

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

University of Virginia, Academic Sponsor

Voyage: Spring 2015

Discipline: English Writing

ENWR 1559-502: Travel Writing (Section 2)

Division: Lower

Faculty Name: Colleen Kinder

Meeting Day: A

Meeting Time: 9:25 - 10:40

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, Leslie Jamison, Alain de Botton, 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: Alain de Botton

TITLE: *The Art of Travel*

PUBLISHER: Vintage

ISBN: 0375725342

DATE/EDITION: May 11, 2004

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

A1- January 9: Welcome + Syllabus Review

A2-January 11: Introduction to Travel Writing

Paul Theroux, "Five Travel Epiphanies" (workbook, p. 9, "Microessays)

Dorothy Allison, "Place," *The Writer's Notebook*

"The Fool" (workbook, p.5)

A3- January 13: Confronting Cliche

"How Not to Write About Africa," Binyavanga Wainaina, *Granta*

Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, "Departure: I. On Anticipation"

"Confronting Cliche (workbook, p. 11)

*Ship Vignette Due

HILO: January 14

A4-January 16: Encounters

William Least Heat Moon, "Nameless, Tennessee," *Blue Highways*

Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, "Departure: II. On Traveling Places"

Barbara Kingsolver, Japan vignette (workbook, p. 10)

*Hilo Vignette Due

A5-January 19: The Journey's Motives

John Jeremiah Sullivan, "Upon this Rock" (workbook, p. 37)

Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, "Motives: III. On the Exotic"

STUDY DAY: January 21

A6- January 22: Hallowed Ground: The Travel Memoir

Joan Didion, "Goodbye to All That"

"Models: Autobiography of a Traveler"

Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, "Motives: IV. "On Curiosity"

A7-January 24: Enigmas: Traveler as Detective

Leslie Jamison, "La Frontera," *Vice*

"Models: Writer as Anthropologist" (workbook, p. 54)

YOKOHAMA: January 26-27

IN TRANSIT January 28

KOBE: January 29-31

A8- February 1: Field Lap Prep

"Lists" (Workbook, p. 19)

*Japan Vignette Due

SHANGHAI: February 3-4

IN TRANSIT: February 5-6

HONG KONG: February 7-8

A9- February 9: Placelessness

David Foster Wallace, "Shipping Out," *Harpers*

"Models: Absence as Presence" (workbook, p. 53)

*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 (workbook, p. 43)

*Final Draft China Essay Due

RANGOON: February 24-March 1

A12-March 2: Features

Chris Collin, "Mystery Train" *AFAR*

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*

"Tasting Place" (workbook, p. 17)

COCHIN: March 6-11

Study Day: March 12

A14--March 13: Portrait of a City

Jan Morris, "Over the Bridge," *Journeys*

E.B. White, excerpt from "Here is New York" (workbook, p.32)

Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, "Landscape: V. On the Country & the City"

*India Vignette Due

A15-March 15: On Street Level: Urban Walkers

"Motion" (workbook, p.33)

"Models: Pageantry of the Street": Mary McCarthy, Colson Whitehead, Ian Frazier (workbook, p. 20)

Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, "Landscape: VI. On the Sublime"

STUDY DAY: March 17

PORT LOUIS: March 18

A16- March 19: Powers of Description

Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, "Art: VII. On Eye-Opening Art."

"Models: Description, Extremes, Scale" (workbook, p.25, 27, 28)

*Mauritius Vignette Due

A17-March 21: Workshop I Day

A18- March 23: Reckonings with Paradise

Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, "Art. VIII. On Possessing Beauty."

Geoff Dyer, "Miss Cambodia," *Yoga for People Who Can't be Bothered to Do It*

"Models: Writing Bliss" (workbook, p. 52))

CAPE TOWN: March 25-30

Study Day: March 31

A19-April 1: Sea Stories

DH Lawrence, excerpt from *Sea and Sardinia*

Laurence Durrell, "A Landmark Gone," *Spirit of Place*

"Models: Approaches" (workbook, p.31)

*South Africa Vignette Due

A20-April 3: Workshop II

A21- April 5: Breaking Form

John McPhee, "The Search for Marvin Gardens" *The New Yorker*

Jess Walter, "A Statistical Abstract for My Hometown, Spokane, Washington" *McSweeney's*

"Letter to a Stranger," Lavinia Spalding" (workbook, p.56)

WALVIS BAY: March 2-6

A22-April 12: Playing with Form

Jonathan Stern, "The Lonely Planet Guide to My Apartment," *The New Yorker* (online)

Rolf Potts, "The Art of Writing a Story About Walking Across Andorra," Worldhum

Margaret Atwood, "England: A Field Guide," *The Armchair Traveler*

*Namibia Vignette Due

A23--April 14: Reentry

Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*, "Return: IX. On Habit"

Pico Iyer, "LAX"

"The Journey's End" (workbook, p. 59)

*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 18-22

A25---April 25: 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.

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 towards the specific.

Students will practice honing their focus and identifying themes and narrative pathways.

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. Additionally 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 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.