

Context of Instruction

In fall 2013, I had an academically enriching experience in a transatlantic seminar course taught by Dr. Linda Hughes and Dr. Sarah Robbins. As part of the seminar's teaching-materials project, I developed this course proposal for "Strangers to Freedom: Transatlantic Conceptions of Enslavement and Liberation." Inspired by a global and research-oriented undergraduate curricular emphasis, I have designed the instructional context for this course to meet the needs of juniors and seniors enrolled in a small liberal arts university honors program. The content is a good match for the instructional context I have selected since honors students often participate in conferences in which they share their research; they may also choose to participate in specific summer or year-long programs which focus specifically on undergraduate research endeavors. Transatlantic literature courses may include researching global periodicals databases which present students with multiple research opportunities. As a result, students who participate in undergraduate research programs will benefit from this course's content.

Course Overview with Rationale and Description

From my experience as both an adjunct instructor and a graduate student, it seems that universities are encouraging global initiatives and undergraduate research projects across academic disciplines. With a large emphasis placed on STEM and business fields, the academic community may not view undergraduate literature courses as likely venues in which students may conduct research and explore global concerns. This course is designed to promote a global literary approach to my future students.

In “Strangers to Freedom: Transatlantic Conceptions of Enslavement and Liberation,” students will have the opportunity to integrate nineteenth-century issues with their own global research interests. An element of transatlantic content that students will encounter is antislavery and abolitionist writings. With regard to these texts, students will examine how slaves viewed something they had never known: freedom. As an example, in the unit “Framing the Slave Narrative: A Free Voice for Slavery,” students will read as primary texts *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave* (1831) and “Narrative of James Thompson, A British Subject, Twenty-One Years a Cuban Slave” (1843). These readings will inform students of how antislavery and abolitionist writings often included information that framed or packaged slaves’ words as “a black message in a white envelope.” In other words, white publishers and scribes provided character references, introductory details intended to authenticate the slaves’ claims, and various appendices to offer additional credibility. As an instructional starting point, students will explore how the two works demonstrate how the slaves view freedom and how the “framing or packaging” influences readers’ perceptions.

Since today’s undergraduate students were born at a time when many forms of slavery were considered illegal, the course’s writing assignments will include free writing activities in which the students will identify international forms of slavery that still exist and how individuals who experience slavery might visualize freedom. Students will then reflect on how their perceptions of freedom might affect how they think an enslaved individual views freedom. In other words, students will engage with texts that indicate how an individual’s experience with enslavement might challenge more hopeful

understandings of liberation. Students will study scholarship that examines how death could be a form of liberation. Additionally, students will determine if publishers or news media still “frame” or “package” oppressed peoples’ statements. I will give students the examples of the young women in Ohio who were forced to live as sex slaves for years; one of the women recently shared her story on *The Dr. Phil Show*. A possible point that I will address is if the television program framed or packaged the individual’s story and, if so, how.

With regard to the assigned texts, I will post prompts and handouts to a course website. Students will either post their responses electronically or participate in in-class discussions to illustrate that they have read the assigned material and have an understanding of what makes the material transatlantic. As an example, I will post the following questions and information about Charles Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop*:

One might say that the novel itself is transatlantic since it made the journey from England to America. Given this information, how might we incorporate the journey motif to Little Nell’s seemingly never-ending migrations? How might this motif have resonated with American readers?

For additional example questions, please refer to the handout titled “Context for Reading a Primary Text: How Little Nell Conceptualizes Freedom.” This handout follows in my lesson plan.

For a final research project, students will write a short (4-6 page) paper in which they will investigate how nineteenth-century periodicals covered issues related to slavery transatlantically. Students will choose two periodicals (from different countries) and research how the publications addressed similar concerns. This project is designed so that it may be submitted to the university’s undergraduate research symposium.

Course Description for “Strangers to Freedom: Transatlantic Conceptions of Enslavement and Liberation”

This undergraduate honors literature course will explore the concepts associated with enslavement and liberation and how writings from the long nineteenth-century represent those themes. By reading and researching novels, periodicals, and short stories within a transatlantic context, students will develop understandings of topics related to slavery. Students’ readings will center on works from Cuba, England, Denmark, Spain, and the United States. With the goal of encouraging students to pursue their own global research, this course will examine how freedom is conceptualized by those who have endured various forms of slavery.

Important Note: In cooperation with a university’s undergraduate global research initiatives, the final project in this course could be designed for submission to the spring undergraduate research symposia which are now occurring on many campuses. Please consult the undergraduate research program’s website for information regarding application requirements, presentation specifics, and deadlines.

List of Themes and Units for “Strangers to Freedom: Transatlantic Conceptions of Enslavement and Liberation”

1. Framing the Slave Narrative: A Free Voice for Slavery’s Words
2. English Words for Cuban Slave Poetry
3. Antislavery Transatlantic Literature
4. Child Labor as a Form of Slavery
5. Immigration and Forms of Slave Labor

List of Primary Texts for “Strangers to Freedom: Transatlantic Conceptions of Enslavement and Liberation”

Important Note: Time frames for course readings will be flexible, depending on the number of weeks allocated to the research that students will be doing and the expectations of the particular honors program’s guidelines for reading.

1. Framing the Slave Narrative: A Free Voice for Slavery’s Words

Contextual Note:

In each of these texts, the slaves’ narratives are supported by other persons’ words to offer credibility to the stories. Also, both writings detail the lives of individuals who have transatlantic backgrounds. James Thompson was a British subject born in Nassau to an Irish father and slave mother. His American brother-in-law removed him from his mother’s care and sold him into slavery. Mary Prince was a slave for many years in the Caribbean; she relocated to England where she fought for her dignity and freedom.

Primary Reading

- “Narrative of James Thompson, A British Subject, Twenty-One Years a Cuban Slave.” *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter* 4.9 (May 1843): 71-72. *ProQuest British Periodicals*. 5 Oct. 2013
- Prince, Mary. *The History of Mary Prince a West Indian Slave Narrative (Related by Herself)*. ed. Sarah Salih. New York: Penguin, 2001. [originally published 1831]

Secondary Scholarship

- Gilroy, Paul. “Masters Mistresses, Slaves, and the Antinomies of Modernity.” *The Black Atlantic*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993. 43-71.

2. English Words for Cuban Slave Poetry

Contextual Note:

Continuing with the framing lesson from above, we will look at slave writings in translation. Both poets from these primary texts were translated and published transatlantically.

Primary Reading

- Wiffen, Benjamin B. “Placido, the Cuban Poet: Thirty Years. by Placido, the Cuban Poet.” *The Liberty Bell by Friends of Freedom (1839-1858)* 1 Jan. 1848: 60. *ProQuest American Periodicals*. 7 Nov. 2013.
- “Art. III. Poems by a Slave in the Island of Cuba, Recently Liberated; Translated from the Spanish, by R. R. Madden, M.D., with the History of the Early Life of the Negro Poet Written by Himself. To Which Are Prefixed Two Pieces Descriptive of Cuban Slavery and the Slave Traffic.” *The Eclectic Review* 9 (Apr. 1841): 406-14. *ProQuest British Periodicals*. 5 Oct. 2013.

Secondary Scholarship

- Almeida, Joselyn M. “Pan-Atlantic Exports and Imports: Translation, Freedom, and the Circulation of Cultural Capital.” *Reimagining the Transatlantic, 1780-1890*. Ashgate Series in Nineteenth-Century Transatlantic Studies. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. 105-49.

3. Antislavery Transatlantic Literature

Contextual Note:

This primary text is by Gertrudis Gomez de Avellaneda, a transatlantic author who lived in Cuba and Spain. In brief, Sab, the protagonist, is a slave who is in love with Carlota, the plantation owner's daughter. Carlota marries Enrique Otway, a wealthy Englishman. The novel presents the challenges Sab faces as a mulatto plantation slave in Cuba.

Primary Reading

- Gomez de Avellaneda, Gertrudis. *Sab and Autobiography*. Trans. and ed. Nina M. Scott. Austin: U of Texas P, 1993. [originally published in Spanish in 1841]

Secondary Scholarship

- Pastor, Brigida. "Symbiosis between Slavery and Feminism in Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's 'Sab.'" *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 16.2 (1997): 187-96. *JSTOR*. 21 Oct. 2013.

4. Child Labor as a Form of Slavery

Contextual Note:

Both of the primary writings in this unit present instances of child labor as a form of slavery. The authors shared a special transatlantic, transnational connection. Charles Dickens and Hans Christian Andersen were acquainted with one another, and they were both quite popular in the United States. In this unit, students will read historical research to engage with information about nineteenth-century child labor.

Primary Reading

- Andersen, Hans Christian. "The Little Match Girl" (1845)
May be found at: http://www.andersen.sdu.dk/vaerk/hersholt/TheLittleMatchGirl_e.html
- Dickens, Charles. *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Ed. Norman Page. London: Penguin, 2000. [originally published serially in Dickens's *Master Humphrey's Clock*, 1840-41]

Secondary Scholarship

- Heesom, Alan. "The Coal Mines Act of 1842, Social Reform, and Social Control." *The Historical Journal* 24.1 (Mar. 1981): 69-88. *JSTOR*. 7 Nov. 2013.
- Parker, Jacqueline K. and Edward M. Carpenter. "Julia Lathrop and the Children's Bureau: The Emergence of an Institution." *Social Service Review* 55.1 (Mar. 1981): 60-77. *JSTOR*. 7 Nov. 2013.

5. Immigration and Forms of Slave Labor

Contextual Note:

The primary text addresses the difficulties Lithuanian immigrants encounter in America. We will build on our discussion of slavery and freedom by discussing the types of enslavement the characters experience as immigrants to a new country.

Primary Reading

- Sinclair, Upton. *The Jungle*. New York: Signet Classics, 2001. [originally published 1906]

Secondary Scholarship

- Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "Cosmopolitan Contamination." *Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Norton, 2006. 101-13.

Context for Reading a Primary Text: How Little Nell Conceptualizes Freedom

Initially published in Charles Dickens's weekly serial *Master Humphrey's Clock* (1840-41), *The Old Curiosity Shop* was popular in both England and the United States. American readers reportedly mobbed British ships that carried the serial's last installment to find out Little Nell's fate. Undeniably, the story was a smashing transatlantic success. In the novel, Nell, the central character, lives a dreary existence. She is a young girl who serves as the primary caretaker for Old Trent, her grandfather. In short, Nell knows nothing about the freedom and joy one frequently associates with childhood. Nell's grandfather has a gambling addiction, and he cannot repay the debts he owes to Daniel Quilp, an evil moneylender. Nell regularly meets with Quilp in order to arrange her grandfather's gambling loans. These transactions are dangerous, and Quilp claims that he would like for Nell to be his wife one day. In an unpleasant encounter, Quilp makes sexually suggestive remarks toward Nell in the presence of her grandfather. When Quilp forces Nell and Grandfather Trent to flee their own home, Nell has to find work in order to earn money for her family. As a result, Nell works for a time in a traveling wax-works show. This circumstance carries with it an implicit form of slavery: child labor.

Instructional Notes:

- Since this course is designed for an honors class, I would likely assign *The Old Curiosity Shop* as pre-semester reading material. My goal is for students to read the novel in its entirety. Should I be unable to assign pre-semester reading, I would likely devote three weeks to the study of this novel.
- In order to engage students with both contemporary and nineteenth-century concerns related to child labor, I will ask students to locate and submit an article from contemporary journalism that resonates with Nell's story.

For Our Reading Pleasure:

As you read *The Old Curiosity Shop*, please take note of the following questions from which we will build our in-class discussions and online postings:

- Based on our understandings of the “Framing” and “Packaging” of slave writings, what evidence is there in *The Old Curiosity Shop* of how Dickens may have “framed” Nell’s story? What is the significance of the central character’s name not being part of the work’s title? What role does the narrator play? How is he a constant presence in the novel? How do the illustrations influence your thoughts? Please keep in mind that nineteenth-century readers of the serialized version would not have had access to all of the illustrations at once. Also, these illustrations would have been, using Dickens’s words, “dropped into the text.” In other words, they would not have appeared as pages independent of the text.
- One might say that the novel itself is transatlantic since it made the journey from England to America. Given this information, how might we incorporate the journey motif to Little Nell’s seemingly never-ending migrations? How might this motif have resonated with American readers? What effects do the novel’s illustrations have on how Nell’s journey is presented?
- Even though she apparently treats Nell courteously, what evidence is there that Mrs. Jarley is using the child’s labor for her own benefit? Please note two to three passages of text that reflect this evidence.
- In one instance, Nell must perform her wax-works talents at a boarding school for young ladies. Although she is harsh in her treatment of Nell’s occupation, Miss Monflathers, the director of the boarding school, recognizes that the poor child must work in order to survive. In a spirit of patriotism, Miss Monflathers recommends that Nell seek a line of work that is more appropriate for her gender, albeit dangerous and physically taxing:

Don’t you know how naughty it is of you . . . to be a wax-work child, when you might have the proud consciousness of assisting, to the extent of your infant powers, the manufacturers of your country; of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam-engine;

and of earning a comfortable and independent subsistence of from two-and-nine pence to three shillings per week? Don't you know that the harder your work, the happier you are?
(240)

Looking at Miss Monflather's claims, how would you say that she justifies nineteenth-century child labor?

- In addition to her wax-works travels, Nell spends much of her time on the road. As a traveler, Nell crosses many "borders" through which she must negotiate her identity. She must enter her grandfather's shop, visit the Quilps, and engage with various communities once she flees the shop. In brief, Dickens often presents Nell in terms of what she is not. As an example, Nell is young; however, everything around her in her grandfather's shop is old. What are some examples of binaries that you noted in reference to Nell's age and gender? In what way do sexuality and innocence interplay with Nell's identity?
- In our reading of Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, he suggests that death provides a freedom from slavery and "It supplies a valuable clue towards answering the question of how the realm of freedom is conceptualised by those who have never been free. This inclination towards death and away from bondage is fundamental" (68).

Special Note: With regard to the above bulleted statement, I will assign students to specific groups and distribute one of the following questions to each group: How might you apply this reading to Nell's death and her conceptualization of freedom? How does Nell's claim that she and her grandfather once had a happier life complicate your understanding of Gilroy's findings?

Specific Classroom Learning Activities

Lesson Plan 1:

Anticipated Class Size: 20 Students

Class Meetings: For either a MWF or TR Class

Lesson Goals: The goal for this lesson is that students will learn how to connect both nineteenth-century and contemporary concerns related to child labor as a form of slavery. Since this lesson draws from information learned in a previous unit, students will compare readings from “Framing the Slave Narrative” with the possibility that Dickens might frame Nell’s story with the narrator’s words.

Introduction

As students enter the classroom, I will have a list of the day’s activities on the screen or board. I will also remind them of any upcoming assignments and due dates. For this class meeting, students should have read Charles Dickens’s *The Old Curiosity Shop* and “The Coal Mines Act of 1842, Social Reform, and Social Control.” They should also come prepared with the completed handout on “Contexts for Reading: How Little Nell Conceptualizes Freedom.”

Special Note: The readings and handout will be posted to the course website before the first class day.

Class Warm-Up

To prepare students for the class discussion, I will ask them to free write for five minutes about what they know or have read about child labor. After the students free write, I will distribute the following article regarding present-day child labor:

Hunt, Katie. “The 10 Worst Countries for Child Labor.” *CNN.com*. Cable News Network, 15 Oct. 2013. 14 Nov. 2013. This article may be found at <http://www.cnn.com/2013/10/15/world/child-labor-index-2014/>.

We will form small groups of two to three students in which we will discuss the article. I will post the following discussion questions on the board or screen:

1. Which instances in the article connect with your reading from *The Old Curiosity Shop*?

2. How could you argue that child labor is an issue that affects areas outside the country or region in which it takes place? In what ways is child labor a global concern?
3. Since Dickens was from England, did his work only affect British readers? How might Nell's plight have resonated with American readers?
4. How do Nell's circumstances influence your thoughts about child labor?
5. Why did the countries mentioned in the article make the child-labor list?
6. What is the significance of this article's appearance in an American news source?

We will discuss the above questions. I will monitor each group and inquire if students have questions.

After the group discussions, I will take general questions from the class as a whole. I will end this part of the lesson by asking students how and why they may or may not think child-labor concerns are just as relevant today as they were in the nineteenth century.

Body of Lesson

After we finish with our discussion groups, we will move forward with examining the novel and the handout. We will discuss their findings on Dickens's "framing" of Nell's story, and we will compare it with other "framed" or "packaged" readings from the course. As an example, we will revisit *Mary Prince* and compare how her story was framed in comparison with Dickens's possible framing of a fictional character's account. We will consider the narrator's role in the framing of Nell.

End of Class

I will prompt students to identify ways in which Nell experiences forms of slavery. I will write the following categories on the board or screen: child labor and sexual exploitation. Students will communicate passages from the text in which they perceive Nell's serving as a child laborer or as being sexually exploited. Following this discussion, we will regroup and think about any recent international and national accounts of child labor that the students had heard of before reading the CNN article. I will remind students to bring their handouts with them to the next class meeting so that we may continue with our discussion of Nell.