Travel Writing

WRTG 3020, sections 088 and 096

Instructor: Juliet Wittman

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30 to 3 p.m. and by appointment, Environmental Design Building (ENVD), 1850E (lower level), (303) 735-4788, jwitts@aol.com

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot, Little Gidding, The Four Quartets.

Course description:

Travel writing takes many forms: journalistic, literary, spiritual, philosophical, psychological, anthropological, consumer-oriented or purely entertaining. Writers stride the Himalayan peaks; thread through a maze of city streets; spend long periods of time in an alien culture, whether living with a hunter-gatherer tribe in Africa, following the trail of illegal immigrants in the United States, or examining cuisine in Paris. They laze on tropical beaches; trace the footsteps of Judas in Palestine; travel to sites of violence or natural disaster to report back; seek out vanishing species, rare orchids or herbal cures; find a foreign lover; or just re-discover their own backyards. There are also many who travel unwillingly: political exiles, immigrants driven from their homes by violence or hunger, and profound books and essays have been written by these inadvertent travelers.

It is a cliche—but an absolutely true one—that travel expands our horizons, introduces us to new realities, makes us question the familiar and helps us more deeply understand the human condition.

I think of the concept of travel as swinging between two polarities. First, there is the idea of home and that of away/not home. We will begin this class by discussing what we think the word home means, and the experience of being displaced, feeling lost and made uncomfortable, having all your customary certainties questioned. From there, we will move on to ideas about discovery and adventure, both in the traveler’s experience of new places and cultures, and in your own exploration of the possibilities of writing, the forms it takes, and the multi-modal means of expression now available to us.

The second polarity: We travel to discover ourselves and also to lose ourselves. We want our ideas and prejudices affirmed, and we also want to subsume our own small lives in
realities that are far bigger and more resonant. The paradox is that the more deeply we immerse ourselves in our travels, the better we understand our nation and our home, and the more deeply we become ourselves. This class ends as it began, at home.

CCHE Criteria

**Rhetorical knowledge:** We will emphasize critical reading, undertaking a close analysis of assigned texts, and considering in each case the writer’s purpose, persuasive tactics, and intended audience, as well as the overall context in which he or she is writing.

**Writing process:** Writing is a continually recursive process. Often we discover what we think about a particular issue or topic only through the process of putting our thoughts on paper. As the ideas become clearer and more focused, it becomes necessary to re-work what has already been written.

This class follows a workshop format, and you will be expected to re-write every paper assigned at last once, and in some cases several times. Your writing will be critiqued and discussed by your fellow students as well as by me; you will give a presentation to help you shape your material and devise the best and most persuasive way of organizing and communicating your ideas. Through this presentation you will also be able to analyze the differences between written and oral communication in terms of both content and audience, and the varying strengths, weaknesses and uses of both modes.

You will be encouraged to analyze your own arguments and those in the written materials assigned for logic, coherence and persuasiveness. You will brush up on your research techniques, and will evaluate in depth the validity and relevance of your sources.

**Writing conventions:** You will learn to devise effective communication strategies for differing audiences, including readers of newspapers, scholars in the specific discipline toward which you direct your in-depth research project (economics, anthropology, geography, literature, etc.), civic leaders, and the general public.

We will examine the conventions and vocabulary of each genre, at all times bearing in mind the needs and expectations of your specific audience.

**Texts:**

**The Art of Travel,** by Alain de Botton, Vintage.

An elegant, thoughtful, and philosophical look at why and how we travel.

**The Best American Travel Writing 2011,** edited by Sloane Crosley, Mariner

Both books are on reserve for you at Boulder Book Store, 1107 Pearl Street. Please support out local bookseller.

“**Homesick in America,**” an essay by Juliet Wittman, Water-Stone (handout)
“Why I Blog.” Andrew Sullivan: 

Other essays will be delivered to you through the semester as handouts, electronically or through Desire2Learn.

**Student writing and blogs will also serve as texts:** Your papers will be workshopped online and in class; you will need to make hard copies of your papers for distribution to your fellow students. Students will read and comment on each others’ blogs.

**Film** (shown in class):

**Daughter From Danang**

There are strong arguments in this film, but they are implied rather than stated. We’ll ferret them out and discuss them, analyze the narrative and film makers’ techniques and—most of all—discuss what this film tells us about displacement, adventuring forth, the profound meaning of the concepts of home and away, and also of self and world/not-self.

**Recommended supplemental texts:**

- The Elements of Style, Strunk and White
- On Writing Well, William Zinsser

A first-rate dictionary and a college handbook, such as The Everyday Writer, Andrea A. Lunsford

**Assignments**

**Exercises:** You will be working on exercises to increase the ease, fluidity and expressiveness of your writing throughout the semester. Some of these will be brought into class—on paper—for reading and discussion; some will be shared (somewhat strengthened and cleaned up) on your blog.

**Maintaining a blog:** Blogging exists somewhere in the space between a private journal (which doesn’t need to be polished or even particularly coherent) and a published piece. It can have a slightly unfinished quality that makes it porous and allows the reader to enter and become a part of the dialogue. This unfinished quality also allows the writer to revisit, modify or change what he or she has already written. It’s a fluid medium. But each entry should go beyond self-expression. It should be edited, re-written, generally put together with an audience in mind. Do *not* waste your reader’s time with unfinished drivel. Expect to write a couple of blog entries a week. These can be exercises I’ve assigned, new insights that have occurred to you, your thoughts and feelings about class readings or activities.
Feel free to use photographs, music, video, sketches, podcasts. These can all be part of a first-rate blog, and learning to communicate through several kinds of media is an important contemporary skill.

**Interview/profile: 4 pages**

You will interview someone with expertise on travel—a foreigner with an interesting story, a professor who has expertise on a particular country or theme, a thoughtful, frequent traveler, a lawyer specializing in international law. Your job is to describe what this person does and to transcribe his or her opinions, joys and frustrations, but also to provide a sense of this person as a human being. His or her affect, looks, speech patterns. The challenge is to utilize the kind of descriptive writing you did in your exercises and on your blog, as well as providing cold facts, data and statistics, and then to place the whole in some kind of meaningful context. As always, you should be aware of audience. The model for this paper is provided in a couple of the essays we’ll be reading, and also in the kind of interview you can find in the New York Times or other excellent publications.

**Magazine or newspaper article on travel, 3-4 pages**

Visit a place or attend an event in Colorado that is new to you: go to a ranch, farmers’ market, evening of opera, all-night coffee shop at four in the morning. Take a painting, cooking or karate class. Let yourself be surprised and immersed in something completely unfamiliar. Then write up the experience as a travel article with a specific print outlet in mind.

We’ll talk about what editors look for in a proposal (you’ll be writing one) and also in the final piece—and since publications differ, you’ll need to think hard about audience and writing style. News articles tend to be shorter, pithier, less literary, and much more consumer-oriented than essays although, like essays, they often use fictive techniques such as description, dialogue, scene setting, first-person narrative, and story telling.

**Personal travel essay, 6 to 8 pages**

Like all writing, a personal essay is a negotiation between private and public, the writer and the world, but it is a negotiation of a very particular and immediate kind. An essay can have a profound effect on the reader, or it can seem merely solipsistic and self-indulgent. We will analyze sample essays, discuss voice and tone, consider the strengths and weaknesses of first-person narrative in general, and explore questions of audience. This exercise will also enable us to tackle issues of style, grammar, readability.

**Persuasive research paper, 8-10 pages, subdivided as follows:**

1. Class presentation, 15-20 minutes. You will determine the primary claim you intend to make in your research paper, and present it to the class with supporting evidence. This should enable you to sharpen your focus, think ahead of time about the most persuasive way in which to present your data on paper, figure out, with the help of your classmates’ questions and overall response, your areas of strength and those where more thought and research are needed.
2. Research paper. Based on our discussion about the essay, you will determine which works best for your topic: the first person or a more formal academic style. The goal is to arrive at a complex and sustainable thesis and to convince your reader of its validity. Like everything you write for this class, the research paper will be critiqued both by the instructor and your peers, and re-written at least once.

Methods of delivery and evaluation

Class time will be taken up with lectures, discussion, analysis of reading material, in-class writing, both full-class and small-group workshops, tests, and an occasional speaker. We will utilize e-mail, Desire2Learn, library databases and various travel and writing websites. You will be encouraged to explore several modalities for communication—blogs, podcasts, video, etc.—and use all relevant technological processes for your research and to aid communication both inside and outside the classroom.

You will be graded on your comprehension of course subject matter, your ability to conduct serious, in-depth research, the skill with which you use the information you’ve acquired in argument and to persuade, your ability to communicate in different genres and to differing audiences. And of course how well you think and write.

Schedule of readings, assignments, exercises

August 28: Introduction to class. In-class writing exercise. (Describe the room.)

Assignment: Polish and type up your exercise. When completed, it should be around two pages. Due in: September 4

Read Pico Iyer, Why We Travel: http://www.salon.com/2000/03/18/why/

August 30: Share and discuss exercises.

September 4: Discuss Iyer, Why We Travel. (Share our travel experiences.)


Read: “Homesick in America.”

September 6: Discuss the art of the blog.

Read “Aligning the Internal Compass,” by Jessica McCaughey, Best American Travel Writing.

Sept. 11: Discuss “Homesick in America,” “Aligning the Internal Compass,” Best American Travel Writing.

Respond to “Homesick in America” on your blog or—if the blog isn’t up yet—write two pages and turn it in by September 18.

Sept. 13: In-class blog tutorial
Read Venance “Lafrance is not Dead” and “Famous,” both in Best American Travel Writing.

Set up an interview.

Set up blog

**Sept. 18:** Discuss “Venance Lafrance is Not Dead” and “Famous.”

**Sept. 20:** Continue discussion. How to write an interview. Exercise: Describe a person.

*Profile due in September 25. Bring four copies.*

**Sept. 25:** Daughter From Danang

**Sept. 27:** Small-group critique interviews; Daughter from Danang.

*Revised interviews due October 2*

*Respond to Daughter From Danang on your blog.*

**Oct. 2:** Finish discussion of Daughter From Danang.

*Write a one-page query letter for a specific outlet and bring it to class Oct. 4.*

**Oct. 4:** How to query a travel editor. Your article and who you’ll query. Visiting editors and/or writers

*Read a travel article in the New York Times. Blog about what you learned from this that applies to your own article.*

**Oct. 9:** Discuss NYT articles you read. Analyze query letters in small groups.

*Assignment: Visit somewhere in Colorado and write your impressions as a travel article. Due October 16. Bring four copies.*

**Oct. 11:** Blog discussion and update. Travel writing cliches.

*Read “My Monet Moment” by Andre Aciman (handout)*

**Oct. 16:** The Art of Travel, presentations.
Oct. 18: Small-group critique of travel article. The Art of Travel, presentations continued.

*Travel article rewrite due Oct. 23.*

Oct. 23: Art of travel presentations conclude.

Oct. 25: How to write an essay.

*Read:* “*The Undead Travel*” (handout) and “*Twilight of the Vampires,*” *Best American Travel Writing.*

Oct. 30: Discussion: Night of the vampire. Folklore and place. Sinister travels.

Nov. 1: In class: Write a ghost story with a strong travel component.

*Clean up ghost story and post it on your blog.*

*Personal essay due in: Nov. 6. Bring four copies.*

*Read:* Travel and politics: “*The Last Stand of Free Town,*” “*A Girl’s Guide to Saudi Arabia.*”

Nov. 6: Forms of exploration.

Nov. 8: Small-group critique of essay. Forms of exploration continued.

*Personal essay revision due in Nov. 13.*

Nov. 13: How to write a research paper

Nov. 15: Student conferences. Share ideas for research topics.

*Research paper due November 27. Bring four copies to class.*

Nov. 20: Class discussion on research papers.

Nov. 22: Thanksgiving
Nov. 27:

Nov. 29: Small group critique of research papers.

Dec. 4: Student conferences.

Dec. 6: Student conferences.

*Final version of your research paper due in Dec. 11.*

*Read Oliver Sacks, “The Bear on the Mountain,” handout.*

Dec. 11: Discuss “The Bear on the Mountain.”


**The Writing Center:** All students are invited to bring their writing to the Writing Center in Norlin Library for feedback and advice. Students are welcome to bring writing from any discipline at any stage of the writing process. Fifty-minute consultations with experienced writing consultants are available by appointment and at no charge to CU students. Because the Writing Center is a very popular campus resource, please plan to make reservations at least one week in advance. Reservations can be made through the Writing Center website or in person.

--Improve your planning, logic, and organization

--Refine your clarity, style, citation, and grammar.

--Present procrastination and writing anxiety.

Find more information at: [http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html](http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter.html)

**Attendance and participation:** Since this is a workshop class, participation counts for 10 percent of your final grade. More than two unexcused absences can result in your final grade falling by one fraction of a letter (from A to A-, etc.); four absences may earn you an F. Failure to attend an individual conference counts as an absence.

Participation involves more than your physical presence. It encompasses your contribution to discussions (ideally, you’ll be well-informed and well-prepared as well as enthusiastic) and the generosity and intelligence you show in critiquing the work of others.
Late papers will not be accepted unless you have consulted with me and secured my agreement beforehand.

Grades: Your work will be held to high standards, according to the following criteria:

A  Excellent in content, form, and style—original, substantive, insightful, persuasive, clear, and free from mechanical errors. Elegant and inspiring are good qualities too.

B  Good, with no major flaws—interesting, with above-average thought and expression. Well-written.

C  Adequate or reasonably competent. May have a mixture of strengths and weaknesses.

D  Poor in content, form, or style—disorganized, illogical, confusing, unfocused, or containing pervasive errors that impair readability.

F  Incoherent or disastrously flawed, turned in late without excuse, plagiarized, never workshopped, or never handed in.

Plagiarism is presenting the work or ideas of someone else as your own. It includes failing to use quotation marks for directly quoted work, failing to document paraphrased ideas, and false documentation. It is also plagiarism to submit someone else’s work as your own. An assignment containing plagiarized material will receive an automatic “F” and will be reported to the Dean. (See “Honor Code” in “University Policies” below.)

University Policies:

Students with disabilities:

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability please submit to me a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities (303-492-8671, Willard 322, www.colorado.edu/disabilityservices).

Religious holidays:

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. See full details at http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html

Classroom behavior:

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide classroom discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender variance, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I can make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at: http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html and at: http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code

Honor Code:

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-725-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at:
Sexual harassment:

The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment (http://www.colorado.edu/policies/discrimination.html), the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships applies to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at http://www.colorado.edu/odh