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Chapter Author(s): Emily Stevenson

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Corey the Saldanian (d. c.1627)

The man known in English records as 'Corey the Saldanian' first entered English archives in 1613, when Gabriel Towerson, captain of the *Hector*, kidnapped two local men from Saldanha Bay while on a voyage for the East India Company (EIC).[1] The story was recounted over forty years later in Edward Terry's *A Voyage to East-India.* Here, Terry recorded that one of the men, left unnamed, died during the voyage, but the other 'who call'd himself *Cooree*' was taken to London, where he lived for six months in the house of the EIC governor Sir Thomas Smythe. Corey, desperate to return home, was eventually taken back to Saldanha Bay in June 1614, where 'he had no sooner set footing on his own shore, but presently he threw away his *Clothes*, his *Linnen*, with all other *Covering*, and got his sheeps skins upon his back'.[2] Over the next decade Corey would appear sporadically in EIC records, assisting Walter Peyton during his voyage to India in 1615 by mediating between the sailors and the local community in Saldanha Bay, and in 1617 doing the same for Nathaniel Salmon during his journey to Surat.[3] He appears to have been killed in 1627, according to a record in an anonymous Welsh logbook, after refusing to provide Dutch sailors with 'fresh victuals'.[4]

The apparent simplicity of this biography belies its formation through vast ongoing background processes of knowledge mediation. The 'character' of Corey only emerges through these processes, with each occasion of his appearance within EIC records intended to serve a discursive purpose. It was not Terry, Towerson, Peyton or Salmon's primary intention to write a biography for Corey, and acknowledging this fact necessarily raises the question of how – and whether – it is possible to do so here using their texts. This question of visibility through a paradoxical invisibility has been

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1   Edward Terry, *A Voyage to East-India* (London, 1655; Wing 2nd ed. T782), pp. 19–21. Saldanha Bay is on the south-western coast of modern-day South Africa.

2   Terry, *A Voyage to East-India*, p. 21.

3   Walter Peyton, 'Voyage of Captain Walter Peyton to India, in 1615' in *A General History and Collection of Voyages and Travels*, ed. by Robert Kerr, vol. IX (London: T. Cadell, 1824), pp. 219–222; 'Nathaniel Salmon, master of the New Year's Gift, to the East India Company', 9 July, 1617, in *Letters Received by the East India Company*, ed. by William Foster, vol. VI (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1902), pp. 290–292.

4   Linda Evi Merians, *Envisioning the Worst: Representations of 'Hottentots' in Early-Modern England* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), p. 90. Later editions of Thomas Herbert's *Some Yeares Travels into Divers Parts of Asia and Afrique* (London, 1664; Wing H1533A) recorded that Corey was 'butchered' by his community when he returned home, but there is no evidence of this, and it contradicts extant EIC documents.

explored in great detail in Imtiaz Habib's *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible*. There, Habib posited a recursive linkage between the 'imprints' and 'invisible' elements of his title, 'imprint' working as both noun and verb to 'reveal by its very visibility that which is not'.[5] Natalie Zemon Davis faced a similar problem in her account of Leo Africanus, finding herself haunted by 'the silences in the contemporary record and the occasional contradictions or mysteries in the texts'.[6] In attempting to enact analytical processes through these scattered details, Corey's role as a transcultural figure of mobility is interrogated here within the context of such an archival record, asking whether it is possible to extrapolate a version of his history.

Even Corey's name comes to an English reader through such a process of textual mediation. His original language was likely Khoekhoe, so 'Coree' is one of, if not the first, indigenous African names to appear in English records.[7] Terry records that he 'call'd himself *Cooree*', but the name's spelling is inconsistent in English records. Terry had not been present himself at Corey's abduction – he notes that these events took place 'about three years before I went to *India*' – and his telling of the event is therefore entirely reliant on information provided by others, even down to his phonetic transcription of Corey's name.[8] Corey's role within Terry's text is inextricably linked to this question of knowledge transmission: he first appears in the text in a brief reference to '*Coorce* one of the Natives (whose story you shall have by and by)'.[9] The significant detail here is that Corey is considered by Terry to have a 'story'. This structural formula signals to the reader his status as an agent of transcultural interaction between English and native communities, but in a sense paradoxically renders the story itself unnecessary for Terry's readers. What matters is that he is considered by an English writer to have a story worthy of being recorded in English because it concerns English interests: it is this alone which makes the details of Corey's life worthy of note for Terry.

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5   Imtiaz Habib, 'Afterword', in *Black Lives in the English Archives, 1500–1677: Imprints of the Invisible* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 261–272 (270); see also Margo Hendricks, 'Feminist Historiography', in *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2008), pp. 361–376.

6   Natalie Zemon Davis, *Trickster Travels*: *The Search for Leo Africanus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006; London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 13.

7   His name has been standardised to 'Corey' within this essay, but this is not to imply any degree of prescriptivism as to the spelling.

8   Terry, *A Voyage to East-India*, p. 20.

9   *Ibid.*, p. 16.

The formula thus serves as a reminder that the concept of 'stories' and their telling are not neutral ones, and further complicates attempts to use such accounts to form a biography. Corey's name, and its movement from Khoekhoe to English through phonetic transcription, functions as a similar signifier, reminding the reader of the importance of orally transmitted knowledge. The importance of this process is clear from the various spellings of his name: 'Coorce' and '*Cooree*' in Terry, 'Corey' by Peyton, 'Cory' by Salmon, 'Cary' in the anonymous Welsh account, and 'Choree' by Nicholas Downton.[10] As long as the name was rendered phonetically similarly, the figure to whom it referred could be recalled by the English reader.

It is also important here to consider the other textual identifiers connected to Corey. English accounts indicate that he came from Saldanha Bay, though this is gleanable only through inference: there is no known account of his life before the abduction. His home was described by Peyton as a 'town or *craal* of about an [*sic*] hundred houses, five English miles from the landing place', and Thomas Roe described their houses as being 'only made of mats, rounded at the top like an oven, and open on one side, which they turn as the wind changes, having no door to keep out the weather'.[11] The wider influences of transnational engagement are visible even here: though it would appear from Peyton's text that '*craal*' is a word taken from Corey's language, it appears originally to have derived from the Portuguese word *curaal*, a cognate of the Spanish *corral*. Portuguese presence in the area is clear from such territorial designations: Saldanha Bay had been named as such after the Portuguese Antonio de Saldanha, who landed there in 1503.

The majority of the other figures in this collection left records of their writings, such as letters, speeches, prose, or poetry. This is not the case for Corey: there are points where his voice appears within these texts, but these take the form of reported speech, mediating his words through linguistic and generic intermediaries. The first such occasion, in Terry, is the already-discussed formula 'he called himself *Cooree*'. The second comes later in the account, when Terry describes how 'when [Corey] had learned a little of our Language, he would daily lye upon the ground, and cry very often thus in broken English, *Cooree home goe, Souldania goe, home goe*'.[12] The third took place after his return, when Terry met him and 'asked *Cooree*

10   Terry, *A Voyage to East-India*, pp. 16–17; Peyton, 'Voyage of Captain Walter Peyton', p. 161; Salmon, 'Nathaniel Salmon, master of the New Year's Gift, to the East India Company', p. 292; *The Voyage of Nicholas Downton to the East Indies, 1614–1615: As Recorded in Contemporary Narratives and Letters*, ed. by William Foster (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1938), p. 2.
11   Peyton, 'Voyage of Captain Walter Peyton', pp. 219–222.
12   Terry, *A Voyage to East-India*, p. 21.

who was their God? he lifting up his hands answered thus, in his bad English, *England God, great God, Souldanian God*'.[13] Finally, Walter Peyton describes in his diary visiting Corey's home a few years after his return and meeting his family, recording that 'most of these savages can say *Sir Thomas Smith's English ships*, which they often repeat with much pride'.[14]

These moments of speech each served distinct discursive purposes as recorded. The second, where Corey's desire to return home is recorded in broken English by Terry, serves in his text as evidence of the truth of a biblical verse.[15] Terry wrote that:

> wee may draw this conclusion, that a continued Custome may make many things that seem strange and loathsom to some, even naturall to others, and that the most brutish life may seem civill, and best to a most brutish man; and he thus pleading for it.[16]

For Terry's later readers, the events described may suggest no such conclusion. Rather, they record the violent displacement effected by English sailors and Corey's desperation to return home. The third instance of reported speech serves a similar function: in this case, Corey's apparent acknowledgement of the existence of an omnipotent God proved, for Terry, that it was a 'greater misery, to fall from the loyns of *Civill* & *Christian Parents*, and after to degenerate into all brutishness' rather than to be born into a non-Christian family and be '[in]sensible of their condition'.[17] Peyton's report served a more straightforwardly nationalistic purpose, with his story of the inhabitants of a *craal* chanting 'Sir Thomas Smith's English ships' demonstrating the reach of English mercantile strength on the other side of the globe. Their refrain, we are left to assume, would have been learnt from Corey.

These incidents of reported speech each speak in turn to English concerns of conversion, mercantilism, and home, while each obscures Corey's own version of his life story in both their linguistic structure and attention to these concerns. The microhistory of Corey as a transcultural and mobile figure offered here is predicated initially on English movement to his home and his abduction. This considered, our view of him as a traveller must necessarily

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13 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
14 Peyton, 'Voyage of Captain Walter Peyton', p. 219.
15 2 Peter 2.22 specifically: But it is come unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is returned to his own vomit: and the sow that was washed, to the wallowing in the mire [1599 Geneva Bible].
16 Terry, *A Voyage to East-India*, pp. 21–22.
17 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

consider his mobility differently from most of the other figures within this collection (with the exception of Peter Pope). Unlike diplomats, royalty, or merchants, Corey had no agency in his initial movement. He does appear, however, to have recognised the potential benefits of his transcultural role after his return. Terry wrote despondently that:

> it had been well if he had not seen *England;* for as he discovered nothing to us ... when he came home he told his Country-men (having doubtless observed so much here) that *Brass* was but a base and cheap commoditie in *England*.[18]

The reciprocal nature of transcultural interaction evidently had not been apparent to the English in this case, and in using Corey to 'discover' information for themselves, they failed to realise that he in turn could make discoveries which would endanger their interests. Thomas Elkington, an EIC merchant, complained bitterly that '[it] would have been much better for us ... if he had never seen England'.[19] The connection between agency and mobility was expected to run one way: one could be made mobile through English agency, but claiming that resultant agency for oneself was a traitorous act.

Such moments suggest an alternate history, silent in the English records, of a man forcibly taken from his home and family to travel to the other side of the world who, once there, used the language of his abductors to express his desperate desire to return home. After having returned, he cast off the trappings which had 'civilised' him in the eyes of the English, reclaiming his native identity. He then used this experience to aid his community, sharing his knowledge of their goods to procure better trades while acting as a mediator between agents of the EIC and his community. He would later suggest that one of his sons go to England on an EIC ship, perhaps hoping that he would be able to take on a similar role.[20] Within English historiography, the figure of 'Corey the Saldanian' would become synonymous with that of the now antiquated term 'hottentot', assuming far greater mythic proportions than originally laid out in Terry's narrative.[21] Any attempt to examine Corey's role as a transcultural figure inevitably comes into contact with both this later history, and the moments of crisis outlined by Habib between the visible

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18 *Ibid.*, p. 23.
19 Thomas Elkington, in 1614/1615 wrote that '[it] would have been much better for us as such as shall come hereafter if he had never seen England' [*Letters Received by the East India Company*, ed. by William Foster, 6 vols. (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1902), III, p. 2].
20 Peyton, 'Voyage of Captain Walter Peyton', p. 220.
21 See Merians, *Envisioning the Worst*, pp. 91–137 for more detail.

imprints and the invisible person. On the one hand, gleaning the details of a subject's life from 'official' records inevitably risks entrenching those texts further into biographical certainty. On the other, attempts to recreate the undocumented details threaten to bring ahistorical perspectives into analysis. There is no easy way of overcoming this limitation, but Corey's story, fragmentary as it is, still demands to be told.

Emily Stevenson

Further Reading

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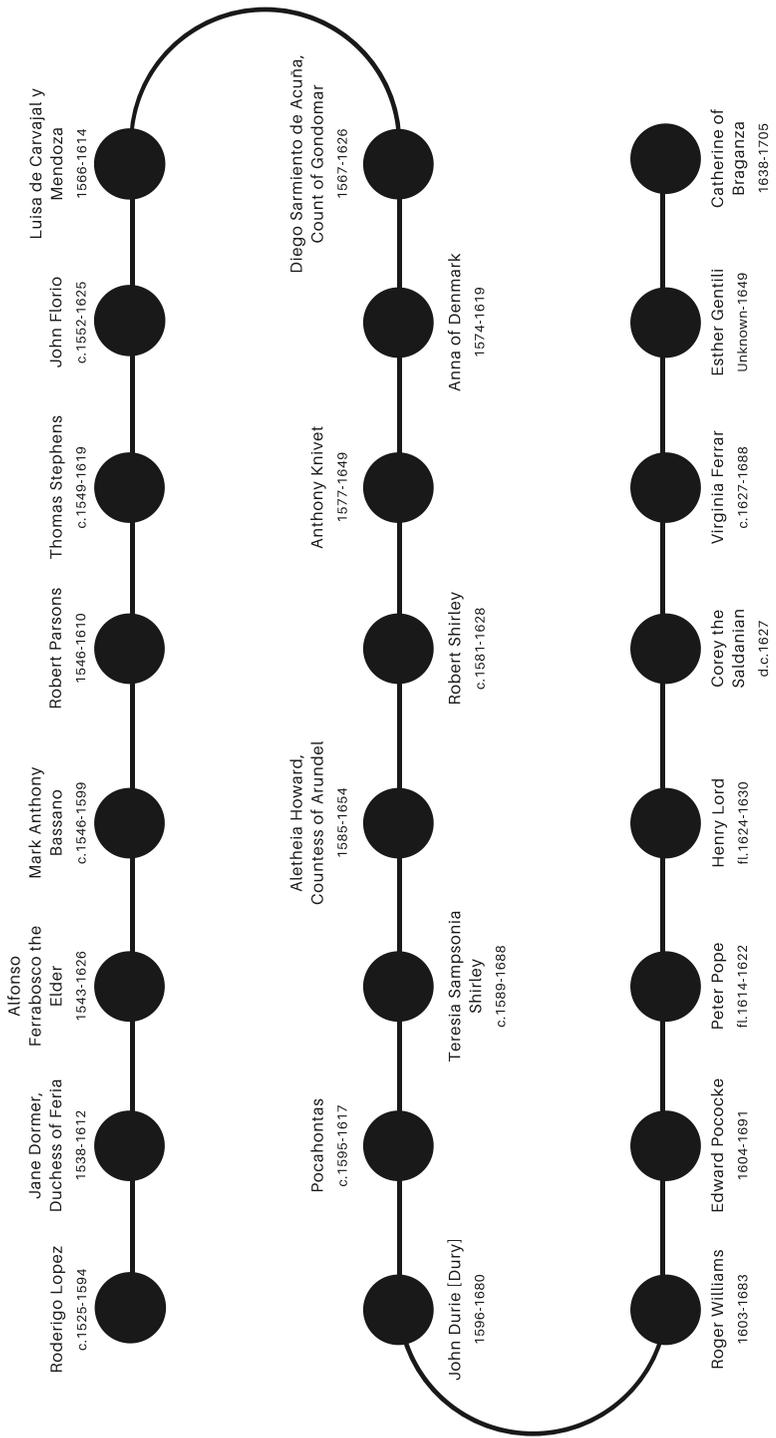
Figure 10 Chronology. Image Emily Stevenson for TIDE (CC BY 4.0).

Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza
1566-1614

Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, Count of Gondomar
1567-1626

Catherine of Braganza
1638-1705

John Florio
c.1552-1625

Anna of Denmark
1574-1619

Esther Gentili
Unknown-1649

Thomas Stephens
c.1549-1619

Anthony Knivet
1577-1649

Virginia Ferrar
c.1627-1688

Robert Parsons
1546-1610

Robert Shirley
c.1581-1628

Corey the Saldanian
d.c.1627

Mark Anthony Bassano
c.1546-1599

Aletheia Howard, Countess of Arundel
1585-1654

Henry Lord
fl.1624-1630

Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder
1543-1626

Teresia Sampsonia Shirley
c.1589-1688

Peter Pope
fl.1614-1622

Jane Dormer, Duchess of Feria
1538-1612

Pocahontas
c.1595-1617

Edward Pococke
1604-1691

Roderigo Lopez
c.1525-1594

John Durie [Dury]
1596-1680

Roger Williams
1603-1683