

SEMESTER AT SEA COURSE SYLLABUS

Voyage: Spring 2014

Discipline: English Writing

ENWR 2559-502: Travel Writing (Section 2)

Division: Lower

Faculty Name: Natalie Bakopoulos

Pre-requisites: An introductory composition course. Some advanced essay writing/creative nonfiction experience helpful but not necessary.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

“When something human is recorded, good travel writing happens” ---Paul Theroux

In this course we will examine various types of travel writing, both classic and contemporary, and the way in which writers interact with and engage with the places they visit. Students will keep an informal, daily travel journal as well as write two formal essays about a particular place. Pico Iyer has famously described travel writing as love story: He describes the way he, after a trip, would lie in his bed and play back his travel memories, looking through photos and reading diary entries: “Anyone witnessing this strange scene,” he writes, “would have drawn the right conclusion: I was in love.” We will examine the ways in which travel writing is a sort of love story. But whether the story is happy or tragic, wistful or comedic, all involve some sort of search, journey, or quest and both an emotional and physical distance traveled. Just like being in love: after, we are never the same. We will examine the ways in which travel writing---both of published authors and the writing we will produce in this course---is also often prone to nostalgic impulse, the romantic foreign gaze, and, as is often the case with more contemporary writers, an acute self-awareness about this nostalgia. In this course we will open our minds and rattle our senses.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To gain an understanding of the genre of “travel writing”
2. To produce complex, analytical, and artful travel essays of various lengths
3. To gain insight into what it means to look at a place from an outsider’s gaze, whether naive or informed
4. To analyze the ways in which travel writers use various strategies to articulate their experiences
5. To hone skills at critical self-assessment and reflection on the process of writing.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

The Best American Travel Writing **2011**, Edited by Sloane Crosley, Series Editor Jason Wilson, Houghton Mifflin, ISBN 9780547333366

The Best American Travel Writing **2012**, Edited by William Vollerman, Series Editor Jason Wilson, Houghton Mifflin, ISBN 9780547808970

TOPICAL OUTLINE OF COURSE

A1- January 16: Introduction to Travel Writing

Reflection and discussion on several quotations about travel from various writers. These will be returned to throughout the semester.

When I'm in a foreign country, I do things that I would never dare to do in my own country, because everything seems like fiction. ---Edouard Levé, *Autoportrait*

We travel, initially, to lose ourselves; and we travel, next, to find ourselves. We travel to open our hearts and eyes and learn more about the world than our newspapers will accommodate. We travel to bring what little we can, in our ignorance and knowledge, to those parts of the globe whose riches are differently dispersed. And we travel, in essence, to become young fools again — to slow time down and get taken in, and fall in love once more.
---Pico Iyer, "Why We Travel"

"I haven't been everywhere, but it's on my list" ---Susan Sontag

Travel is not about finding something. It's about getting lost -- that is, it is about losing yourself in a place and a moment. The little things that tether you to what's familiar are gone, and you become a conduit through which the sensation of the place is felt." -- Susan Orlean

Think of the long trip home.
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
Where should we be today?
Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
in this strangest of theatres?
----Elizabeth Bishop, "Questions of Travel"

At no time are we ever in such complete possession of a journey, down to its last nook and cranny, as when we are busy with preparations for it. After that, there remains only the journey itself, which is nothing but the process through which we lose our ownership of it. This is what makes travel so utterly fruitless.

—Yukio Mishima, 1948

B1- January 13: Toward a Definition of Travel Writing

What is travel writing? What might good travel writing do?

B2 – January 15: The Imaginative and Foreign Gaze: Sentimentality, Preconceived Notions, and Pitfalls

January 17: Hilo

B3- January 18: The Imaginative Gaze (Cont.)

B4- January 21: Developing a Persona

Philip Lopate, "On the Necessity of Turning Oneself into a Character"

B5- January 23: Isolation in the Metropolis

Lost in Translation (film)

B6—January 26: Short assignment 1: After watching the film, take one or more of the quotes on travel presented on the first day of class and use it as a lens to examine the film. (In class)

B7: January 28:

January 29 to February 3: Yokohama, Transit, Kobe

B8- February 5:

Brainstorming for essay 1

February 6-11: Shanghai, Transit, Hong Kong

B9- February 13:

Essay 1 due, first draft. Revision Strategies.

February 14-20: Ho Chi Minh City

B10- February 21:

Workshop

February 22-23: Singapore

February 25: Study Day

B11- February 26: Essay 1 Final draft due in class.

February 27 to March 4: Rangoon

B12- March 6: Reading to be determined.

B13- March 9: Reading to be determined.

March 9-14: Cochin, India

B14- March 16: Braiding an essay

Monday, March 17: Study Day

B15- March 21: Field Experience Assignment Due

March 21: Port Louis

B16- March 22: Notes from the Sea---The Epistolary Travel Narrative

B17- March 24: Notes from the Sea---The Epistolary Travel Narrative (2)

Tuesday, March 25: Study Day

B18- March 27: TBD

March 30-April 4: Cape Town

B19- April 4: Interlude: Playing with Style and Structure

Michele Morano: "Grammar Lessons"

B20- April 6: Brainstorming for Essay 2

B21- April 9: Essay 2 due, first draft

April 10-15: Tema and Takoradi, Ghana

B22- April 16

Workshop

B23- April 18: Revision Day

B 24- April 21

Final Draft of Essay 2 due

Reading Performance: Greatest Hits

April 23-27: Casablanca

Section 2: Casablanca, April 23

Acts of Translation

“Narration is an act of translation: we aren’t recording an experience, we’re translating it.” (Peter Turchi, “You and I Know, Order is Everything”). For this exercise, taking place in the last of our series of stops, students will explore the open-air market and then write about their experience. As we will have been discussing through the semester, as Paul Theroux has famously said: “When something human is recorded, good travel writing happens.” Students will be asked to produce a piece that is not necessarily a recording of the situation, but of the story. That is, to somehow use the experience in the market to illuminate and interrogate an emotional response and to somehow present the experience as a microcosm of a larger concern.

The only stipulation here is that students don’t simply record their experience as a series of events: (“first we visited a stall selling spices, and then we found a man who made instruments”) but instead to use the experience as scaffolding to capture something greater about their Moroccan experience, whether it has to do with someone they met, something they discussed, or the general feelings and insights that arose from the experience.

B 25- April 29: Field Lab Assignment Due.

May 2: Arrive in Southampton

FIELD WORK

FIELD LAB (*At least 20 percent of the contact hours for each course, to be led by the instructor.*)

ENWR 2559-502, Section 2: Casablanca

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FIELD ASSIGNMENTS

Unlike the two formal essays that you will produce for this class, you will compose your Field Experience responses as informal letters from three of the ports that we visit.

- (1) You will be required to write a brief response for each Field Experience.
- (2) Each response will be one page, single-spaced. This is an exercise in editing: no more, no less.
- (3) Each response will be in the form of a letter, a “Dispatch From...”

METHODS OF EVALUATION / GRADING RUBRIC

Grades

This is an advanced essay writing class. The expectations are high, and so are the grading standards. Grades must have meaning; they are *measures*, not *rewards*. The University has high standards, and it is my job to uphold them. Plain and simple: to earn an A, you must do *consistently exceptional* work. You must also have your first drafts completed on time, and you must participate in all the peer workshops.

The grading breakdown is as follows:

Essay 1: 20%

Essay 2: 20%

Short Assignments (in-class exercises, field experiences, peer critiques, etc.): 30%

Field Lab: 20%

Participation: 10%

Grading scale:

94.0–100	A	74.0–76.9	C
90.0–93.9	A-	70.0–73.9	C-
87.0–89.9	B+	67.0–69.9	D+
84.0–86.9	B	64.0–66.9	D
80.0–83.9	B-	60.0–63.9	D-
77.0–79.9	C+	0–59.9	E

Grading Criteria

“A” RANGE:

This writing is original, intelligent, and insightful. The paper moves beyond the bounds of the assignment, surprising the reader and compelling him or her to consider the topic in a new light. It shows the reader a “New Way of Seeing.” Hard work is in evidence, as well as skillful use of the craft elements we have studied. Such a paper is lucid, elegantly written, and error free. An “A” paper takes intellectual risks: the analysis is rigorous, the reflection is thoughtful, the topic is challenging, and the treatment of the subject matter is thorough and discerning.

“B” RANGE:

This writing is interesting and intelligent. “B” work is solid and strong but not exceptional. Organization and depth of analysis characterize a paper in this range. There are smooth transitions and good narrative movement. The piece makes a worthwhile point about the topic and is thoughtful in its execution. Good work is in evidence, as well as an honest attempt to employ the different elements of craft that we have studied. There may be a handful of rough spots in the writing, but there are no serious errors. A “B” paper does not take the risks or surprise the reader with insight to the extent that an “A” paper does, but it nevertheless constitutes a substantial achievement.

“C” RANGE:

This writing is competent. It fulfills the minimum requirements of the assignment. A “C” paper demonstrates an understanding of the material, but is weakened by problems with awkward expression or execution. Similarly, it may be fairly well written, but miss a number of significant points in its interpretation or lack close examination. The paper’s analysis is therefore superficial, simplistic, or flawed. Transitions are awkward, scenes or sites of introspection are rushed, and the prose is weak. Consistent grammatical errors will tend to put a paper in this range regardless of how compelling or intelligent the writer’s ideas are. Similarly, an absence of significance can keep a paper in the “C” range even if it is well written. Work that doesn’t meet the minimum page requirements will automatically receive a “C” at best.

“D” RANGE:

This writing is unoriginal and/or confusing. It attempts to address a particular subject, but it lacks a

central question or goal. In other words, the paper doesn't have a point. Or, if it *does* have a point, the author fails to synthesize the material and draw out the *significance* of his or her analysis in a meaningful way. Every piece of writing needs to answer the "SO WHAT?" question or it will risk falling into this grade range. Lacking organization and structure, A "D" paper will be very hard to follow in places and will be marred by awkward writing. Or it will meander and detour from the primary topic or themes. The writer may also have a basic misunderstanding of the subject matter at hand. Consistent grammatical or stylistic errors may also keep a paper in this range, as will failing to meet the minimum page requirements.

"E" RANGE:

I only give this grade if the paper demonstrates virtually no effort to engage seriously with the relevant subject matter or material. If a paper is plagiarized to any extent, incomplete, or more than a week late, it will automatically earn an "E." If it is marred by so many errors in mechanics, spelling, or diction that it is unreadable, or if it indicates a careless attitude to the material at hand, it may also receive an "E." If I do not receive all the course assignments from you by the end of the term, you will receive an "E" for the course.

First and Final Drafts and Late Papers

Students may interpret the concept of a "first draft" in different ways, so I want to be clear about my expectations. In this class, a first draft is a *complete* draft of an essay that has been spell checked and proofread and that meets the **minimum page requirements** (An eight-page minimum means at least eight complete pages) and parameters of the assignment. I don't grade rough drafts, but if you turn in an incomplete draft to be workshopped, you will lose points from the paper's final grade. In addition, for each day the rough draft is late, you will lose three points from the paper's final grade; the same goes for late final papers. If you are not prepared with the correct amount of copies for your group, it is your responsibility to see that your group receives your paper. If you are not in class the day a draft is due, it is up to you to make arrangements to ensure that your group will receive your essay. Failure to do so may mean that your lose your workshop time, and this will also affect your grade.

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]."