wildlife Conservation, Colorado State University; Senior Scientist of the Wildlife Conservation Society; and author of *Extreme Conservation: Life at the Edges of the World*  
June 2023

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## Preface: Mapping and Meaning

The volume you hold in your hand is, as its title suggests, an extended meditation on the themes of migrations and home. As the poetry (and a little prose) collected here make quite clear, these twinned and intertwined terms are opposites only at first glance. If migration may be driven by yearning or brute necessity, so, too, is home. Home is not a static or stubbornly permanent place. It is a constantly transforming gesture towards a type of happiness and rootedness which is as much metaphysical as physical. It is a model, or occasionally perhaps merely a counterfeit, of our true home, which may always seem elsewhere. Home is a place of constant migrations. Migrations may be our home.

Migrants may cover great distances, leaving their home searching for home. They may cross political, personal, environmental boundaries; find new landscapes; and encounter new land, new spaces, new possibilities and presences. At some cost, old realities may be left behind. Equally they may journey further into aspects of themselves, crossing interior boundaries; discovering new landscapes of the soul; and encountering new imaginative, spiritual, intellectual or emotional possibilities, perils and presences. These interior journeys, too, may lead to a new but always provisional sense of home: in the heart, in the spirit, in the consciousness. Heart is where the home is: but where is it?

These migrations – these wanderings - occur simultaneously, the outer lives of the land and the wanderer informing their inner lives, and vice versa, in an intricate and endless web of reciprocal relations, like a richly interwoven tapestry or Celtic knot.

“May this poem be a portal/or a map” wishes (prays?) Lynne Shapiro in the opening piece of the collection. A portal to what, a map of what? The poem – and all the poetry here – may show us, but still it is up to us to explore, in the manifold ways which seem fit to us, the new land which may (or may not) lie before us. Sonia Overall, in the title of her poem, takes us on *three walks without maps*: mapless perhaps, but still they are walks, and we may choose to trust the poet even as we stray.

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Our wayward wanderings may lead to the realisation that we are infinite and everything and everywhere, as in Yuan Hongri's *My Heaven is Inside My Body*, and so any movement is just an illusion. That, too, however, may just be a moment, provisional and precarious like the "Transformation into peace" in Elaine Reardon's *Cassidy's Pub*. Always already we are captured by yearning for migration and home, as happens to Yehudit Silverman in *The Calling*. When that occurs, yearning and calling meet in an endless spiralling dance, "urging you to turn/ from your scavenging on earth/ toward the mystery of flight" (Cynthia Anderson, *Möbius*). Though what is earthbound and what is mystery may be a matter of perspective: "*Still circling, nearly-finishing, never resting/ say the bees/ I'll see you on the other side of the rose/ says each rose*" (Katherine Pierpoint, *Foxglove, or 'snoxum'*).

The words of this vagrant preface are certainly no map. Readers will notice, however, that we have divided the poems into short sections or sequences, marked by a mysterious glyph, which is in fact an alchemical symbol. Alchemy, with its yearning for change, mapped in careful stages but rarely if ever reaching its end, seems an appropriate guide (which in truth is no guide at all) to migrations and home. We have deliberately left unexplained the symbols themselves and their relation to the sections they mark. Readers may decide to explore them, and map out their own meanings. The book may thus generate as many maps as there are readers, becoming a seemingly endless source of migrations and an infinity of homes.

—*Simon Richard Wilson*  
8 June, 2023  
Bridge, England

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Crossings  
by Lynne Shapiro

I.

May this poem be a portal  
or a map,

breadcrumbs, a way out,  
a way back.

In Santa Lucia, near Vejer, the scarlet  
hibiscus unfurls with first light,

folds like an umbrella with setting sun.  
Aperture, unseen, remembered,

like the garden, the first garden —  
the garden within.

Lately, the lyric is absent.  
Poetry feels too pretty, like ballet,

seems beside the point, too too clever,  
overwrought.

Now I too am vanished between cupboard and sink, lost  
in quarantine to sanitizing and serving.

To keep peace, I try on the rhythm of others  
but that doesn't stop the unintended trampling of toes.

Then I remember to remember.

*Lynne, look to the sky.  
There are birds, lots of them.  
Lots of them.  
Migrating.*

I'm in the hibiscus garden.  
I hear Pol's voice and look up.

It's the autumnal flight of storks,  
the world without end.

Throngs pass and pass proudly. Stretches of joyous  
configurations go on and on without pause.

When the carpet of birds begins to thin,  
the storks swirl round and round

waiting for the last bird, who searches for possible stragglers  
before they move on into the paleness beyond sight.

The pageantry gone, I'm exhausted and ache  
from the affliction of having seen too much beauty.

Stendhal syndrome, like swallowing too much air.  
I lay on the grass arms outstretched,

try on the fanfare of the southbound muster, join  
*Ciconia ciconia's* endless ribbon,

and relive the raucous freedom of convergence  
from all points north

in congregation for the great migration over  
the Strait of Gibraltar — just a few miles away,

each bird having birthed or having been born  
into this ecstatic crossing.

Their journey a reverse of mine.  
I ferried from Tangier to Tarifa

To the hibiscus garden's house on a floating portal  
across the Strait amidst immigrant families

---

whose tongues spoke every possibility, who converged  
from various lands like the storks.

My ears, whirling pistils of receptivity  
heard angelic voices as I merged,

and recalled how I merged, with that abundant phalanx  
of boundless life —

benediction.

II.

The beauty of humanity and birds, vanished  
over coffee in my kitchen.

The headline read *Bodies Wash Ashore.*  
*Thousands of migrants lost in crossing from Africa.*

The photo showed a small milk-blue boat,  
weathered, sand-filled, abandoned

by the shore, Vejer de la Frontera, Spain.  
I was there.

On that beach,  
waiting for sunrise.

Twinkling lights across dark waters  
on both sides of the Strait.

*A record year for migrant drownings.*  
I had no idea the crossing dangerous,

after all, my ferry ride was untroubled.  
My travels, born of curiosity



and connection —  
friends, djellaba buttons, and storks.

I didn't imagine how desperate a 27-year old  
mechanic from Tangier might be,

or that there were hundreds  
like him, young and hungry; their travels travails.

Many never *make it to Spain alive*.  
I didn't know of Martin Zamora,

mortuary owner, who took it upon himself to repatriate  
broken bodies, some wasting away at sea for months;

some nameless for years,  
some nameless still.

*The clothes are often the only clues.*  
No way out. One way back.

No breadcrumbs to a better life.  
Bitter-sweet homecoming.

*The tourist in the garden  
sees only flowers.*

I wrote these lines about the visitor,  
the ease with which one overlooks

the whole, misses subtleties,  
the varieties of green.

I read those lines differently today; see myself  
as the tourist who yearned *only for the easy beauty*.

I didn't close my eyes to the truth —  
but I didn't question what else might be true.

---

In the end, beauty remains;  
it lives in Mr. Zamora —

the Body Collector of Algeciras,  
and now his son who helps him,

their sense of duty,  
and the final act of benediction

they bestow on those who die at sea  
with fists-full of faith.

Love Song for Mexico  
by Dana Maya

You are the clouds

And I am the mountain

I am the streetdog

And you are the *calavera*

You are the skeleton

And I am the desert

You are the dancer

And I am the rain

I am the feathers

And you are the rattle

You are the clouds

And I am the corn

I am the jaguar

And you are the *aguila*

I am the dream

And you are the dragon

You are the boy

And I am his dream

I am the devil

And you are the donkey

You are the fire

And also the smoke

I am the cactus

And we are the desert

---

You are my braids

And I am your face

Your mamá is the *bruja*

And I am her gaze

I am the false god and

You are the *virgen*

I am the fur

And you are the feathers

You are the *selva*

And I am your flowers

I am the nest

And you are my beak

I am the *palma*

And you are its *coco*

I am the fingers

And you are my palm

You are mi *reyna*

And I am the queen

You are the mask

And also the wrestler

I am the gate

And you are the falling

god

You are the sun

And I am the flight

I am the sky

And you are the footprints

Mi abuela is the stone

And yours is the cross

I am the *piñata*

And you are the stick

I am the blindfold

And you are the spin

I am the *dulces*

And you are the song

You are the ¡*TRAS!*

And I am the ¡*SAS!*

You are the *cuerda*

And I am the pull

I am the hand

And you are the rooster

I am the drunk

And you are my drink

This is the nightmare

But also the dream

The men are the *migra*

And we are the boy

You are the *nopal*

And I am the slingshot

We are the *espina*

And also the toy

We are the cactus

And also the slingshot

I am the cactus

And you are its joy

three walks without maps  
by Sonia Overall

*tongue*

The city is tacky-edged. Circuit this perimeter of glue, licked by the tongue of river.

Water runs fast beyond the weir. Follow paths of bark chip banked by split logs, twisting between trees. Wait for a dog walker to pass, fetid black plastic bag swinging from the knot. Look away. Examine the tree-rings of a supine trunk. Listen for the road against the roar of river. Metallic car-flashes on the bridge are trout, jumping midstream.

Pass the cog-and-bolt of the weir gate. See it for what it is: a giant scold's bridle for silencing riversong.

*nails*

Walk each finger on the spread hands of a town. Hidden histories snag under the grimy fingernails. That's where you want to be. That's what never fails to draw you.

*ghosts*

Scout the gravel arc before the gates of building site, scoured by traction marks. Close your eyes and listen for the faint hiss of ghosts beyond, buried in builders' spoil.

Find them everywhere you walk: massing beneath limbs of heart-shaped foliage; pressing against rust-flecked iron railings. Rustling leaf litter, broken branches, silt, flung packages.

Trapped. Pathless.

Keep out signs. Rusted padlocks.

Valerian sways in defiant mulberry sprays.

North Atlantic Fracture Zones  
by Linda Buckmaster

Under the North Atlantic's deep waters, a landscape lies,  
a geography of fracture zones in the sea bed unseen  
by emigrants from the Highlands riding rough seas  
to the unknowns of Nova Scotia and Newfoundland.  
Where they'll work, "na better 'n slaves," on other boats  
steaming from the Grand Banks or down from the Labrador  
to the land crew of women and children toiling on the flakes,  
all for the making of salt cod. Barrels of it,  
the best grade hauled overseas to Europe  
or the cheapest to the Indies to feed black slaves  
owned by Glasgow merchants getting fat on sugar.

Aye, many fractures there are.  
In the North, the Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone,  
and farther south the Oceanographer Fracture,  
the Atlantis, the Kane, the Vema, the Doldrums.  
There is the goodbye to the land of ancestors fracture.  
Your mum dying while at sea fracture. The lash  
of the overseer's whip fracturing flesh from bone.  
The hand caught between dory and schooner  
offloading fish. The hauling block  
upside the back of the head on a rogue wave.  
The machete lopping off an arm caught in the sugar mill.  
The fractures of a life, lives, lost to struggle and short pay.

And running north and south down  
the middle of the ocean for ten thousand miles,  
the great Mid-Atlantic Ridge crosses  
the fractures that bind  
Europe and North America,  
Africa and Indies,  
East of, West of,  
Before, after.



Into the City  
by Sean Prentiss

Now that I've come here, into the city,  
deep into tall towers that don't lean  
into an embrace like mountains do  
—rather blot out our sun—I wonder

why.

Toward the Lake

*at the mouth of the Little North Fork*

by Robert Wrigley

The river's purposeful, immemorial unwandering,  
the curvaceous meander and bee-line of it  
down to the basin of heavy metal tea.

Its dearth in autumn, its abundance in spring,  
a live fallen cedar with root wad run aground  
mid-channel in May? Holding water in October.

Burble, wash, sough, diminishing plunge  
and thrash, its cold and never-still depths,  
into stiller ones, to slow and swirl, to rest in the lake,

for the long massive migration that lies ahead,  
from river to river to river to river,  
to the planet it helps make of the sea.

The Calling  
by Yehudit Silverman

I have to  
lean into longing  
like a pilgrim  
whose hands are empty

Only wind  
and perhaps the whisper  
of a cellular calling  
I never asked for

A child held tight  
by secrets  
a corset  
no breath

No becoming  
the wilderness  
that grows unbidden  
between ribs  
between lips  
between pilgrim and prayer

You look at my long robe  
and see starlight  
as if I can lead you  
easily  
through the dark  
as if my feet  
don't bleed  
as they open

Tell me  
how to be  
in this wild walking

how to feel the flight  
of all things lifted

tell me...

Möbius

by Cynthia Anderson

*...we were not born to survive*

*Only to live*

—W. S. Merwin

You imagine a point of no return.

But it's not there—it's not anywhere—

despite the grudges you carry  
or your fading body. You learn this

as you stand in the warm sun,  
watching the effortless circles

of turkey vultures, a blackened kettle  
ballooning and flattening, a sky snake

coiling and uncoiling—soaring  
on thermals, wheeling northward,

splitting and regrouping, closer  
and farther, until they are smaller

than sparrows, then gone—  
a surge in the tide of migrants

who will be back before you know it,  
tracking the scent of death,

surprising you as they did today  
with an arrival out of season—

urging you to turn  
from your scavenging on earth

toward the mystery of flight.

**About the Editor, Dr. Simon Richard Wilson**

Simon Richard Wilson is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Education at Canterbury Christ Church University (UK), and a member of the Institute for Orthodox Christian Studies at Cambridge (UK). He has a special interest in landscape, co-creation, love of learning, the theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the true nature of sustainability.

**About the Foreword Author, Dr. Joel Berger**

My fascination with biodiversity began in LA (California) where I grew up. I traded body surfing for desert and mountain explorations, and melded that pursuit into serious science. But, I also soon realized that if we did not do more than just science we'd not have species and important biological interactions from which to enhance our understanding of a diverse and brilliant planet. I've concentrated on animals larger than a bread box – both iconic endangered species and those lesser known. Among these have been black rhinos and wild yaks, Patagonia's huemul, and saiga in Mongolia's Gobi Desert. Although I've targeted extreme spots – described in my Geographical pursuits – including the edges of the planet, I ask questions about climate and environmental change, migration and connectivity, and, most recently, how our burgeoning passion for play and our travel footprints affect species at a local scale. In my soul, I know the important issue is how to engage science at levels that not only inform but improve visibility and result in change.

