Voyage: Spring 2015  
Discipline: English Writing  
ENWR 1559-502: Travel Writing (Section 2)  
Division: Lower  
Faculty Name: Colleen Kinder

Pre-requisites: None.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

There are only two plots in all of literature, claimed the late John Gardner: the story of a journey, and of a stranger coming to town. Most travel literature is both: the story of a journey as well as a tale of a stranger, stepping into an alien land. This course is an introduction to the craft of travel writing, with a focus on the techniques by which writers capture the essential qualities of a place. Students will survey a wide range of works, from long-form “place” essays to destination articles, by travel writers such as Paul Theroux, Ryszard Kapuscinski, Jan Morris, and Pico Iyer. Students will take advantage of their geographic mobility throughout the course, gathering fresh material at our diverse ports of call, and submitting these stories and articles for peer review in workshop.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

To develop observational skills and a rigorous note-taking practice  
To bring specificity and originality to sensory descriptions  
To write with immediacy, to capture a “sense of place,” as well as with distance  
To write range of essays and articles suited to a variety of publications  
To experiment with form and style, emulating the models on the syllabus

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

AUTHOR: Jason Wilson (editor), Elizabeth Gilbert (guest editor)  
TITLE: Best American Travel Writing 2013  
PUBLISHER: Mariner Books  
ISBN #: 0547808984  
DATE/EDITION: 2013

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

Depart Ensenada- January 7:
A1- January 9: Welcome + Syllabus Review

A2-January 11: Introduction to Travel Writing
“Antipodes,” Ian Frazier, The New Yorker (Handout)
Paul Theroux, “Five Travel Epiphanies,” Fresh Air Fiend
Dorothy Allison, “Place,” The Writer’s Notebook

A3- January 13: Confronting Cliche
“How Not to Write About Africa,”Binyavanga Wainaina, Granta (online)
Alain de Botton, “On Anticipation,” from The Art of Travel
Ship Vignette Due

Hilo: January 14

A4-January 16: Encounters
William Least Heat Moon, “Nameless, Tennessee,” Blue Highways
“Letter to a Stranger,” Lavinia Spalding.
Hilo Vignette Due

A5-January 19: The Journey’s Motives
Bruce Chatwin, Excerpt from The Songlines
Ariel Levy, “Thanksgiving in Mongolia,” The New Yorker
Mary Morris, preface to Nothing to Declare

Study Day: January 21

A6- January 22: Hallowed Ground: The Travel Memoir
Joan Didion, “Goodbye to All That”
Eula Biss, “Goodbye to All That,” 20-Something Essays by 20-Something Writers

A7-January 24: Enigmas: Traveler as Detective
Leslie Jamison, “La Frontera,” Vice
Colin Thubron, from Where Nights Are Longest
Yokohama: January 26-27
In-Transit: January 28
Kobe: January 29-31

A8- February 1: Field Lap Prep
Japan Vignette Due

Shanghai: February 3-4
In-Transit: February 5-6
Hong Kong: 7-8

A9- February 9: Placelessness
David Foster Wallace, “Shipping Out,” Harpers
China Essay Draft 1 Due

Ho Chi Minh: February 11-16

A10- February 17: Intro to Workshopping
Vietnam Vignette Due

Singapore: February 19-20
Study Day: February 21

A11-February 22: Pitches I
Sample pitches
Final Draft China Essay Due

Rangoon: February 24-March 1

A12-March 2: Features
Chris Collin, “Mystery Train” AFAR (online)
Peter Hessler, “Wheels of Fortune” The New Yorker
Burma Vignette Due

A13- March 4: Culinary Journeys: Tasting Place
Calvin Trillin, “Three Chopsticks,” The New Yorker

Cochin: March 6-11
Study Day: March 12
A14-March 13: Portrait of a City
Ian Frazier, “Someplace in Queens,” The New Yorker
Jan Morris, “Over the Bridge,” Journeys
India Vignette Due

A15-March 15: On Street Level: Urban Walkers
Colson Whitehead, excerpts from The Colossus
Vivian Gornick, “On the Street,” Approaching Eye Level
Study Day: March 17
Port Louis: March 18

A16- March 19: Powers of Description
Mark Doty, excerpts from The Art of Description
Mauritius Vignette Due

A17-March 21: Workshop I Day

A18- March 23: Reckonings with Paradise
Peter Jon Lindberg, “Summerland,” Travel + Leisure
David Mamet, “A Family Vacation,” Bad Trips
Geoff Dyer, “Miss Cambodia,” Yoga for People Who Can’t be Bothered to Do It
Cape Town: March 25-30
Study Day: March 31

A19-April 1: By Sea, By Subway: Narrative Vehicles
Jonathan Raban, “Sea Room,” The Best of Granta Travel
Paul Theroux, “Subterranean Gothic,” The Best of Granta Travel
South Africa Vignette Due

A20-April 3: Workshop II

A21- April 5: Breaking Form
John McPhee, “The Search for Marvin Gardens” The New Yorker
“Letters to Strangers”: Essays by Ted Conover and Leslie Jamison.

Tema (Accra): April 7-9
A22- April 12: Playing with Form
Rolf Potts, “The Art of Writing a Story About Walking Across Andorra,” Worldhum
Ghana Vignette Due

A23- April 14: Ancient Paths, Modern Pilgrims
Anne Carson, excerpt from “Kinds of Water,” The Next American Essay
Gideon Lewis-Krauss, excerpt from A Sense of Direction
Final Draft of Essay II Due

A24- April 16: Revision/Workshop Day

Study Day: April 18

April 19: Global Lens Exams and Study Day

Casablanca: April 20-24

A25: A Day Finals

April 29: Arrive in Southampton

FIELD WORK
Field lab attendance is mandatory for all students enrolled in this course. Please do not book individual travel plans or a Semester at Sea sponsored trip on the day of your field lab.

#1: Crafting from Chaos
Shanghai, China

Marketplaces—whether tidy or chaotic, dusty or gleaming—are prime portholes into foreign cultures. At the marketplace, the writer can play anthropologist, observing the convergence of peoples and rituals of interaction. But the writer’s main challenge is to describe. Specific sensory detail is the essence, and for this reason, our field lab activities put a strong emphasis on note-taking: how to bring keen and constant attention to the many dimensions of a crowded scene.

Writers will spend the day navigating the Tongchuan Lu market in Shanghai. Each writer’s primary task is lend close attention to external stimuli, observing not only the array of detail in the marketplace, but the sensations and stirrings in themselves, as this, too, is story material. Partway through their reporting journeys, each student will pause and evaluate their gathered material to identify themes and further focus their reportage for the remainder of the field lab excursion.
Academic Objectives:
Students will learn best practices as note-takers and strengthen their observational powers.
Students will challenge their notions of specificity, pushing all descriptions further in the direction of the specific.
Students will practice honing their focus and identifying themes and potential narrative pathways.
Students will write with immediacy, turning their raw material into narrative.

#2: Crafting from Chaos
Country: Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Marketplaces—whether tidy or chaotic, dusty or gleaming—are prime portholes into foreign cultures. At the market place, the writer can play anthropologist, observing the convergence of peoples and rituals of interaction. But the writer’s main challenge is to describe. Specific sensory detail is the essence, and for this reason, our field lab activities put a strong emphasis on note-taking: how to bring keen and constant attention to the many dimensions of a crowded scene.

Writers will spend the day navigating a market. Each writer’s primary task is lend attention to external stimuli, observing not only the array of detail in the marketplace, but the sensations and stirrings in the writer, as this, too, is story material. Partway through their reporting journeys, each student will pause and evaluate their gathered material to identify themes and further focus their reportage for the remainder of the field lab excursion.

Academic Objectives:
Students will learn best practices as note-takers and strengthen their observational powers.
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Students will write with immediacy, turning their raw material into narrative.

Field Lab Requirements/Grading

Students will rely upon their notes to write a 1250-1500 word personal travel essay about their experience. Notes will also be handed in. The essay will be workshopped and peer reviewed prior to being submitted in final draft. This assignment counts for 30% of your final grade.

Other field assignments along the voyage will include 10, 1 page (single-spaced) vignettes that together will compose a travel journal suitable for an audience. The vignettes will derive from your own personal, travel journals. There will be vignettes due for 8 ports and 1 for the ship. 1 additional vignette is required. As well, up to 2 alternate vignettes may be submitted, about whatever excites and inspires you to write (an incident, a moment, an event, a person, an encounter). Vignettes do not need to follow a traditional personal essay format, but they do need to be clearly, coherently and intelligently written, exploring meaningful material. Vignettes will be
shared with the class, for reflection and critique both immediately following ports, but also in dedicated workshops. Each vignette is worth 2% of your final grade.

Your second essay will be an expansion of one of your vignettes into a longer piece of 1250-1500 words.

METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING RUBRIC

Field Lab Assignment, Essay 1 (1250-1500 words): 30%
Essay 2, expanded vignette (1250-1500 words): 30%
10 Field Assignment vignettes (1 single-spaced page each, max. 500 words): 20%
Reading Quizzes: 10% (very basic quizzes designed to verify your completion of readings)
Other Participation (including in-class discussion and exercises, workshop participation): 10%

RESERVE LIBRARY LIST

AUTHOR: Mary Morris
TITLE: Maiden Voyages
PUBLISHER: Vintage
ISBN #: 0679740309
DATE/EDITION: 1993

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Film: Jiro Dreams of Sushi

HONOR CODE

Semester at Sea students enroll in an academic program administered by the University of Virginia, and thus bind themselves to the University’s honor code. The code prohibits all acts of lying, cheating, and stealing. Please consult the Voyager’s Handbook for further explanation of what constitutes an honor offense.

Each written assignment for this course must be pledged by the student as follows: “On my honor as a student, I pledge that I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment.” The pledge must be signed, or, in the case of an electronic file, signed “[signed].”