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21L.007 World Literatures: Travel Writing
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Writing Workshop handouts

Here, you will find three handouts:

1. A [summary](#) (link to Writing issues you raised section in this document) of responses to the issues you asked to have addressed.
2. A [draft](#) (link to **Section 2 of a draft essay (column 1) analysed (column 2)** in this document) of an essay on instruments in Equiano's *Narrative*, with an analysis of what the draft is doing; I've tried to show the writing *process*.
3. A [more polished draft](#), (link to **Revising the essay: towards a comparison between Equiano and Phillips** in this document) with notes for how I might revise this material for purposes of a comparative essay on Equiano and Caryl Phillips, with a sample "media object."

Writing issues you raised:

- 1) Time allocation: clean draft vs. messy draft with revisions. **The latter works better for most writers.**
 - a) I never know what I want to say until I've done several drafts.
 - b) Trying to get it right the first time gives most people writer's block.
- 2) Forming a thesis.
 - a) **Start with something loose and intuitive.**
 - b) **Modify it as you write; make it sharper/more precise.**
 - c) **Make this process part of the essay.** "I felt that such and such was the case. I wondered if that held true throughout the text. I looked at some important scenes to see what I could discover. In the end, I found that a/ I was right, and was able to understand *why* such and such was the case with more depth and detail; b/ I was largely right, but I had to qualify my idea in several important ways; c/ I was actually wrong -- here's why I originally thought such and such was the case, and what led me to change my mind."
- 3) Transitions between sections and paragraphs.
 - a) Fill in context carefully,
 - b) clarify the conceptual relationship,

- c) step back to the bigger picture.
- 4) “What can I claim?”
- a) Is it plausible?
 - b) Is it relevant?
 - c) Is there counter-evidence?
 - d) Remember that texts are not a clear window to reality; that’s not their job.
- 5) Conclusions.
- a) **restate the key points:** don’t forget the highpoints of your analysis.
 - b) **look back at the questions you have raised:** make sure you addressed them, and if not, do it now.
 - c) **assess your claims objectively:** what degree of certainty is it reasonable to have, given the evidence available to you? Is there counter-evidence in the text, and how important is it? Are there questions is not possible to answer in the present essay, or even at all? Are there questions other than the ones you've asked that would be interesting to pursue?
- 6) Introductions.
- a) give the "loose and intuitive" version of your thesis.
 - b) hold argumentative claims for later.
 - c) raise questions that the conclusion will answer.
 - d) hint at the conclusion, but don’t give everything away.
 - e) Provide basic context.
 - f) WRITE THEM LAST.

Section 2 of a draft essay (column 1) analysed (column 2)

A few weeks ago, as we talked in class about the second essay, we looked at three passages from Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, all focused on his observations and descriptions of tools and instruments: agricultural instruments in Africa, a watch and painting in Virginia, and the instruments of writing (journal, pen, candle) on his expedition to the Arctic. Here, you'll see some of the process by which I began to put together some detailed close readings of the second scene into the frame of a bigger paper; this section would come *after* a discussion of African tools in chapter 1, and *before* a description of writing and danger in the Arctic, in chapter 3.

<p>When Equiano describes his home in chapter 1, we see simple tools used for obvious purposes by people he knows well. When he arrives in Virginia in chapter 3, he encounters artifacts that are new and strange. [Describe the scene; think about how it's different from the first scene]. These objects are intimidating in their complexity; not only does he not understand how they work, but he also doesn't know what purpose they are intended to serve.</p>	<p>MAJOR TRANSITION: I recall the previous section, and create a parallel construction to show its relationship to the next section.</p>
<p>The young Equiano, still a child, and far from everything that is familiar to him, decides that the watch and the painting are there to watch him and to report if he does anything wrong. He speculates that they work either by magic, or because they contain the spirits of dead people.</p>	<p>KEY ELEMENTS – DESCRIPTIVE SUMMARY</p> <p>[all this context is important – it matters where we are on the timeline of age and experience]</p> <p>[Do I know anything about what leads him to these ideas?]</p>
<p><i>There are two ideas here to explore: first, that these are instruments of surveillance and punishment; second, that they are animate rather than mechanical.</i></p> <p>What leads Equiano to these interpretations of what</p>	<p>KEY ELEMENTS -- ANALYTIC: I had to come back and add this sentence later, because I couldn't quite see it right away.</p> <p>MINOR TRANSITION:</p>

<p>he sees? **</p>	<p>introducing the next part of this section on the scene in Virginia.</p>
<p><i>He is reasoning on the basis both of what he understands from the past, and also what he understands clearly about his present environment.</i></p>	<p>ANALYSIS: (Later on, I decided to cut this sentence, but writing it helped me get the argument clearly in my mind). How should I sequence the discussion that follows? I need to find out what I will be able to say about each part of the scene before I can decide.</p>
<p>Equiano writes that he was "affrighted at some things I saw" especially because, as he entered the house, he had seen "a black woman slave... cruelly loaded with various kinds of iron machines." In particular, he describes one on her head which prevents her from eating, drinking, or speaking: "I was much astonished and shocked at this contrivance." He describes what he sees not in terms of the familiar and readily understandable (chains and shackles), but as a form of alien technology, a "machine" or "contrivance." He understands that the purpose of this "machine" is to limit the woman's freedom of action, and he observes that it does so "cruelly." When he speculates that the watch and painting serve similar ends, he is reasoning from what he has already observed and understood about the use of "contrivances" in his immediate environment.</p>	<p>DESCRIPTION 1: the watch. Followed by some ANALYSIS: more abstract/conceptual description (familiar vs. alien). CLAIM: generalizing from the analysis.</p>
<p>The painting causes Equiano to feel "affrighted" because it is utterly unfamiliar to him, "having never seen such things as these before." He quickly concludes that it probably serves the same purpose as the watch and the iron muzzle, namely, to observe his actions while the master is asleep. From there, however, he goes on to make several conjectures about how the painting "works." When Equiano speculates that the picture is either magical or a repository for the spirits of the dead, he is</p>	<p>DESCRIPTION 2: the painting. [This is where I decided that this paragraph has to go second, because the example of the painting has something in common with the example of the watch, but also something</p>

<p>drawing on ideas that he has brought with him from home, in an effort to find something familiar in what appears to be an alien environment. If the painting contains the spirits of great men who have died, perhaps "the whites... offer them libations as we used to do our friendly spirits."</p>	<p>extra].</p> <p>CLAIM: another analytic point to parallel the one just above.</p> <p>But SO WHAT? Here, I go back to the “big picture” and realize I left out something obvious.</p>
<p>Equiano's response to things he doesn't understand seems to be a combination of fear and wonder. He is very far from understanding the makeup and purpose of watches and paintings in the way that we would understand them, or that he himself would understand them as an adult.</p>	<p>OVERVIEW: this material, along with the context and analysis to follow, needs to go at the beginning of the section, before the two paragraphs of description, at **. It's a more obvious, general point, so it goes before the detailed analysis.</p> <p>[How <i>does</i> he understand them as an adult?]</p>
<p>Equiano will later become skilled at arithmetic and navigation; he will come to value both the ingenious contrivances of European civilization, and his own mastery of them.</p> <p>Making himself look naïve here will make him seem more sophisticated later.</p>	<p>CONTEXT: this raises the question, which will be obvious to the reader, but I didn't think of it until now: How do I make sense of this difference between how he shows himself as a child and how he shows himself as an adult?</p> <p>ANALYSIS: I decided that the point was not just about how Equiano himself changed, but also about his intentions as a narrator in showing us that change.</p>

<p>He is mistaken in all of his ideas about the watch and the painting; yet in producing these interpretations, he explores the power of his own unaided reason to make sense of complex, alien, and even frightening new phenomena in a hostile environment.</p>	<p>SUMMARY/ANALYSIS: now I'm back to the sequence of the essay -- this will come directly after the material on the painting, as an answer to SO WHAT? It incorporates both the obvious general point and what I learned from more detailed analysis, and deals with the apparent conflict between them.</p>
<p>As a boy newly arrived in Virginia, he is already developing the mind and consciousness we will see when he is a mature man recording in his journals the details of an expedition to the Arctic.</p>	<p>SUMMARY/ TRANSITION: I'm getting ready to move on to the next section, the scene in the Arctic.</p>

Revising the essay: towards a comparison between Equiano and Phillips

Second text: Caryl Phillips, *The Atlantic Sound*, "Homeward Bound: Thru the Door of No Return." This section, at the end of the chapter on Ghana, brings to a head this chapter's ongoing preoccupation with time, punctuality, watches, and the difference between "African" and "Western" relationships to both. The narrator's irritation about lateness turns into a critique of "returned" Americans who wish to reject watches and timekeeping in favor of a "return" to simply watching the sun for time. The issue of time surfaces both at the microlevel, in attention to watches and clocks, and at the macro level, in a series of reflections on history.

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The watch has lost its time-keeping function, and become a pure symbol – existing side by side with *actual*, functional watches. This will give another perspective on "African" relations to timekeeping. I've also found some text associated with the object: "the ability to "control time" -- to determine when events happen is frequently asserted on the flags and shrines of... the Fante.... these [cast-gold watches] do not have a timekeeping mechanism... they are still warning conjunction with perfectly functional, often very expensive, watches with prestigious logos. The cast-gold watches are obviously less about keeping the time than with owning it and, once more, with displaying wealth" [Doran Ross, *Gold of the Akan from the Glassell Collection* (Houston, 2002)].

<i>In this column is a more polished version of the “original” essay.</i>	<i>In this column are my notes for how I might change this material in moving towards a revision..</i>
<p>When Equiano describes his home in chapter 2, we see simple tools used for obvious purposes by people he knows well. When he arrives in Virginia in chapter 3, he encounters artifacts that are new and strange. [Describe the scene]. These objects are intimidating in their complexity; not only does he not understand how they work, but he also doesn't know what purpose they are intended to serve. He is still a child, far from home, and “had no person to speak to that I could understand.” Left to his own devices, the young Equiano decides that the watch and the painting are there to watch him and to report if he does anything wrong. He speculates that they work either by magic, or because they contain the spirits of dead people. What leads Equiano to these interpretations of what he sees?</p>	<p>I'm going to keep the material about Africa, because the point in Phillips seems to be a contrast between Africa and the West; I want to compare the contrast in Equiano to the contrast in Phillips.</p> <p>I'm also going to focus more specifically on the watch and on timekeeping.</p>
<p>Overall, the young Equiano's response to things he doesn't understand, here and elsewhere in the text, seems to be a combination of fear and wonder. He is very far from understanding the makeup and purpose of watches and paintings in the way that we would understand them, or that he himself would understand them as an adult, later on in the book. Moreover, rather than examining these objects more closely in order to learn more about them, he simply assigns them to the category of the supernatural: things which cannot be explained by rational means, and should not be approached by ordinary people. Later in the narrative, Equiano will come to value both the ingenious contrivances of European civilization, and his own mastery of them. (For instance, he will become skilled at arithmetic and navigation). To some extent, making himself look naïve here will make him seem more sophisticated later. At the same time, there are elements of the scene which point forward to the sophisticated man Equiano will become, rather than backwards to the naïve child he once</p>	<p>Owning and understanding things like watches becomes a sign of belonging to the Western world.</p> <p>Make more of the relationship between time-keeping, calculation, and the applied math of navigations. Highlight the quantitative and abstract dimension of all these skills. Replace the scene in the Arctic with something else.</p>

was.	
<p>Equiano writes that he was "affrighted at some things I saw, the more so" because, as he entered the house, he had seen "a black woman slave... cruelly loaded with various kinds of iron machines." In particular, he describes one on her head which prevents her from eating, drinking, or speaking: "I was much astonished and shocked at this contrivance." He describes what he sees not in terms of the familiar and readily understandable (chains and shackles), but as a form of alien technology, a "machine" or "contrivance." He understands that the purpose of this "machine" is to limit the woman's freedom of action, and he observes that it does so "cruelly." When he speculates that the watch "would tell the gentleman any thing I might do amiss," he is reasoning from what he has already observed and understood about the use of "contrivances" in his immediate environment.</p>	<p>Equiano associates machines and contrivances with the oppressive violence of slavery. Compare with associations made by the "returned" Americans in Phillips. They seem to feel that returning to a life that is simpler in material terms will also return them to the state they would have been in had slavery never happened.</p> <p>Add some material about how watches and similar instruments (for instance, the compass) are used more generally -- what do they allow people to do, and how do they seem to function as symbols in the text? Use Stanley, Lewis and Clark.</p>
<p>The painting causes Equiano to feel "affrighted" for somewhat different reasons: not because it is , but because it is utterly unfamiliar, "having never seen such things as these before." He quickly concludes that the painting probably serves the same purpose as the watch and the iron muzzle, namely, to observe his actions while the master is asleep. From there, however, he goes on to make several conjectures about how the painting "works." For instance, if the painting contains the spirits of great men who have died, perhaps "the whites... offer them libations as we used to do our friendly spirits." When Equiano speculates that the picture is either magical or a repository for the spirits of the dead, he is drawing on ideas that he has brought with him from home, in an effort to map out conceptually what appears to be an alien environment.</p>	<p>Less a contrast than an overlap with Kohain's group in <i>The Atlantic Sound</i> – lots of libations in the ceremony he organizes. Bring in some of the things Equiano says about the resemblances between Judaism and African religious practice. Of course, he ends up by rejecting both. Equiano opts for modernity, complexity, and technology over the primitive innocence he associates with his childhood. <i>He</i> is not interested in going back.</p>

In short, this scene shows the young Equiano reasoning on the basis both of what he understands from the past, and also what he understands clearly about his present environment. He is mistaken in all of his ideas about the watch and the painting; yet in producing these interpretations, he explores the power of his own unaided reason to make sense of complex, alien, and even frightening new phenomena in a hostile environment. As a boy newly arrived in Virginia, he is already developing the mind and consciousness we will see when he is a mature man recording in his journals the details of an expedition to the Arctic.

This part of the essay relates more to Equiano's development over the course of the narrative, and that's no longer my focus; I will probably cut this material. I won't have time to talk about the Arctic, although it occurs to me that the scene of Equiano sitting by himself and writing is probably the moment in the narrative when he looks most like Phillips. They are both writers whose mission it is to describe the Atlantic world to others.