



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1979 Volume I: The Stranger and Modern Fiction: A Portrait in Black and White

The Stranger in Fiction

Curriculum Unit 79.01.04
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In the course of our seminar we read a book by Robert Heinlein entitled *Stranger in a Strange Land*. It was a fun book to read, yet I felt uncomfortable with it. Something about the book struck a chord in me. A lot of important questions were raised in the text, but there was nothing beyond these questions. There was nothing to sustain the reader, nothing to generate intellectual enthusiasm, nothing to impell the reader to think seriously about the issues in the text. The book was like a cute but gutless boxer, always teasing and feinting but forever moving away.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized that this book typified what was happening in my classroom. I was forever offering students works that teased, but always danced away—works with no real organization, no real power, no intellectual candor. I was offering them texts that in turn offered no resistance—works that insured success, but lacked substance.

Our seminar has caused me to rethink this approach. For at least a portion of the year I plan to teach a unit that contains what might be termed “forbidding” but rewarding works. We will read works that are difficult, works written by such important figures as William Faulkner and William Blake, whose mere presence in the student’s realm of experience will enrich those lesser works that are read in the course of the year.

The intent of this unit is to use certain fictional texts to study “The Stranger in Fiction,” or “Estrangement in Fiction.” In doing so I intend to peek into those dark alleys of the mind and focus on the figure of the stranger that exists in all of us. This is especially appropriate to my own teaching situation. It is an alternate school, a repository for students expelled from other hallowed halls. Thus we begin each year, and sometimes end it, as a collection of strangers.

How does one go about all this? I will begin the unit with a short story by Joseph Conrad, “Amy Foster.” Conrad *the man* can have an interesting effect on students that will in turn generate interest in his work. Some biographical information on Conrad should precede the reading of “Amy Foster”—especially information relating to Conrad’s late learning of English. It should be pointed out that Conrad was twenty-one years old and fluent in Polish and French before he made even his first acquaintance with the English language. That acquaintance was the result of hearing it spoken by English seamen and fishermen—those very types so near and dear to the heart of George Bernard Shaw, who lambasted them for mangling their native tongue in his play *Pygmalion*. He spent two years with these men and “acquired” the English language without ever opening a grammar text—a fact that should and does cheer and astound students. As a result, they will often

read a work by Conrad with a sense of awe. This can diminish the student-author tension—or, rather, the student-academic text kind of tension that is such an obstacle to learning.

Conrad, an estranged figure himself, was orphaned at an early age, was virtually a man without a country, and was a wanderer—a seaman; he almost embodies the idea of “The Stranger in Fiction.” The story begins with a shipwreck in which Yanko Goorall, the estranged figure in the text, is cast into the sea and then washed upon the English coast near a town called Colebrook. He reaches land, but there is really no solid ground for the man in this tale. There is no hope. There is no comfortable progression from his initial state of wariness—Goorall is cast upon the land and for days he wanders through the countryside while people drive him from their doorsteps—to a state of acceptance either on the part of Goorall for his new country, or on the part of the country for Goorall. There is no overcoming of the original animalized, even demonized perception of him by the people of the countryside.

The students must be asked: What is there in the text that causes this isolation? What is there perhaps in the manner in which the story is told that conveys to us a feeling of despondency, a sense of foreboding for Yanko? What is there about the point of view that does not sit well with readers? Conrad’s use of point of view in the text is that of limited vision. Kennedy, the country doctor, relates the story to the narrator, who in turn relates it to us. Kennedy is a strange bird indeed, and may well be responsible for the feeling of estrangement and despondency that envelops the tale. He is described as a fellow with a brisk manner, a hearty laugh and attentive eyes. Yet there is something profoundly creepy about him. People talk freely to Kennedy and he patiently listens. After all, he is an important figure in the countryside—a learned man, a saver of lives. But he gives nothing in return. There is no flow of sympathy back to people who seek solace from time. By being this way he seems to create a further sense of isolation among the people who confide in him—and Goorall is at the forefront of these people.

Returning to Yanko, he begins his predicament in the water. He manages to scramble ashore, but the feeling of safety is merely illusory. What is ironic in the situation is that while the sea appears to be cruel, it is merely the water of an indifferent ocean that one finds throughout the works of Conrad. It is on land that Yanko Goorall really encounters cruelty and suffers through the condition of estrangement. Perhaps this is Conrad the seaman speaking—a figure who profoundly mistrusts dry land.

This is the first text to be studied in the unit. It is first because it is a short story and because the issue of estrangement is relatively clear. It is appropriate then to raise those questions with students that will be raised again and again, and to see how Conrad handles the issues. How is one a stranger? How does one work to overcome estrangement and to what end? Conrad’s estranged figure of Yanko Goorall violates and thus makes those around him acutely aware of something called the “law of familiarity.” This is simply the way we are, the way we interact, the way we define ourselves as people. The intrusion of a stranger challenges this tightly-knit system. The intrusion causes awkwardness and makes people acutely aware of personal vagaries. All this is the result of someone formed in one pattern being projected into another. In the Conrad text this is literally and figuratively true, as Yanko Goorall is hurled from his ship into the sea and then washed onto the land.

The process of overcoming the state of estrangement never really takes place in the story. Yanko Goorall never overcomes his sense of isolation. Students will see, albeit in retrospect, that this is the only work in the unit where this occurs. It is the only text in the unit where the instruments for communication and/or repudiation among people in society fail throughout the entire work. What are these instruments? For Conrad they are food and language—the language of dance and of words. Language especially fails on both

levels. When Yanko dances on the table tops in the local pubs, in an effort to communicate his zest for life, he is roughly tossed out on his ear. And the language of words is certainly a failed medium, a source of frustration for Yanko throughout the text. He is never even able to communicate his real name to the Englishmen.

Conrad ends on a miserable note. The estranged Yanko dies in isolation, comforted only by the country doctor and abandoned by the only figure in the text who sought to help him overcome his state of estrangement—Amy Foster.

The Green Hills of Africa by Ernest Hemingway is the next work to be studied in this unit. Like “Amy Foster” it deals with the question of estrangement, with the difference being that the issue is not quite so clear-cut in Hemingway. What is clear is a sense of hope, of the possibility of overcoming isolation certainly not present in Conrad.

A study of the text must begin with the foreword. It is a powerful piece, much like Conrad’s preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. In fact I will begin the study of *Green Hills* by having students read both forewords. The discussions that follow should be structured in such a way that the message of both texts—a human being is not a human being alone—becomes clear. Students might also look at the question of imagination, especially in relation to the Hemingway foreword. This is to be an absolutely true book, bereft of any imagination. A courageous undertaking to be sure. But is it possible? Is it possible to leave out imagination? If one stops using imagination, does one cease to become human? Is the state of estrangement thus intensified?

The issue of estrangement is, of course, present in Hemingway. But it is couched within a type of quest story—a quest story limited by the mortal qualities of its participants and by time. Ernest Hemingway is hunting in Africa. He is concerned as always with the biggest and the best catch. He is also concerned with making the perfect shot, an immaculate shot, a single, accurate and essential shot. What he encounters during this expedition is more than he bargained for. It is much more than the best set of horns and much more than the question of who is the best man.

Hemingway finds himself being pushed by forces, being pushed by the text against an unbendable setting. The setting is the African landscape which he cannot “read” either while passing through it in his jeep, or while on foot. His misreading of the landscape is at first deliberate. It comes about as a result of Hemingway’s highly developed sense of self-preservation and/or vanity. I lump the two qualities together because I can barely distinguish between them in Hemingway. *Green Hills*, you might say, is not about hunting at all. It is about writing. It is Hemingway’s attempt to legitimize the vanity he feels as a creative artist—the vanity that sets him apart from the masses and estranges him. He satisfies the vanity by producing another creative work, and uses the work to legitimize, justify and defend his vanity against his critics. So perhaps there is a kind of symbiosis between the self-preservation and the vanity of Hemingway. He acts to preserve the vanity—the vanity that is actually part of the self. Strictly speculation on my part. Nothing I will be able to convey to students. But I will include it in the unit in an effort to mystify readers.

Hemingway, as stated before the digression, does deliberately misread the landscape. It is the result of his trying to encase himself in a bubble—to remain an exempt figure, a deliberate stranger. He cannot remain so. Circumstances combine to burst his bubble and propel him through the opening. Hemingway, unlike the estranged figure in Conrad’s “Amy Foster,” is forced to take steps toward overcoming his isolation. In doing so he experiences a reduction of self-preservation/vanity, making him vulnerable as the novel progresses.

The vehicle for all these circumstances is the hunt. It must be pointed out to students that the hunt, from

Moby Dick to *Jaws*, is one of the key symbols, one of the major forms in American literature. It is especially important to the study of estrangement in that the hunt acts as a means by which figures are humanized—by which they become less estranged. Hemingway and William Faulkner, as students will see in the next text to be studied, use the hunt in this way. Hemingway himself and Faulkner's figures have difficulty existing in society as they know it. They have difficulty reconciling the industrial America before them with the America of the individual. Hemingway, as a result, becomes an obnoxious prig. This action intensifies his estrangement from society. He, and Faulkner's characters seek the solitude of the woods in an effort to undergo a sort of cleansing process so that they can return to society as more complete human beings. This must be seen by students as a key gesture in American literature.

There is a curious bifocal quality to the Hemingway text. It is a quality that confused me until it was clarified by Michael Cooke. And it is a quality that is directly related to the issue of Hemingway's estrangement. He attempts, and succeeds to a certain degree, in moving through Africa in his own way, under his own conditions. He creates a micro-universe containing such Hemingway necessities as a drink, a wife and a gun bearer. He depends upon as well as masters the elements in his micro-universe as he continues his quest for that single shot, that single moment. The moment and the shot just are not there for Ernie. But his isolation, his sense of estrangement, diminishes in the course of events.

How does Hemingway accomplish this? He does it by making certain admissions. He does it by becoming pensive, by reducing his vanity, by finally breaking his protective bubble. Enter the figure of Pop, the authentic great white hunter figure in the text. Pop is everything Hemingway wants to be. Pop has succeeded in the quest. He has experienced the single moment and the shot. Hemingway can never attain this. The figure of the great white hunter will always be unavailable to him. Hemingway knows this, and while he does not baldly state it in the text, the reader knows it. Students must see this, as it is essential to their understanding of the problem of overcoming estrangement in the text.

In a sort of salt-in-the-wound gesture, Hemingway admits to being an actor in the text—a clown, really. In the course of the story, in an effort to fulfill his quest, Hemingway must take on and follow into unfamiliar territory a guide/gun bearer whom he dislikes intensely. He nicknames him Garrick, for his extravagant, stage-like gestures I suppose, and berates him constantly. By the author's own admission he then takes his place beside Garrick in the text. It is a painful admission for Hemingway. It leads to a sharp reduction in vanity. In a word it makes him vulnerable, yet much less of a stranger to human society.

I envision *Green Hills* as being difficult to teach. In this segment of the paper I have not so much as laid out a means of teaching the book, as I have attempted to understand it myself in relation to its place in the unit.

From Hemingway's *Green Hills* it is a natural move into Faulkner's forest and his short story "The Bear." While it is important for students to eventually see that Faulkner's range as a novelist exceeds Hemingway's, it is even more important to examine the works based on their similarities and in this way to further examine the question of estrangement in fiction.

First of all there is the problem of the way in which the works are couched. Both authors begin their stories in mid-stream, with Hemingway beginning nearer to the end. It must be pointed out to students that while this can be confusing, it is a traditional method of story-telling that has been utilized for ages. A closer look at Faulkner will help. Ike McCaslin, the central figure in "The Bear," is initially seen as a youth whose early years are nothing but a preparation for an event to come. Absolutely nothing of any significance happens to Ike before the age of ten. That event is the hunt. It is not the weekend idea of hunting and fishing, but the Hemingway/Faulkner canonical idea of the hunt: The hunt that takes place in the immemorial forest and that

propels one toward a state of civility.

In the hands of Faulkner, the hunt is again a vehicle for humanizing, for reducing one's sense of estrangement. But it does not always propel directly forward toward civility. It deflects sometimes, as in the case of Ike McCaslin, for whom it has a curious dream-like quality. The tradition of the hunt has so impressed its shape on Ike that it is as if he has been there before. The hunt is all Ike has ever heard about. He is steeped in its lore. When he enters the forest for the first time the impact is as if he is witnessing his own birth. Yet this is accompanied by a sense of estrangement—massive estrangement at that. It is as if Ike McCaslin knows not where he is, but where he's been.

Where are we as readers of the text? As Ike is in danger of getting lost in the forest, students are in danger of getting lost in Faulkner. There exists this grand panorama before us. Yet it is filled with interruptions, conflicts and constant tension. It is truly a strange, almost maze-like work. Despite this, and with a good deal of guidance from our seminar leader, our group was able to embrace "The Bear" without problems. We were able to overcome a feeling of estrangement from this complicated story. So can my students. They can be made to see that the maze is mastered by the child, Ike McCaslin, who in turn passes on the mastery to the reader. Ike masters the woods and eventually the world beyond. This idea of a child leading the way should appeal to students—the child as expert in the system—an expert in the embryonic stages of his life—a person for whom the passage of time is not an impediment, but an enablement.

What is this system that must be mastered and what are its components? Actually there are two systems or traditions that the story sets up. There is the tradition of the hunt and there is the larger social tradition. As we shall see in more detail later in this paper, the tradition of the hunt prepares one for and leads into the larger social tradition. But what of the tradition of the hunt and its components? There is, of course, the untamed, immemorial forest. This is the setting of the tradition and is a closed world where virtually no evolution occurs. It stands in stark and yet inviting contrast to the technocratic society of America. The forest and the tradition of the hunt, once mastered, provide an escape route for the likes of Hemingway and Ike McCaslin. As mentioned in the Hemingway section, these men move into the forest, experience a sort of spiritual renewal, and return to society as more complete human beings.

Two points must be clarified here before going on. Ike McCaslin enters the tradition of the hunt as a boy. How can he be so estranged at this stage? How can he derive the same benefits from the tradition that the men around him do? He simply is and does. I have mentioned that Ike is a sort of expert in embryo. Not only does he quickly develop into a peerless woodsman, but he seems to possess an innate, finely honed set of sensitivities to that encroaching technocratic society around him. Even at the age of ten he must move off into the wilderness. It is as if he seeks to draw sustenance for future struggles—as if he anticipates the preparation necessary to move into the larger social tradition.

Ike is in the tradition of the sagacious children that appear in Faulkner's works. There is the cosmic whore, Eula Varner. And there is the small boy in the Snopes trilogy whose illuminating observations so dazzle his uncle that the man is forced one day to grab the youth, pry open his mouth, and attempt to determine his real age via his teeth. The implication is that the boy is really no boy at all, but an intelligent midget whose real age (and thus an explicable source of his intelligence) will be derived from a close study of his teeth.

The other point to be clarified is that of evolution within the tradition of the hunt. There is, as mentioned, virtually no evolution in the forest, in the setting of the hunt. The African plains and the Masai tribesmen will always be there for Hemingway. The swamp and even the bear, in ever-decreasing dimensions, will always be there for McCaslin and his hunting party. Students must see that the evolution occurs within the human

beings in the text, and especially within Ike McCaslin.

What does occur within Ike? Why does the story of “The Bear” change course and begin another story at a point two-thirds into the work? Is the evolution within Ike related to the change in the text? For Ike McCaslin events begin in the landscape. Events begin in nature, which is defined in landscape terms. The landscape presents itself as a stage on which events of derring-do occur. And there is some derring-do! The events revolve around the outlandish figure of a bear—a figure so grotesque and fierce that to authenticiate it in nature borders on, as Michael Cooke points out, recreating the romance phenomena of dragons and Grendels. All of which could lead to some interesting classroom digressions. It is not wholly out of the question to imagine students reading a good, meaty *Beowulf* translation, or sections of *The Faerie Queene*, in an effort to seek the source of inspiration for Faulkner and even for the likes of Peter Benchley’s *Jaws*.

And there is the god—Lion. An untamed forest beast for sure. A figure different from any other. A figure, in fact, without a history—without a history in the sense that the term relates to Old Ben the bear and his place in peoples’ lives. A figure whose sole purpose it is to corner and bring down Old Ben.

The tableau is completed by the woodsmen—Sam Fathers and Boon Hoggenback. Both are important figures in relation to Ike. Neither man ever really leaves the woods, yet both pave the way for Ike’s exit. They prepare the expulsion route used by Ike as he moves from the tradition of the hunt into the larger social tradition.

Sam Fathers, as his name indicates, is a father figure, a teacher. It should be pointed out to students that Sam, the guide figure, is a recurring character in fiction. His presence is basic to overcoming the state of estrangement, which in this case is experienced by Ike when he confronts the elements of the hunt. Sam is the librarian of the woods, and his role is to pass on to and thus to enable Ike to translate woodlore into the larger picture—the eventual unscrambling of family lore, or the larger social tradition of which I have been speaking. Sam must help move Ike out of the action of the hunt tradition and into civilization, where he can come to grips with the problems of identity and estrangement.

Boon also aids in this movement, this evolution of Ike’s. Despite the strenuous objections of my seminar mates, I continue to feel that Boon is both more helpful and more appealing than Sam. It is Boon who acts as a substitute for Ike in the inevitable climax of the hunt. It is the wild, self-exhausting impetuosity of Boon that causes Ike to look so impressive in the end. It is also true that Boon is Sam’s flunky—a neat turnabout that my students will certainly appreciate, what with the white man becoming the servant of the black man. And it is true that Boon’s characteristics parallel those of Lion. They are both single-minded savages.

Yet it is Boon who leaps astride the bear in the obligatory death finale of the hunt. This is not to say that there are heroes and cowards in the text. You cannot draw such distinctions in this work. It is simply Boon and Lion astride the bear. It is Boon and Lion who commit the necessary but sacrilegious act of killing the bear. Ike does not kill. Ike avoids killing. Ike cannot kill. If Ike killed, “The Bear” would be the *Green Hills of Africa* and Ike would have Hemingway’s fixation on the act of killing. Herein lies a major distinction between the two works that must be pointed out to students. Killing is necessary for Faulkner, yet it is a degradation of the world he creates. Again, Ike does not kill. The act itself is too simple, and is not sufficient to express Ike’s relationship to the bear and Faulkner’s hemisphere. Boon kills and enables Ike to avoid it; Ike can not use the landscape as a springboard for commitment, for investigation, into the larger social tradition.

Nevertheless, the climactic hunting scene stays with us. It is one of those small portions of a text that enables you to teach the larger text. On the basis of this scene, you could, for instance, challenge students and label “The Bear” a love story. There is the love triangle of dog, bear and man. Lion leaps for the throat of Old Ben

and is embraced by the bear. Boon leaps astride Old Ben and is reunited with Lion. The bear in turn lovingly raises up both man and beast. He imbues them with courage, but they in turn thanklessly drag him down. On and on . . .

In striking contrast to Faulkner's masculine world is William Blake's poem (one of the "prophetic books") entitled "Visions of the Daughters of Albion"—the next work to be studied in the unit. And prophetic it is! Despite the vehement protests of our seminar's feminists, it was generally agreed that this poem could serve as the Bible of the feminist movement. It certainly has the range to encourage discussions that go beyond the theme of this unit.

I would suggest that the simplicity of the poem be stressed initially. Not that it is simple by any means—structurally or thematically. Yet, when compared to Faulkner's myriad of characters and elaborate system of relationships, it should be a breath of fresh air for students. There are three principal characters in the poem. Oothoon, the woman, is a figure with tremendous human resources. The two males in the text are Bromion and Theotormon—less than adequate characters, as we shall see.

The argument of the poem is stated at the outset. Oothoon, complete with virginal fears, is in love with and intends to marry Theotormon. In this sense the poem is a marriage poem. Oothoon is about to step into an event within which she is supposed to realize certain high ideals—the earth-moves-under-her-feet sort of thing. I would suggest exploring these ideals with students before continuing the poem. What do we as men and women expect from marriage? How are our expectations similar and different? Should there be a difference? This might be a line of questioning to be followed in an effort to spark students' thinking about male/female roles and stereotypes.

Instead of a marriage, a rape occurs. Instead of unity, there is a splitting apart of people—estrangement. Oothoon is really a naive kid at the start. Bromion appeals to her naiveté, and in the course of appealing, rapes her. Thus Oothoon, who becomes a figure of tremendous human power as the poem unfolds, initially confronts another figure who has but one form of superiority. It is force, and Bromion uses it to crush Oothoon. This could be the starting point for a discussion of force/violence in the relationships of younger couples. Who uses force in the relationship? How and why is it used? Interestingly enough, among the students I teach, girls are as prone to use violence as are boys. The girls will fight viciously among themselves in order to gain the favor of a certain male. Among the boys there is another dimension to the violence. They will of course fight for the hand of their lady. At a very early age and stage in the game they will also batter this same lady. It is a despicable state of affairs which will only escalate as they get older. Blake's poem could force students to take a long, hard look at this type of behavior.

Oothoon's reaction to the use of force, her reaction to the rape, is probably the most heroic act in this unit. She feels that she is more than the event. She is not permanently marred or debased by the violence. She will not allow herself to be reduced to the state of just another female victim of a predatory situation. Oothoon, in fact, feels that she can be renewed by the rising sun—by the coming of another day. This act of renewal occurs in the lowest stages of life, so why not with Oothoon? Unfortunately, all this is powerful in affirmation, but not so in realization. Oothoon, rather than being renewed, is twice estranged. The rape has estranged her from her fiancé, Theotormon. (The old damaged goods theory, according to William Blake.) This, followed by her affirmation of self bewilders him even more and drives Oothoon into a deeper state of estrangement.

Why? For the answer to this question we must look at the males in the text. Clearly, the text does not offer us an adequate male. Bromion and Theotormon are, in a word, creeps. Bromion is a little like Faulkner's Boon, without a trace of Boon's admirable qualities. He is a man of action without compassion. He commits the

crude, spontaneous act that lacks all semblance of a relationship. There is a point in the text where his lamentations are almost moving. Readers beware: He is dangerous. He speaks softly and sensitively. Yet he is mashing the despair felt by Theotormon right in the bride-groom's face.

Bromion is not the real villain though. Oothoon is able to rise above his brutishness. Yet she is stymied and in the end embittered and driven to cynicism by Theotormon's attitudes. He is a man to be pitied and scorned. Theotormon is filled with lust. There is ample evidence in the text of this. Yet it is a perverted sort of lust. Theotormon, perhaps because he represents the figure of the law-keeper and is confined to a certain extent by this role, must do things in an orthodox fashion. There must be no trace of affection, sensitivity, or compassion in his actions. Theotormon suffers, but is unable to reconcile events with his nature and is incapable of dealing out punishment to anyone but Oothoon.

The marriage song becomes a marriage of aversion, and Oothoon is sandwiched in between everything. It would be a tragic situation even if Oothoon remained the naive young girl she was at the outset of the poem. But she does not, and this serves to heighten the tragedy. Early in the text, when she is still (physically) naive, she seems to be capable of thought only in terms of light, airy metaphors. But she evolves intellectually. She senses the growing estrangement in the situation—that feeling, as Michael Cooke put it in our seminar, “of people being just a herd”—and she reacts against it. She becomes muscular and resourceful as she fights for her life. Oothoon becomes a theologian and a philosopher. She surpasses Theotormon at his own game as she struggles to arrive at new principles of relationships and at new principles of value. And through all this she continues to emphasize her capacity for renewal.

The whole point, however, is that Oothoon has not done anything wrong. What happened was something she never intended to have happen. At one point in the poem Oothoon lashes out at the concept of the chaste woman. And well she might. How is she any different? This could and should lead into a discussion of hypocrisy in sexual attitudes, especially on the part of men. There sits Theotormon. He continues to be blind to himself and ignorant of the world. He is simply a rule-bound, hidebound little creep who wallows in self-pity as Oothoon waits.

Sadly enough, the evolution of Oothoon eventually takes a downward swing. Faced with Theotormon's intransigence, she has no place to apply the rules and principles she has evolved. There is no room for her to act. What we have at the end of the text is the figure of a woman imbued with a cruel sense of cynicism. She is trapped and she gives up hope. She even resorts to being a sort of pimp for her man, feeding him nymphets in order to gratify that part of his nature that he cannot reconcile himself to, that he cannot integrate into himself.

The final text to be studied in this unit is *The Radiance of the King* by Camara Laye. Of the dozen or more texts we studied in the seminar, I like this one as a unit finale. This is not to say that changes won't occur in my presentation, but this is my first choice. I like the idea of students reading a “Third World” novelist—a major black literary figure who has by no means received the attention he deserves in the western world. And I like the idea of students reading a novel whose fundamental assumptions challenge their own.

The basic structure of the text will be familiar to students. It is a quest story. But it is a quest story with strange goings-on. For one thing, what is originally sought in the quest is not what is ultimately found. This might be an effective way to begin teaching the text—to present the quest as a puzzle and to slowly seek its solution.

Who is doing the seeking and why? Camara Laye, interestingly enough, presents us with a white hero,

Clarence by name. Clarence is estranged at the very outset of the story, as he is cast out of white society and is unable to take his place in the dominant African society. It is a problem of placement in social structure that students must see as running through the entire text. We, as readers, initially see Clarence dressed in typically western clothing and feeling by sheer virtue of his color that he is entitled to speak to the black king, the black King of Kings, in an effort to obtain a paid job. He is unsuccessful, and begins his quest in an effort to gain an audience with the king. The physical journey takes him from the northern city of Adrame to the southern jungle village of Aziana. The real journey, however, occurs within Clarence—a slow but complete inner conversion skillfully conveyed to us by Camara Laye.

The elements involved in the conversion and the first inklings of the process of change occur in the first scene when Clarence attempts to gain an audience with the king. It is one of those small portions of a text that when engaged closely by students can shed light on the entire work. Clarence, as mentioned, gets nowhere near the king in the first scene. Not only that, he is pushed and pummeled about and generally ignored in spite of his color and clothing. And to boot, no one seems to know when and where the king will appear, or, if he appears and exits, when he will appear again.

Clarence is dumb, certainly too dumb to describe what he is going through. This is probably the reason for the third person narration. But he does catch a glimmer of the first in a series of truths leading to his conversion. This new milieu in which he finds himself knows of no rights or privileges based on clothing and color. There are only favors which the king grants or withholds in a seemingly arbitrary fashion. This is Clarence's initial contact with fundamental assumptions that challenge his own. It is his initial contact with such non-western assumptions as humility and a kind of fatalism/acceptance combination. These provide perfect counters to his western-style aggressiveness, which is seen in his attempted movement through the crowd and in his assertiveness based on color.

In this initial crowd scene, Clarence finds himself somewhat unwillingly befriended by a beggar—a guide figure in the text. It is this beggar, or rather our concept of beggarliness, that calls into further question Clarence's fundamental assumptions and values. The beggar is clearly a knowledgeable and important figure in the crowd. Yet he possesses neither a job in the western sense, nor money. He does have access to the King of Kings. This fact both astounds and humbles Clarence; it is the beginning of that stripping-away-of-illusions process, that cleansing-through-seeming-deterioration process, that Clarence undergoes before he is finally ready to be engulfed by the radiance of the king.

Clarence is indeed perplexed. He has been deprived of certain fixed principles and is cast adrift. He simply does not know where he is going. This is communicated in two ways by the underlying imagery of the text. First of all, there is a dreamlike quality about everything. The novel is riddled with such problems of perception. Nothing is certain. Nobody knows. What is at first perceived with clarity by Clarence and readers, blurs and altogether disappears. The scene depicting the initial withdrawal of the king provides students with an excellent example of this. The king is perfectly visible to Clarence while standing on the platform of his palace. A moment later everything begins to dissolve. The platform, the tower, the palace walls and eventually the palace itself move imperceptibly away.

What students must see is that this is the physical manifestation of an even more important internal disintegration. For Clarence nothing really is what it appears to be. As a result he suffers an increasing sense of estrangement that seems to intensify in the course of the text. It is a multi-level estrangement, which may account for its intensity. He is rejected by his own white society. He is incapable of incorporation into the black African society. And he is estranged by means of a total degradation of self and fundamental assumptions.

The recurring image of the labyrinth is the other identifiable form used by Camara Laye to illustrate Clarence's perplexity. Labyrinths are everywhere in the text and are certainly deserving of the students' attention. Their overwhelming presence seems to call into question the very purpose of the quest—if in fact it has a purpose other than to convince Clarence to relinquish his early determination, his very westernized sense of a willful purpose. The northern capital of Andrame is filled with labyrinths. Again there is the inside/outside kind of duality. There is the maze of narrow streets and the maze of internal corridors. Clarence and his band head southward through the jungle; one gets the impression that they are working over the same path, always returning to the same spot. I don't know why it is, but while reading and thinking of this novel I see Humphrey Bogart in "The Treasure of Sierra Madre." Clarence is no Humphrey. Yet I would consider showing the movie in conjunction with the text in an effort to provide students with a striking visual picture of another downtrodden Clarencian figure—an American abroad with no money in his pocket.

In that same vein of relating *Radiance* to another work, students should look at how Faulkner and Laye view the forest. There is an interesting parallel to be drawn here. Both men view the immemorial forest as a sort of green, forbidding wall. It stretches interminably, with apparently no opening large enough to allow a human being to enter. Yet an opening must be found. An opening must be found that allows men to enter the forest and find within it the power to reduce their state of estrangement and gain access to human society. For Ike McCaslin and Clarence the opening is there.

For the purposes of this teaching unit I wish to look at one more aspect of the text that should be considered by students. It is the significance of North and South in the text. In our seminar Michael Cooke referred to them as "countries of the mind," a beautiful term to present to students. The North, while not conforming to Clarence's western concept of logic and rationality, is quite logical and rational. Andrame, the capital city, is orderly with a strong prevailing sense of justice. No matter that the logic and rationality are quite different from what we might expect. The prestige of the beggar, for instance, is in inverse ratio to his wealth. An orderly system exists, and students must see this.

The South is quite another matter. The combination of flower-perfumes, rotting greenery and lust clearly points to it as the world of the senses. I might ask students to rip their paperbacks in half and smell them. They will be smothered into unconsciousness by the latter half of the text. The South is primitiveness. It is everything in Clarence's nature that he cannot control. But it is here that we witness the final stages of that stripping-off-of-illusions process. It is here that the obstacles to Clarence's quest (rather than the subject of the quest) fade away and Clarence finally gains access to the King of Kings. It is here that the king looks at Clarence—actually turns his countenance upon him. And with this look come both joyous purification and annihilation.

That is a good way to end this unit. Purification and annihilation. Like Old Ben, I embrace my students as they attack. I lift them from the ground and imbue them with courage and knowledge. And they in turn annihilate me for being so foolish as to teach this unit.

Student Bibliography

Conrad, Joseph. *Typhoon and Other Tales* . New York: Signet Books, 1914.

Faulkner, William. *Go Down, Moses* . New York: Vintage Books, 1973.

Hemingway, Ernest. *Green Hills of Africa* . New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963.

Kazin, Alfred, ed. *The Portable Blake* . New York: Penguin Books, 1946.

Laye, Camara. *The Radiance of the King* . New York: Collier Books, 1971.

Supplementary Bibliography

This bibliography serves a dual purpose. It can be used as a supplementary student bibliography, in the event that the instructor wishes to expand the unit. It can also be used for the instructor's personal edification in pursuit of the question of "The Stranger in Fiction."

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space* . Boston: Beacon Press, 1967.

Baraka, Imamu. "The System of Dante's Hell," "Tale" and "The Dead Lecturer." New York: Grove Press, 1975.

Bellow, Saul. *Henderson the Rain King* . New York: Viking Press, 1975.

Hegel, G. W. *Lordship and Bondage* . London: Oxford University Press, 1956.

Heinlein, Robert. *Stranger in a Strange Land* . New York: Berkley Medallion Books, 1961.

Shange, Ntozake. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide and When the Rainbow is Enuf* . San Lorenz, Calif.: Shameless Hussy Press, 1976.

Toomer, Jean. *Cane* . New York: Liveright, 1923.

Williams, John. *Captain Blackman* . New York: Doubleday, 1972.

Sample Daily Lesson Plan

This writing activity should begin on the opening day of the unit and continue as the unit progresses.

Objectives

A. To familiarize students with the objectives of the unit.

B. To enable students to arrive at their own definition of what it is to be a stranger.

- C. To enable students to gain first-hand knowledge of how one surmounts the problem of estrangement.

Method Gather the students together to explain the purpose of the unit. Explain that all of us are seeing each other for the first time. We are, in effect, strangers.

Explain that what is to follow is a very personal, very private assignment. Students are to choose one person from the group. They must in no way be familiar with this person. The stranger chosen must in no way know that he/she is the subject of observation.

The details of the observation are as follows: Students are to initially write a physical description of the stranger they have chosen to observe.

The next step is to expand the physical description to include observations of the stranger's more subjective qualities. For example, based on furtive observation in the cafeteria, what sort of food does the stranger like or dislike? Is the stranger's language different from your own? What about the stranger's style of dress? What about his dancing style, the books he reads, the music he listens to on the gigantic portable radio slung over his shoulder?

The final step will be an analysis of the stranger written in such a way as to answer the following questions. Does the person observed communicate with the observer in such a way as to overcome the state of being a stranger? Or does the person continue to be a stranger? Do the qualities observed act in such a way as to cause you to befriend the person, or do they cause you to repudiate this person?

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