



# WHITE MALE AMERICAN IDENTITY

In the Travel Fiction of Hemingway, Kerouac, Theroux  
and Lerner

“There is no authentic American who would not rather be Jack than the Giant, which is to say, who would not choose to be ‘one of the boys.’”

Fiedler, Leslie A. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive, 1998.

“The earth is an Indian thing – I squatted on it [...] – **we had black heels. We talked about the Revolution.**”

“Vibrations of television telepathy surrounded the room as silently the King decided to accept me – when he did I heard the scepter drop in all their thoughts.”

“I turned my head and watched the lights slide by and found it lovely and then realized I was saying so in English, that several minutes had elapsed and I was enumerating everything I found beautiful as we passed; streetlights, fountains, plane trees, if that’s what those were.”

“The taxi went up the hill, passed the lighted square, then on into the dark street behind St Etienne du Mont, went smoothly down the asphalt, passed the trees and the standing bus at the Place de la Contrescarpe [...]. There were lighted bars and late open shops on each side of the street. [...] Brett’s hat was off. [...] I saw her face in the lights from the open shops, then it was dark, then I saw her face clearly as we came on the Avenue de Gobelins.”

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. London: Arrow Books, 2004: 22.

“This cowardly Breton (me) watered down by two centuries in Canada and America, nobody’s fault but my own, this Kerouac who would be laughed at in Prince of Wales Land because he cant even hunt, or fish, or fight a beef for his fathers, this boastful, prune,[...] this false staff not even a prophet let alone a knight,[...] this yeller in Paris salons and mum in Breton fogs, this farceur jokester at art galleries of New York and whimperer at police stations and over longdistance telephones, [...] in short, scared and humbled dumbhead loudmouth with-the-shits descendent.”

Kerouac, Jack. *Satori in Paris*. New York: Grove Press, 1966: 65.

“It bothered me that I had not been able to fit in; that through my own fault I had been cast out; and that having left I would have to keep going – searching for the rest of my life for a similar place, and my mind always returning to Moyo.”

Theroux, Paul. *My Other Life: a Novel*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996: 89.

“It was a secular form on damnation; a half-life, halving again every second in an almost perpetual diminishment. Exile was not a metaphor. I was an exile and I believed I would stay that way. It was no good to see myself as cast out, as though I had fallen from grace. I had not known any Eden. The closest I had come was at Moyo, in 1964.”



“But in certain moments, I was convinced I should go home, no matter the mansion, that this life wasn’t real, wasn’t my own, that nearly a year of being a tourist, which is what I indubitably was, was enough, and that I needed to return to the U.S., be present for my family, and begin an earnest search for a mate, career, etc. Prolonging my stay was postponing the inevitable; I would never live away from my family and language permanently, even if I could work out the logistics, and since I knew that to be the case, I should depart at the conclusion of my fellowship, quit smoking, and renew contact with the reality of my life[.]”

“In the middle of the little park is a bandstand for concerts, actual concerts for the people, free – generations of marimba players maybe, or an Orozco jazzband playing Mexican anthems to El Presidente. – You walk thirsty through the swinging doors of a saloon and get a bar beer, and turn around and there’s fellas shooting pool, cooking tacos, wearing sombreros, some wearing guns on their rancher hips, and gangs of singing business men throwing pesos at the standing musicians who wander up and down the room. – [...] [Y]ou can find it [there], this feeling, this fellaheen feeling about life, that timeless gaiety of people not involved in great cultural and civilization issues – you can find it almost anywhere else, in Morocco, in Latin America entire, in Dakar, in Kurd Land.”

Kerouac, Jack. *Lonesome Traveler*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1960: 28.

“Harry Gumbo was a book salesman. He wore a cowboy hat, which contrasted oddly with his buck teeth and his pin-striped suit. He liked the singer Jim Reeves. He wondered whether I knew the man. Harry sang ‘This World Is Not My Home (I’m Just A-Passing Through)’. He wrote long abusive letters to his district manager in Salisbury. [...] He wanted a company car. He said he was glad to have an American for a neighbour.”

“[...] Jorge approached me; he must have been in my inbox. We embraced warmly. [Jorge] said something about how far my Spanish had come, about the fancy people I’d fallen in with, how he’d tell people in the future all about the famous poet he tutored and sold drugs to. I asked him if he could name a famous living poet. He couldn’t.”

“In the bar there’s a woman who is a lovely forty-year-old redhead Spaniard amoureuse who takes an actual liking to me does worse and takes me seriously, and makes a date for us to meet alone: I get drunk and forget. [...] To make up for forgetting to meet Valerino (the redhead Spanish beauty) I buy her a tapestry [...], ten bucks [...]. She announces she’s going to redecorate her room on account of it but doesn’t invite me over. What I woulda done to her shall not be allowed in this Bible yet it woulda been spelled LOVE. I get so mad I go down to the whore districts.”

“The young girl wore greasy make-up – skin lightener, mascara and lipstick. [...] But she had no shape. Her yellow dress hung straight down like a school uniform. She bent over like a boy to buckle her plastic sandal and I saw she was wearing school bloomers. [...] [Gloria] said that she wanted to sleep – a sort of apologetic complaint. ‘Take my friend.’ ‘No!’ I said. I was shocked, and I waited for her to react. But all I heard were snores from Gloria, and her snoring made me wakeful. [...] The young girl Boopy shuffled and swallowed when I woke her, and then she giggled a little and held me. Caressing her, I was running my fingers over all her bones. She was very thin, but she had large bush-baby eyes. She was a child in my arms, but as soon as I took her on the floor she snorted and sighed, and she moved like a woman who knew what she wanted.” (p. 228-229)

Theroux, Paul. *My Secret History : a Novel*. London: Penguin, 1990: 11.

“She was always wrapping or unwrapping her hair or body in some sort of cloth, winding or unwinding a shawl or scarf, and whenever I imagined her, I imagined her engaged in one of these activities; I couldn’t picture her standing still, fully dressed or undressed, but only in the process of gracefully entangling or disentangling herself from fabric.”

“She paused for a long moment and then began to speak [...]. I formed several possible stories out of her speech, formed them at once, so it was less like I failed to understand than that I understood in chords, understood in the plurality of worlds. [...] This ability to dwell among possible referents, to let them interfere and separate like waves, to abandon the law of excluded middle while listening to Spanish – this was a breakthrough in my project, a change of phase.”