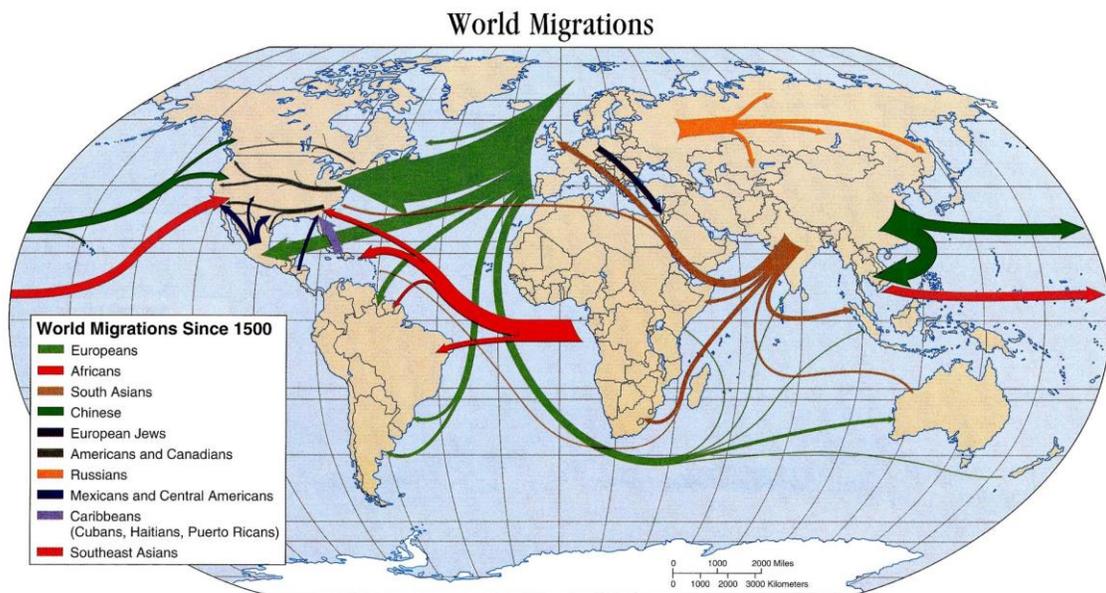


English II Transnational Literature

Semester One 2019

Term One



Michael Ondaatje, *Anil's Ghost* (Picador 9780330480772)

Jhumpa Lahiri, *Interpreter of Maladies* (Houghton Mifflin 9780395927205)

Arthur Nortje, Selected Poems (text provided on RUConnected)

Andrea Levy, *Small Island* (Headline Review 9780755355952)

Paper Description

Literature which explores the lingering impact of colonialism, and which engages with the experiences of diaspora, migration and exile is the focus of this paper. Using English as their language of literary expression, writers have created new literatures which transgress and transcend constructed national boundaries. In particular, this literature explores how the crossing of boundaries, real and conceptual, affects personal and overarching histories, and national, ethnic and cultural identities. Also of interest is how the authors' transnational subjectivities influence their literary aesthetics.

The paper provides an examination of texts selected from the vast and diverse terrain of postcolonial Anglophone writing. Students will first study *Anil's Ghost*, a text about the return of a migrant, by an author from Sri Lanka who now resides in Canada. Thereafter we move to a selection of short stories from Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*, which represents the experiences of South Asian migrants in the USA. The focus then shifts to South African poet Arthur Nortje, to explore how South African texts can also be transnational and how exile and migration intersect with South African concerns. To end, students will read *Small Island*, a novel about the relationships between migrant and host cultures by an author who is a descendent of Jamaican immigrants to the UK.

Week beginning 18 Feb

Tutorial One: Introduction to Transnational Literature

1. What does the term transnational mean?
2. Try to define transnational literature in your own words. What are the main features of transnational literature?
3. What is the relationship between postcolonial literature and transnational literature?
4. Consider the FORM of the texts you have read already (comment on *Anil's Ghost*, if that is the only novel you have read for the course so far). HOW do transnational writers write? What style or elements of narrative form do they favour, or are they too different to compare in this way? What techniques or rhetorical devices do they use? Try to make a connection between CONTENT (subject matter, plot, themes etc.) and FORM (narrative structure, setting, characterisation etc.).

Michael Ondaatje: *Anil's Ghost*

(Lecturer – Sam Naidu)

Let conversation cease

Let laughter flee

This is the place where Death

Delights to help the living

[sign on the chief medical officer's door, Kynsey Road Hospital p.66]

***Anil's Ghost* Topics:**

- Narratives of war, violence and terror
- Discourses of science and humanism
- History (different versions/perspectives)
- Transnational subjectivity: dislocation; nostalgia; multiple affiliations
- Trauma and brutality (various responses; personal versus collective trauma)
- 'Truth' and knowledge (Postmodernist approach)
- Human rights
- Natural world
- Religion, ritual and art
- Bodily experience and touch
- Ecphrasis (descriptions of art)



Recommended Reading:

Derrickson, Teresa. "Will the 'Un-truth' Set You Free? A Critical Look at Global Human Rights Discourse in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 15 (2004): 131-152.

Ondaatje, Michael. "Michael Ondaatje in Conversation with Maya Jaggi." *Wasafiri* 32 (Autumn 2000): 5-11.

Sanghera, Sandeep. "Touching the Language of Citizenship in Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*." *CLC Web: Comparative Literature and Culture* 6.3 (2004). <<http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.1241>>.

Scanlan, Margaret. "*Anil's Ghost* and Terrorism's Time." *Studies in the Novel* 36.3 (2004): 302-317.

Senaratne, Jagath. *Political Violence in Sri Lanka, 1997-1990: Riots, Insurrections, Counterinsurgency, Foreign Intervention*. Sri Lanka Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Amsterdam: VU UP, 1997.

Vertovec, Steven and Robin Cohen, eds. *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*. Cheltenham and Northampton USA: Edward Elgar Reference Collection, 2001.

Week beginning 25 February

Tutorial Two: *Anil's Ghost*

... *Anil's Ghost* is surely a novel of terrorism, but one that abandons most of the conventions of the genre. It reproduces no political rhetoric, adjudicates no political claims, projects no political solutions. Its terrorists remain shadowy, nameless figures, encountered briefly; no police, no secret agents, no journalist heroes emerge to lock wits with them, hunt them down, or play the part of secret sharer. We understand early that we will find no master narratives, no organic psychologies, no resolution and no moral. – Margaret Scanlan (302)

1. Margaret Scanlan labels *Anil's Ghost* “a novel of terrorism”. How would you describe the text?
2. Scanlan claims that the novel does not contain “master narratives”, but is there a discernible narrative structure? Describe how this narrative structure manifests.
3. Ondaatje omits certain basic information about the Sri Lankan war. Why? Is the novel any less powerful because of these omissions? Could Ondaatje be accused of irresponsibility because of his apolitical stance?
4. What is the war about? What are the groups fighting for? Does this information aid a deeper understanding of the novel's central concerns?
5. Compare and contrast the conceptions of ‘truth’ and knowledge held by the following characters: Anil; Sarath; Palipana; Anand; and Gamini.
6. Write a list of the transnational features of *Anil's Ghost*.

Assignment: Due 08 March (1500 words)

Discuss the various ways in which the protagonist, Anil, offers a contrast to other main characters such as Sarath, Palipana, Gamini and Ananda because of her gender, transnational subjectivity, and her views about scientific knowledge. Your essay should make reference to the form of the novel.

Tips:

- Be sure that you understand Anil's transnational subjectivity (her multiple affiliations) before preparing your essay.
- It is absolutely necessary that you attend and understand Lecture 3 on the discourses of science and humanism. Lecture Four expands on this topic.
- Comment on how Ondaatje deliberately sets up a contrast between Anil and the other characters. What aspects of form and other literary techniques does Ondaatje employ to create this contrast?
- Ensure that your essay has a clear introduction and conclusion.
- Reference thoroughly following the rules laid out in the Department's Guide to Essay Writing.

Additional Exercise (to be completed in your own time). NB. This exercise requires a close reading of a selected passages from the novel and is therefore good practice for contextual assignment or exam questions.

Exercise One: Read pages 156-157.

1. Place this passage in context. What major themes of the novel are expressed in this short section?
2. What are Sarath's perceptions of the world? How are Sarath's views and beliefs conveyed to the reader? Try to identify rhetorical devices used here and elsewhere.
3. "Anil would not understand this old and accepted balance" (156).
 - What is the "balance" referred to in this statement?
 - How is Anil compared and contrasted to Sarath and Palipana in the novel?
 - To what versions of truth and knowledge do each of them subscribe?
 - What other versions of 'truth' and knowledge does the novel articulate?
 - How do these personal beliefs relate to the country which "existed in a rocking, self-burying motion" (157)?
4. What, ultimately, do you think the novel is saying about 'truth' and knowledge?

Jhumpa Lahiri: *Interpreter of Maladies*

(Lecturer – Sam Naidu)

Topics:

- Diaspora and migration
- South Asian diaspora in the USA
- Migration as a gendered experience
- Dislocation and displacement, belonging and a sense of 'home'
- Adaptive strength of the migrant
- The 'paradox of continuity and change'
- Resolving the tensions between homeland and diasporic home, host-migrant relationship

Recommended Reading:

Brada-Williams, Noelle. "Reading Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* as a Short Story Cycle." *MELUS*. 29 (3/4, Pedagogy, Canon, Context: Toward a Redefinition of Ethnic American Literary Studies) (Autumn–Winter 2004): 451–464.

Katrak, Ketu H. "The Aesthetics of Dislocation." *The Women's Review of Books* XIX. 5 (February 2002): 5-6.

Williams, Laura Anh. "Foodways and Subjectivity in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*." *MELUS*, Saturday, 22December, 2007.



Week beginning 04 March

Tutorial Three:

Read the short story “Mrs Sen’s” (111 – 135)

1. Describe the relationship between:

- 1.1. Mrs Sen and Eliot
- 1.2. Mrs Sen and Mr Sen
- 1.3. Mrs Sen and Eliot’s mother

What do these relationships reveal about Mrs Sen’s transnational subjectivity?

2. How does Lahiri represent the tensions between Mrs Sen’s homeland (India) and diasporic home (USA)? What exactly are these tensions? Discuss also the ‘paradox of continuity and change’ in relation to Mrs Sen’s transnational subjectivity.
3. What drives the plot of this story? When does the climax of the story occur? How does this element of the plot relate to the theme of transnationalism?
4. Of what significance is Mrs Sen’s gender given her predicament as a transnational subject?
5. At the end of the story both Mrs Sen and Eliot seem deeply unhappy and lonely. Why has Lahiri chosen to conclude the story in this way? What do you think this conclusion augurs for transnational subjects such as Mrs Sen, who seem to lack “adaptive strength” (Vertovec & Cohen 2001: xviii), and for ‘host’ individuals like Eliot who are living lives of anomie and alienation?

Arthur Nortje

(Lecturer – Andrea Thorpe)

The isolation of exile is a gutted
warehouse at the back of pleasure streets
- Arthur Nortje, "Waiting"

Topics:

- Migration and diaspora in South African literature
- The role of the writer in exile
- Alienation and belonging
- 'Race', identity and the body
- Englishness and South Africa
- Transnational writing and the metropolis



Recommended Reading:

Bunn, David, "‘Some Alien Native Land’: Arthur Nortje, Literary History, and the Body in Exile", *World Literature Today*, 70.1 South African Literature in Transition (Winter 1996), 33-44

Klopper, Dirk, "In Pursuit of the Subject: Towards a Biography of Arthur Nortje", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30.4, Special Issue: Writing in Transition in South Africa: Fiction, History, Biography (December 2004), 869-887

Nuttall, Sarah, "Bodiographies: Writing the Body in Arthur Nortje", in *Arthur Nortje: Poet and South African. New Critical and Contextual Essays*, ed. by Craig McLuckie and Ross Tyner (Pretoria: UNISA, 2004)

Thorpe, Andrea, "The 'pleasure streets' of exile: Queer subjectivities and the body in Arthur Nortje's London poems", *Journal of Literary Studies* (March 2018).

Week beginning 11 March

Tutorial Four: Arthur Nortje – South African Transnational Poet

Read the poem below and then answer the questions on the next page:

Native's Letter

Arthur Nortje

Habitable planets are unknown or too
far away from us to be
of consequence. To be of
value to his homeland must the wanderer
not weep by northern waters, but love
his own bitter clay
roaming through the hard cities, tough
himself as coffin nails.

Harping on the nettles of his melancholy,
keening on the blue strings of the blood,
he will delve into mythologies perhaps
call up spirits through the night,

or carry memories apocryphal
of Tshaka, Hendrik, Witbooi, Adam Kok
of the Xhosa nation's dream
as he moonlights in another country:

but he shall also have
cycles of history
outnumbering the guns of supremacy.

Now and wherever he arrives
extending feelers into foreign scenes
exploring times and lives,
equally may he stand and laugh,
explode with a paper bag of poems,
burst upon a million televisions
with a face as in a Karsh photograph,
slave voluntarily in some siberia
to earn the salt of victory.

Darksome, whoever dies
In the malaise of my dear land
remember me at swim,
the moving waters spilling through my eyes:
and let no amnesia
attack at fire hour:
for some of us must storm the castles
some define the happening.

Toronto, May 1970

1. Consider the significance of the poem's title:
 - 1.1. What are the connotations of "native"? How is the term "native" associated with homelands and places of exile? What are the specific nuances of "native" in the South African context? How does Nortje's use of this word in the title shape your reading of the poem as a whole?
 - 1.2. How does framing this poem as a "letter" relate to its transnational themes?

2. How does Nortje present the figure of the exile in the first two stanzas?

i.e. What is the relationship between the exile and his homeland? What is the relationship between the exile and his foreign "home"? Does the speaker (or Nortje himself) seem conflicted about the duty or position of the exile?

3. Write down a definition of each of the following references (Look them up if necessary). Explain the significance of each in the context of the poem.
 - 3.1. Tshaka (l.14)
 - 3.2. Hendrik, Witbooi (l.14) [Note: Although these names are written with a comma in between, 'Hendrik Witbooi' was a historical figure. If you take the name 'Hendrik' on its own, who else might this refer to?]
 - 3.3. Adam Kok (l.14)
 - 3.4. Xhosa nation's dream (l.15)
 - 3.5. Karsh photograph (l. 26)

4. Discuss the significance of the "memories apocryphal" (l.13) invoked in the poem. Why is "memory" important to the identity of the diasporic person/ exile/ immigrant? (Also consider the reference to "amnesia" in the final stanza.)

5. Discuss the last two lines of the poem. What is Nortje suggesting about the role of a poet (or writer, or artist) in relation to politics – especially an "exiled" poet?

Additional Exercise (to do be done in your own study time):

Read the poem “London Impressions” (included in the selection of Arthur Nortje’s poems provided on RUConnected) and answer the following questions:

1. How is London described in this poem?
 - 1.1. Is London presented in a positive or negative light?
 - 1.2. Select specific words that create this “impression” of the city, and explain their connotations.
 - 1.3. What do these descriptions of London on a summer’s day suggest about the speaker’s relationship to the city?
2. Name the specific landmarks and place names referenced in this poem. What is the significance of naming these particular places?
3. From which well-known play does the intertextual reference in line 13 derive? (“The isle is full of Foreign Noises”.) Why is this an appropriate, interesting or ironic reference to make in the context of this poem?
4. Discuss the second-last stanza. What is the speaker saying about his position in his exilic “home”? What does it mean for an immigrant to “acquire” the “pace and tone of other voices”?

Andrea Levy: *Small Island*

(Lecturer – Sam Naidu)

***Small Island* Topics:**

- Migration and Cultural Identity
- Home and Homeland
- Identity and Belonging
- Gender (Femininity and Masculinity)
- Race and Sexuality, Racial Stereotypes, Fetishisation
- Impact of Diaspora on Host Communities

Lecture Series – these are the topics which will be covered in the lectures:

- Small Islands: England and Jamaica – Contexts and Relationships
- Narrative Situation: The Four Narrators and Two Chronologies
- Race and Racism: Stereotypes and Cultural Identities in Post-World War II Britain
- Gender and Sexuality: Masculine and Feminine Identities; Race and Sexuality

Recommended Reading:

Brophy, Sarah. "Entangled Genealogies: White Femininity on the Threshold of Change in Andrea Levy's *Small Island*." *Contemporary Women's Writing* 4.2 (2010): 100-113.

Dalal, Farhad. *Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization: New Perspective from Analysis, Psychoanalysis, and Sociology*. Hove, New England, and New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2002.

Hall, Stuart. "Negotiating Caribbean Identities." *New Left Review* 1.209 (1995): 3-14.

Hall Stuart and Paul du Gay, eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage, 1996.

N.B. DVD: The Department owns a copy of the BBC/ITV mini-series adaptation of *Small Island*. Please arrange with Ms Siphokazi Khanyile for viewing in the AV Room.

Week beginning 18 March

Tutorial Five: *Small Island*

Read the following article:

Levy, Andrea. "This is my England." *The Guardian* Saturday 19 February 2000.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/feb/19/society1>.

1. Summarise the article, and be prepared to present your précis in the tutorial.
2. What is Levy's thesis about the politics of identity in the UK?
3. In addition, read Stuart Hall's theories about cultural identity (see Recommended Reading). How does Hall define cultural identity? How are these ideas about cultural identity reflected in Levy's novel?
4. Closely examine the cultural identities of Hortense and Gilbert. What discourses and myths shape their respective identities? What adaptations are required of them in the diasporic location?
5. Why are the two small islands of the novel both different and similar? Identify the rhetorical devices used by the author to achieve this patterning.
6. Consider the four main characters (Hortense, Queenie, Joseph and Bernard). In what ways are they different or similar? Has Levy constructed a pattern with these four characters? Discuss other discernible patterns in the narrative.
7. Compile a list of the transnational features of *Small Island* (try to cover both content and form).