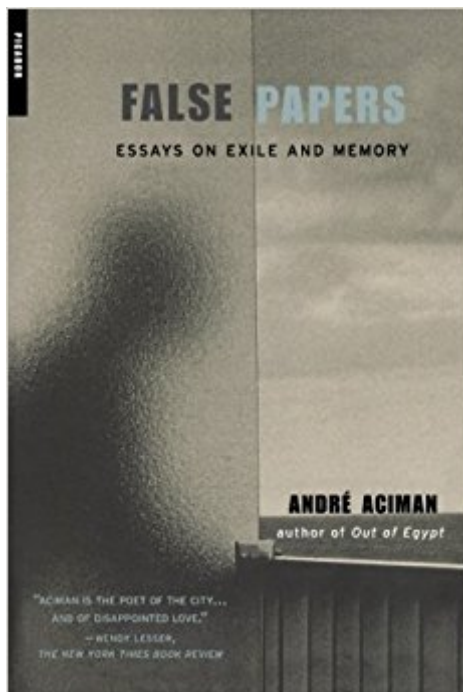


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# False Papers



## Synopsis

In these fourteen essays Andre Aciman, one of the most poignant stylists of his generation, dissects the experience of loss, moving from his forced departure from Alexandria as a teenager, through his brief stay in Europe and finally to the home he's made (and half invented) on Manhattan's Upper West Side.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Memory trumps life and existence acquires the hue of old hand-tinted photographs in this collection of 14 essays by a self-defined perennial expatriate. Aciman, a frequent contributor to the New Yorker and the New York Review of Books, grew up in Egypt, Italy and France, and lives in Manhattan. Taking up again the themes of *Out of Egypt*, his acclaimed memoir of his family's lost life in Alexandria, he fumbles for the nebulous essence of a rootless existence. On a return trip to Alexandria, he tentatively visits old apartment buildings, the Graeco-Roman Museum and the Jewish cemetery, each site leached of visceral impact and replotted on an abstract, internal map. In Paris, a trip to the Square Lamartine in the 16th arrondissement calls to mind the few winter weeks he spent in the city when he was 14. Straus Park, a small, neglected and magically marginal triangle of ground on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, comes to symbolize all the cities he has ever known and loved. Farther afield, he visits Proust's hometown of Illiers, touring the Proust Museum just a few days before Christmas with a select group of Proust enthusiasts, and travels to Bethlehem, where the tension among Muslims, Christians and Jews reminds him of Alexandria. A final few pieces explore the patterns of love affairs in New York: bus routes remembered, cafes

revisited, sentiments examined. Aciman makes an art of indirection. He travels, he ruefully explains, "not so as to experience anything at the time of my tour, but to plot the itinerary of a possible return trip. This, it occurs to me, is also how I live." So long as he keeps from slipping into a repetitive, rarified exaltation of displacement, such insights illuminate the most shadowy corners of memory and motivation. (Aug.) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Fourteen essays on the nature of memory are collected here from the writings of Aciman, who contributes regularly to such publications as *The New Yorker* and the *New York Review of Books*. Like Marcel Proust, Aciman has the ability to show you something you had always suspected but had never put into words. In *Pensione Eolo*, he discusses nostalgia, which he regards as the longing for the memory of a place rather than the place itself. In *Alexandria: The Capital of Memory*, he observes that he lives much as he travels: to plot the itinerary of a possible return trip. Among the other essays included are *Letter from Illiers-Combray: In Search of Proust*, *In the Muslim City of Bethlehem*, and *In Double Exile*. Aciman (literature, Bard Coll.), who recounted the exodus of his Jewish family from Alexandria in *Out of Egypt*, has lived as an exile in Italy and France and currently resides in New York. While the thematic range of the pieces borders on the repetitious, turns of phrase (such as *What do you do with so much blue once you've seen it?* ) give delightful chills. Aciman dissects his feelings so thoroughly that many readers will recognize themselves here and there, even if they are not world travelers."Nancy P. Shires, East Carolina Univ., Greenville, NC Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Aciman's essay about Strauss Park in New York is one of the most brilliant pieces of writing about urban and international life and identity. I read it again and again and pass it along to friends who always agree. His writings on Alexandria and other topics carry the same sensitivity and gravitas, always a pleasure to read but moreover to inspire thoughtful contemplation of the roads he has taken me down.

An excellent writer.

Aciman is one of the greatest writers of the century. I read everything that he writes. This is an excellent compilation.

profound and moving

Like other Aciman books this really worth reading, some wonderful insights, into a long vanished world.

Andre Aciman is our contemporary Proust--the same elegance, the same penetrating eye, the same love for memory and its cinematic clarities.

André Aciman's collection of essays on place and nostalgia is as absolutely gorgeously written as his superb family memoir *OUT OF EGYPT*, and covers the amazing array of places he's lived and left: Alexandria (first and foremost), Rome, Paris, and New York, with side visits to sites important to his sense of himself, Illiers-Combray (Proust's village) and Bethlehem. At his best, Aciman is funny, incisive and extraordinarily clever; his best essays involve sites where he can focus more on other people than just himself, and he can allow his wit and empathy to emerge. Since his topic is always nostalgia here, it is inevitable that much of his critical focus should be himself (as he points out repeatedly and intelligently, the urge towards nostalgia is always as much a yearning for one's self and one's memories as it is for a particular place). There are times, however, when his interest in his self tends more towards a carefully nurtured narcissism than an incisive self-critique and when you want to roll your eyes at the insufferably precious delight with which he can regard himself.

Andre Aciman is an astoundingly gifted writer. When I first read his memoir "Out of Egypt" five years ago, I was amazed by its wit and wisdom, its precious and seamless blend of irony and deep feeling. Having followed his career in writing ever since, I am thrilled by the recent publication of "False Papers," a magnificent compilation of fourteen of his best essays from the past few years. These pieces can be seen as a kind of sequel to "Out of Egypt," an extension of its central theme of exile in new, often unexpected directions. In "Out of Egypt" Aciman vividly reminisced about his childhood years in Alexandria up to their dismal end, when amid the virulent anti-Semitism of Nasser's Egypt he and his family were expelled. The essays of "False Papers," by contrast, pertain more to the intellectual and emotional residues of exile-in particular the "confused, back-and-forth, up-and-around" way of thinking, remembering, desiring, and relating to oneself and to others that exile seems to foster. Aciman writes poignantly but analyzes ruthlessly: he may be one of the most introspective of current writers, and at a time when memoirs and confessions line the shelves, but

refreshingly, he is also one of the least self-indulgent and complacent. Complexity does not faze him. He excels at finding a concrete metaphor, typically from far afield, to convey some paradox of memory or desire: for instance, his surprisingly apt use of the financial term "arbitrage" to illustrate how one might "firm up the present...by experiencing it from the future as a moment in the past," much like an arbitrageur might trade securities in different markets to benefit from different prices. He can qualify thoughts and impressions without diluting them into a muddle, and even, occasionally, cast doubt on the relevance of his most reliable figures and tropes-to wit, exile-without sacrificing any of his writing's underlying pathos. Few, in short, can match Aciman when it comes to a grasp of the fitful economy of the soul, and even fewer could hope to write about it so deftly and affectingly. Those, like myself, who have already read and enjoyed Aciman's essays on their first appearance in print will want to own a book that brings them all together. Those who have not are to be envied the opportunity to read them in "False Papers" for the first time.

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