

Exploration, Exile and Return: Affects of Transnational Literature

Porter White
Junior Tutorial, Fall 2018

“So, are we or aren’t we, siamo o non siamo,” boasted my Great-uncle Vili when the two of us finally sat down late that summer afternoon in a garden overlooking his sprawling estate in Surrey.

“Just look at this,” he pointed to a vast expanse of green. “Isn’t it splendid?” he asked, as if he had invented the notion of an afternoon stroll in the English countryside. “Just before sundown and minutes after tea, it always comes: a sense of plenitude, of bliss almost. You know—everything I wanted, I got. Not bad for a man in his eighties.” Arrogant self-satisfaction beamed on his features.

I tried to speak to him of Alexandria, of time lost and lost worlds, of the end when the end came, of Monsieur Costa and Montefeltro and Aldo Kohn, of Lotte and Aunt Flora and lives so faraway now. He cut me short and made a disparaging motion with his hand, as if to dismiss a bad odor. “That was rubbish. I live in the present,” he said almost vexed by my nostalgia. “Siamo o non siamo?” he asked, standing up to stretch his muscles, then pointing to the first owl of evening.

André Aciman, “Soldier, Salesman, Swindler, Spy,” *Out of Egypt* (1994)

Contemporary transnational literature and diasporic literature both ask questions that have been circulating through texts in English for centuries. How does migration rewrite identity? What do generic forms reveal or occlude about place and community? What is cosmopolitanism? How do we define the limits of our worlds against nation and nature? Are we or aren’t we? This tutorial groups texts that, while distant in period, share underlying concerns about specific kinds of travel, where travel is defined more expansively than through the usual passport control binary of business versus pleasure. As transnational writing necessarily engages with the inheritance of our collective colonial past, we will read foundational postcolonial theory and criticism as we consider our primary texts. As changes in place often induce changes of heart, we will also recur to the new affordances of affect theory. Each course module pairs a different form of transnational travel (exploration, pilgrimage, deployment and exile) with terms related to affect that likewise indicate transfer (derogation or belittlement, pretense, sympathy, charm). Primary texts range broadly across century and genre. Some include Byron’s celebrity-making *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*, André Aciman’s excerpted *Out of Egypt*, a memoir of Jewish diaspora, Kincaid’s radiantly acerbic *A Small Place*, John Bunyan’s deceptively simple *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and Leslie Marmon Silko’s oneiric *Ceremony*, a novel about a Pueblo soldier’s return from WWII published two years after the fall of Saigon, which we will read alongside contemporary stories of Viet Thanh Nguyen.

The class also serves as an introduction to writing longer critical papers, culminating in the junior essay, a research paper of 20 to 25 pages. Throughout the semester, smaller assignments leading up to the essay will be due. These include an article abstract, short paper, prospectus with annotated bibliography and a draft. Tutorial meetings will provide a forum for discussing these assignments and the developing project of the essay. We will meet with Odile Harter at Widener to explore the remarkable resources of the Harvard libraries that sustain excellent research.

Assessment will follow this framework:

Short Essay (5-6 pages): 10%

Annotated Bibliography (10 sources) and Prospectus: 10%

Full Draft (20 pages): 20%

Junior Essay (20-25 pages): 40%

Participation (including preparation and smaller assignments): 20%

No unexcused absences are permitted. Meeting with the Departmental Writing Fellow is mandatory, as are the tutorial-wide meetings. Finally, participation in a course is what makes it transformative or dull: please come to each session prepared to speak on the readings and to listen intently.

Schedule of Readings

Exploration: Enlargement and Derogation

Week 1

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726): Parts I and II

Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (1988)

A Disclaimer on Method: Laura Brown, "Reading Race and Gender: Jonathan Swift" (1990); Claude Rawson, "Gulliver, Travel, and Empire" (2012)

Week 2

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (1726): Parts III and IV

Joseph Banks, selections from the Newfoundland and Labrador Journal (1766)

Mungo Park, selections from *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa* (1799)

Postcolonial Studies: Mary Louise Pratt, "Science and Sentiment" from *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992)

Pilgrimage: Devotion and Pretense

Week 3

John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress, Part One* (1678)

Postcolonial Studies, Book History: Isabel Hofmeyr, “Mata’s Hermeneutic: Internationally Made Ways of Reading Bunyan” from *The Portable Bunyan* (2004)

Short essay due

Week 4

Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*: Cantos I and II (1812)

James Buzard, “Being Byron,” from *The Beaten Track* (1993)

Affect Theory: Nigel Thrift, “Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour” (2008)

Week 5

Walter Scott, *The Talisman* (1825): Tales of the Crusaders, Volume 3 [Chapters 1-13]

Postcolonial Theory: Edward Said, selections from *Orientalism* (1978)

Week 6

Walter Scott, *The Talisman* (1825): Tales of the Crusaders, Volume 4 [Chapters 14-28]

Richard Burton, selections from *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madinah and Meccah* (1855)

Postcolonial Studies: Tim Fulford, “Romanticism and Colonialism: Races, Places, Peoples, 1800-1830” (1998)

Prospectus and annotated bibliography due

Deployment and Return: Disconnection and Sympathy

Week 7

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977): Read from page 1 to 138 through “they left on horseback before dawn.”

Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*: Canto III (1816)

Trauma Theory: Selections from Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (1992)

Trauma Theory related to Affect (?): Lauren Berlant, “Affect is the New Trauma” (2009)

Week 8

Viet Thanh Nguyen, “The War Years” (2009), “The Americans” (2010)

Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977): Read the remainder of the novel, from page 138 through 262.

Affect Theory: Anna Gibbs, “After affect: sympathy, synchrony, and mimetic communication” (2010)

Exile and Charm

Week 9

Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands” (1991)

Byron, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*: Canto IV (1818)

Postcolonial Theory, Diasporic Studies: Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Shattered Mirror” from *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006)

Draft due

Week 10

Workshop during meeting

Week 11

André Aciman, *Out of Egypt* (1994): Through Chapter 3

Mary Wortley Montagu, Turkish Embassy Letters (1716-1718)

Postcolonial Theory, Cultural Studies: Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1996)

Week 12

André Aciman, *Out of Egypt* (1994): Chapters 4-6

Affect Theory: Sarah Ahmed, “Happy Objects” (2010)

[Junior Tutorial Conference—date tbd]

Junior essay due in hard copy to the English department and via email to Porter White

Please send me an email about editions if you would like to start reading over the summer (ewhite@fas). A number of our secondary readings can be found in one of the two anthologies below. In addition to the longer primary readings, these will be required course texts:

The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, Ed. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2nd ed., 2006)

The Affect Theory Reader, Ed. Gregg and Seigworth (2010)

Note on the Honor Code

Becoming a responsible writer requires careful reading and discussion with others.

Acknowledging the influence that others have on your thoughts is essential for encouraging an open exchange of ideas. Cite clearly and when in doubt, please get in touch.