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21L.007 World Literatures: Travel Writing
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The Atlantic Sound.

Prologue: Atlantic Crossing.

The narrator crosses the Atlantic to his “home” in England, retracing his parents’ journey from the West Indies to England when he was a child.

1. Leaving Home.

1881: John Ocansey goes to Liverpool to bring a lawsuit against Robert Hickson, the merchant who has defrauded his own adopted father.

Postscript.

– Present: the narrator arrives in Liverpool by train and takes a tour with Stephen.

2. Homeward Bound.

– Present: Mansour introduced, first as a detainee in Britain, then as the narrator’s driver in Accra. With some temporal back and forth, the narrator flies from Gatwick and arrives Accra. He has dinner with Mansour and they discuss Mansour's present situation. Interview with Dr. Ben Abdallah, Ghanaian "Pan-Africanist" with ideas about the slave trade that the narrator finds rather surprising: they discuss the way history is taught in schools, and the way that historical preservation should be done. Interview with Dr. Robert Lee, African-American dentist. He and the narrator discuss the differences in how Africans and African-Americans see things, and they too discuss questions of site preservation and memory.

El Mina: the Encounter.

– This historical summary (specifically, the history of El Mina and the trade associated with it) **can be skipped**, if you must. Basic info: the Portuguese built a fort here from which to conduct trade in (first) gold, and later slaves. Elmina became one of the major West Africa ports for the Atlantic slave trade.

Panafest (I):

– Present: the narrator arrives at Elmina with Mansour, his driver, for the first of three short sections focused on "Panafest: a time when the diasporan family returns to Mother Africa to celebrate the arts, creativity and intellectual achievements of the Pan African world." One of the performances in this section

is an "official atonement ceremony." The end of the section looks towards the next set of events, held at Cape Coast Castle.

Cape Coast: an African missionary.

– 1741-66: Philip Quaque. This biographical section is written rather differently than the earlier narrative of Joseph Ocansey -- here, the narrator gives us information but we can also tell that he is reading or rereading documents that don't tell him absolutely everything. Summary: Quaque was an African man educated in England who returned to Cape Coast as a missionary after he was ordained. He served as chaplain to the British slavers who (by this point) were staffing the castle, but met with limited success in trying to educate or convert the local African population. The narrator comments that he had forgotten his own language, and "never once expressed moral outrage at the indignities that were being visited upon his fellow Africans." If nothing else, you should **read the last two paragraphs of this section** with their quote from one of Quaque's last letters.

Panafest (2):

– the narrator is (still) staying at a hotel with many other foreign visitors, particularly from the Caribbean, who have come for the festival. They are not happy with the facilities. **Pay attention to the last two paragraphs** of this section, at least.

***Mansour:**

– in this section, the narrative loops back to provide Mansour's life story up until the point when he was imprisoned in Britain as an illegal immigrant. Born in Ghana, he has sought work and education in Nigeria, Libya, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia before getting a student working visa for England. In England, he worked under the table and taught Arabic while enrolling in several academic programs, and was periodically picked up by police or immigration officers or finally being detained and sent back. Now he was seeking to get to the United States. The section concludes by describing his situation now. **The last two pages of the section** are especially noteworthy as they bring to ahead the narrator's growing discomfort and perhaps judgment of Mansour's life plans.

Hashuvah: The Return.

– Present: the narrator visits a café at Elmina that is part of a community of African-American "returnees" led by an man named Kohain Halevi. The café is being visited by several busloads of tourists from the Americas; one of the businesses run by the community is a tool or service in the area.

– We get a bit of background on Halevi, whose reading of the Bible "had led him to believe that God would eventually lead black people in America out of

their bondage." You may remember that Equiano saw many points of comparison between the African religious tradition of his childhood (whether actually remembered, or reported by others) and the practices of Judaism. Halevi and others believe that "Hebrew traditions... were practiced in Africa before the onset of the Atlantic slave trade." Frustrated in their attempts to settle in Israel, they have settled on Africa as "the promised land." Halevi's beliefs intersect with ideas about the kinds of experiences visitors to the area ought to have. The section ends with a narrator chatting to someone in a bar.

Panafest (3): THIS SECTION CAN BE SKIPPED

– back at the festival, the narrator sees a display describing a utopian community of "African Hebrew Israelites" who have settled in Israel. He will visit this community in the last section of the book. The hotel staff are irritated with their Jamaican guests, and have decided to ask them to leave.

***Through the Door of No Return:**

Present: Kohain Halevi's ritual, in fort where Quaque is buried. The narrator attends a ceremony, organized as part of the festival, that commemorates those who were sent through the castle's "door of no return" and into slavery. I would like to spend some time on this section.

3. Home. THIS CAN BE SKIPPED (ca. 33 pp.).

Present: Phillips in Charleston. Most of the section tells a story from very early in the civil rights era, about a very well-connected and socially prominent white judge who alienated his entire community by an antiracist decision in a voting rights case. An additional offense was his decision to divorce his wife and marry a northern woman with whom he had fallen in love; and were vocal supporters of civil rights. There is a great deal of documentary detail in this section, but the gist of it is that even while staying in his home, the judge's actions made him effectively homeless. The narrator also visits

Sullivan's Island, the place of arrival in America for many slaves, or as he calls it, "the black Ellis Island. Finally, he watches "the Charleston Festival of African and Caribbean Art" downtown, and reflects on it as an invocation of the past.

***Epilogue: Exodus.**

This section finds the narrator with the Hebrew Israelites, who we have heard described earlier. Again, he witnesses public performance. We should pay attention to the opening and closing pages of this section in particular to get a sense of where the book ends up.