

**8N: 130:03 Forms of Non-Fiction: Reading and Writing Travel Essays
M and W 11:30-12:20 in 218 EPB**

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"You don't necessarily have to go far to achieve something memorable. You just have to be able to see things in a different way." (Bill Bryson)

Pack your gear and get out your passports for a vicarious trip around the world! Just as many excursions feature a balance of sightseeing and recreation, of museums and restaurants, of mountains and beaches, balance will structure our journey also. The course will feature:

- a balance of reading about others' travel experiences and writing about your own;
- a balance of reading travel essays and travel books;
- a balance of writing critical responses to the work of professional and student writers and creating your own work;
- a balance of writing short, informal and long, formal pieces, the former creating material for the latter;
- a balance of attention to theme and to form (types of essays, sentences and literary and rhetorical devices and techniques);
- a balance of action and reflection narratives
- a balance of attention to writing processes and to written products; and
- a balance of American perspectives on "foreign" places and people vs. foreigners' perspectives on Americans and the U.S. All Aboard! (or is that All Abroad!)

Goals of the Course:

- 1) To teach you to read, analyze, evaluate, and write literary travel essays;
- 2) To cultivate a sensitivity to the forms, strategies, and techniques that make certain essays compelling;
- 3) To armchair-travel to places many of us may never see and to learn more about them; to become more "worldly" and less ethnocentric;
- 4) To understand how the lenses of culture, class, ideology, language, religion, race, and gender affect observations while traveling and while writing and reading about travel; to see and evaluate ourselves and the U.S. through the eyes of different cultures;
- 5) To understand the politics, economics, ethics, and ecology of both travel/tourism and travel writing

Texts: Available at Prairie Lights Bookstore, 15 South Dubuque, in the Textbook Room in the back of the store.

Bryson, Bill, editor. *The Best American Travel Writing, 2000*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Mayes, Frances. *Under the Tuscan Sun: At Home in Italy*. NY: Broadway Books, 1996.

Salzman, Mark. *Iron and Silk*. NY: Random House, 1986.

Severgnini, Beppe. *Ciao, America! An Italian Discovers the U.S.* Broadway Books, 2002.

Handouts from other anthologies, books, and magazines: *The Best American Travel Writing 2001*; *They Went: The Art and Craft of Travel Writing*; *Land Without Ghosts: Chinese Impressions of America from Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present*; *Motionsickness: The Other Side of Travel*; Bill Bryson's *I'm A Stranger Here Myself*; Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*.

Assignments and Grading:

- 1) Journal Section of Portfolio: 45%, In-class and out-of-class analytical (20%) and creative (20%) responses and travel notes (5%)
- 2) Travel Essay #1: 20%, polished draft due March 3, final draft due March 12
- 3) Travel Essay #2: 20%, polished draft due April 28, final draft due May 12
- 4) Participation: 10%, insights communicated to the class about the readings and responsiveness to classmates' contributions, thoughtfulness and care of workshopping comments
- 5) Completeness and Organization of Portfolio (see Below) 5%

Your Travel Writing Portfolio

- 1) All written homework assignments must be typed on 8 _ by 11 paper, double-spaced, edited, proofread, and handed in the day they are due. Except when indicated for creative assignments (marked with *), each response should be approximately one page long in 11 or 12 point font. When these assignments are returned, use a three-hole punch and place them in a one-inch binder with pockets--your Portfolio.
- 2) Include looseleaf paper in the Journal section of your Portfolio for in-class writing, class notes, and notes about the readings.
- 3) Punch and include polished and final drafts of for both your travel essays. Final drafts of your travel essays should be 5-7 pages long, titled (no title sheet is necessary), double-spaced, and in 11 or 12 point font. Also, include your classmates' workshopping sheets and xeroxed copies of the workshopping sheets you gave to your fellow workshopers.
- 4) **A small notebook** (approximately 4 by 6 inches) with your travel notes recording your observations on trips can go in front back pocket of the binder/portfolio. You should have a minimum of 2 entries and 5 pages filled. Handouts and the syllabus can either be punched and bound or placed in the back binder pocket.
- 5) Use dividers to label and separate sections of your portfolio: **1) Reading Responses, 2) Creative Responses, 3) Class Notes, In-Class Writing, and Reading Notes, 4) Essay #1 materials, and 5) Essay #2 materials.**
- 5) Portfolios will be collected and evaluated twice, once at midterm and once during finals week.

Your Two Travel Essays

You don't have to be a world traveler to write travel essays. Travel experiences include all those in which place was significant, and where encounters with difference defined the experience and changed one's sense of the necessary, normal, or expected. In these senses, we've all traveled.

Here are some common features of the travel essays you'll write: (not all essays contain all features)

- 1) A focus on place, its physical features, people, and customs. Through description and use of selected details, the writer attempts to make North English (IA), North Dakota, or the North Pole come alive for the reader.
- 2) A focus on the people who are somehow emblematic of the place and how they interact with, see, and are seen by the writer.
- 3) A focus on social, cultural, ethical, or political issues. The writer uses place to explore an important idea and to explore himself.
- 4) A focus on change in the writer's perspective, reflection on and an understanding of the travel experience.
- 5) A focus on plot or story, the creation of suspense in an adventure narrative.

Your two essays can explore two different aspects of the same place or set of experiences or two different places. Both essays will receive feedback from classmates and me and go through several revisions.

Attendance and Deadlines

You are expected to be present at and prepared for all classes. More than 3 absences may affect your grade. If you absolutely can't come to class due to illness or other emergency, please e-mail me for a course update and the assignment for the next class. If you are more than 10 minutes late for a class, you'll be marked absent. All assignments, papers, and workshopping sheets must be received the day they are due or they could lose from a half to a whole grade. Study the syllabus and due dates so you can read and write ahead when you have more time. For example, you could get started on your Encounter or Adventure stories weeks ahead of time. And during Spring Break you might be able to read *Iron and Silk* and *Ciao America* and get started on Essay #2.

Workshopping and Other Feedback

Because this is a 3-credit class that meets only 2 hours a week, and because writers work at different paces, you will meet with your assigned workshopping group outside of class. It is your responsibility to arrange these meetings (their location, number, and frequency is up to you, but you must meet in person **at least once for each essay**), to provide thoughtful, constructive feedback to your two workshop members that they can use to revise their essays, and to obtain thoughtful, useful feedback from them by the deadlines on the syllabus: Feb 26 for the first essay, April 23 for the second. Feel free to request a meeting with me to get feedback at any stage of your writing process. You're also encouraged to use one of our Writing Center programs: Enrollment, Appointment, or E-mail Tutoring. See www.uiowa.edu/~writingc

Complaints: If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the course, please e-mail me to arrange to talk about it. If after we talk, you are still dissatisfied, you may contact the 8N course supervisor Bonnie Sunstein at Bonnie-Sunstein@uiowa.edu 335-5607

Disabilities: If you have a disability that will affect performance in this course and need accommodations, please see me the first week of class.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1

Wednesday, Jan. 22: Introduction of the Course and each other; Commercial vs. literary travel writing

Homework for Monday, Jan 27:

Pico Iyer, "Why We Travel" (Handout, from *Best Travel Writing, 2001*)

Which of Iyer's reasons for traveling resonate with you? Why? For what other philosophical reasons that Iyer didn't mention do you travel? List and label three stylistic devices Iyer uses and a few examples of each.

*On the Writing Center web site www.uiowa.edu/~writingc/ under Invitations, What do I see?, choose one of the **places** and describe it according to the options listed (minimum _ page)
Read over syllabus carefully and bring questions.

Week 2

Monday, Jan 27: Why We Travel; sharing of place writings

Homework for Wednesday, Jan 29:

Jason Wilson, Forward, and Bill Bryson, Introduction to *Best Travel Writing, 2000*

Jason Wilson, Foreward, and Paul Theroux, Introduction to *Best Travel Writing, 2001* (Handout)

From these readings, make two bulleted list of desirable and undesirable features (do's and don't's?) to consider when evaluating or writing literary travel essays

*On the Writing Center web site, under Invitations, What do I see? choose one of the **people** and describe him/her according to the options (minimum _ page)

Wednesday, Jan 29: Desirable Features of Travel Writing

Homework for Monday, Feb 3:

Alden Jones, "Lard is Good for You" (2000)

Take notes, no journal entry: Which features of this essay appeal to you and why? (i.e. characterizations, themes, dialogue, persona of author, particular descriptions)

*Write a dialogue that took place or might have taken place between your Traveler and your Tourist during one of your journeys. We'll share some of these in class. (1-2 pages)

Week 3

Monday, Feb 3: Tape of Jones reading her essay; appealing features; dialogue sharing

Homework for Wednesday, Feb 5.

Bill Buford, "Lions and Tigers and Bears" (2000)

How does Buford use past and recent history of Central Park throughout his narrative? How does he create suspense?

*On the Writing Center web site, under Invitations, What do I see? choose one of the **scenes** and describe it according to the options listed. (minimum _ page)

Wednesday, Feb. 5.

Taped selections of Buford's essay

Dialogue sharing, continued

Homework for Monday, Feb 10

Dave Eggers, "Hitchhiker's Cuba" (2000)

Take notes, no journal entry: How does Eggers portray the Cuban hitchhikers? What do you think of the various portrayals? How does he portray himself as an American? How serious or satirical is he? How does his portrayal of himself and his role in relation to Latin Americans compare and contrast with Jones's?

*Describe the scene of an encounter between yourself and members of another culture (1-2 pages). Include dialogue.

Week 4

Monday, Feb. 10

Taped Selections from Eggers's essay; discussion of travelers' vantage points, personae, and relationship to host country and people

Homework for Wednesday, Feb 12.

.P.J. O'Rourke, "Weird Karma" (2000) How does O'Rourke use comparisons with U.S. culture to help us understand his travel experiences in India? Which of these comparisons work best for you and why? Which of O'Rourke's jokes work for you and which fall flat?

Read Carol's essay draft "Vacation Photo" and annotate places and aspects that can be improved

Wednesday, Feb 12

Taped Excerpt of Weird Karma; Discussion of comparisons and characterizations
Workshop Carol's draft; continued discussion comparing vantage points

Homework for Monday, Feb 17

Symmes, "From the People Who Brought You 'The Killing Fields'" (2000)

Kapucinski, "The Truck" (2000)

Take notes for discussion (no journal entry): Why does each man put himself in such danger? Compare and contrast their motivation and their relationships to and portrayals of the country's inhabitants.

*Write a draft of the story or part of the story of one of your own adventures (up to 3 pages)

Week 5

Monday, Feb 17

Taped excerpts from Symmes

Discussion of adventure travel and travel writing; sharing of adventures

Homework for Wed, Feb. 19

Judy Copeland's essay, "Guided Drifting"

Comment on Copeland's essay in relation to themes and issues discussed so far. Prepare a list of questions to ask her

Wednesday, Feb 19

Judy Copeland's visit

Homework for Monday, Feb 24.

Ruskin, "Winter Rules" (2000)

Tourtellot, "The Two Faces of Tourism" (2000)

How does development change the culture of a country and its people? How does development change tourism? How does it change the landscape and the environment? Compare these two author's vantage points and relationships with the country and its people. How have you participated or not in ecologically sound tourism?

Week 6

Monday, Feb 24

Taped excerpts from Ruskin

Discussion of Development issues

Homework for Wed, Feb 26

Read Marilyn Abildskov's essays "The Occurrence" and "One Blue Note" in light of themes and issues discussed; prepare a list of questions for her.

Make sure you have given feedback on two drafts of your group members and received feedback from them on your own draft.

Wednesday, Feb 26 WORKSHOPPING SHEETS DUE TO CLASSMATES ON OR BEFORE TODAY

Marilyn Abildskov's visit

Homework for Mon, March 3

Jamaica Kincaid's "A Small Place" (Handout)

Work on revising and polishing drafts

Week 7**Monday, March 3 DRAFTS OF ESSAY #1 With Workshopping Sheets DUE**

Discussion of Kincaid's view of tourists and colonialism

Homework for Wed, March 5

Finkel, "A Desperate Passage" (Handout from 2001)

How does Finkel's essay change the conception of travel; what is your view of Finkel's ethics as a journalist? Compare the Haitians' escape in Finkel's essay to the tourist's escape in Kincaid's.

Wednesday, March 5

Different conceptions of escape

Today through Friday—RETURN OF DRAFTS WITH MY COMMENTS, Optional Conferences

Homework for Mon, March 10

Selections from *Motionsickness* Magazine

What are the economic foundations of travel and travel writing? What are the facets of the dark side of travel and travel writing?

Week 8**Monday, March 10**

The Dark Side of Travel and Travel Writing

Homework for Wednesday, March 12

Finish revising Essay #1, Prepare Journals to hand in

Wednesday, March 12 PORTFOLIOS DUE WITH FINAL DRAFT OF ESSAY #1 and**workshopping sheets.** Include a paragraph or two about how and why you used or didn't use feedback and suggestions from your fellow workshoppers and the teacher.

Excerpts from film "Cannibal Tours"

Homework for March 24

Iron and Silk 1-79

How would you characterize Salzman's style of story-telling? How does he portray the Chinese teachers, doctors, and students? How does he portray China? How does he portray himself?

Spring Break—Week 9: Have a Good Trip (and Remember to Take Notes)**Week 10****Monday, March 24, Salzman, Spring Break Trip Stories**

Homework for Wed.

Iron and Silk, 81-158

Which is your favorite titled section so far and why?

Wednesday, March 26, Salzman, Spring Break Trip Stories, Continued

Homework for Mon.

Iron and Silk, 158-211

*Write a cultural encounter scene/describe a moment that is colored by a special interest of yours such as Salzman's interest in martial arts, calligraphy, drawing, or music.

Week 11

Monday, March 31, Salzman

Homework for Wed

Salzman, "Peopling the Landscape" (Handout from *They Went*)

What surprised you about Salzman's description of his motivation for and process of writing *Iron and Silk*?

Wednesday, April 2, Salzman

Excerpts from film *Iron and Silk*

Homework for Mon.

Selections from *Land Without Ghosts* (handouts)

Describe these two Chinese scholars' reactions to facets of U.S. landscape and culture. How do you react to their observations?

Write a proposal for your topic for Essay #2

Week 12

Monday, April 7

Chinese views of the U.S.

Sharing of Essay #2 Topics

Homework for Wed.

Selections from Bryson, *I'm A Stranger Here Myself*

What are the elements of Bryson's writing that make it effective and humorous?

Wednesday, April 9, Bryson

Homework for Mon

Severgnini, *Ciao America*, Chapters April through September

Which of Severngini's gentle criticisms of Americans do you share and why? Where does he also criticize Italians?

Week 13

Monday, April 14, Severgnini

Homework for Wed.

Chapters October through March

Question TBA

Wednesday, April 16. Severgnini

Homework for Monday

Frances Mayes, *Under the Tuscan Sun*, 1-61

*Describe an ethnic meal you've either prepared or eaten in a restaurant in ways that make readers' mouths water.

Week 14

Monday, April 21—Sun

Homework for Monday
Sun 62-182
 Question TBA

Wednesday, April 23—NO CLASS—GIVE AND RECEIVE FEEDBACK FROM WORKSHOP GROUP ON OR BEFORE THIS DATE

Week 15

Monday, April 28—DRAFT OF ESSAY #2 DUE IN CLASS
Sun

Homework for Wed
Sun 183-239
 Question TBA

Wednesday, April 30, *Sun*
 Homework for Mon
Sun, 239-285
 Question TBA

Week 16

Monday, May 5 ESSAY #2 DRAFTS RETURNED WITH COMMENTS/optional conferences
 Wrap up of *Sun*
 Readings from Drafts

Homework for Wednesday, May 7
 Work on revising drafts

Wednesday, May 7
 Readings from Essay #2 Continued
 Class Evaluations

Homework: Finish Revising Essay #2 and Prepare Portfolio

Complete Portfolio, including Final Draft of Essay #2, workshopping sheets, and a paragraph about how and why you used or didn't use feedback and suggestions from your classmates and me, due **Monday, May 12 by 4:30 in 168 EPB.** (If for some reason I'm not there, the women across the hall in the Rhetoric office, 169 EPB, will put your portfolio on my desk)

