

**Travel Writing Spring 2014**  
**McGill Writing Centre -- Special Interest Courses**  
**Instructor: Trish Audette-Longo**

**Course Objectives**

This course's two-pronged approach is dedicated both to developing travel writing skills for publication, and to critically assessing the roots and future of travel writing. Participants will work through story idea development, pitching ideas to editors, building non-traditional or online-ready story elements, and interview techniques. The course will have a strong participation element, encouraging students to work collaboratively to better understand how their writing might appeal to different audiences. The course will also offer a great deal of in-class writing time -- time to put aside your other distractions and just write the story you have been waiting to tell.

**Lectures and Assignments**

**May 7: Introduction to and history of travel writing**

*Objectives:* We will consider what purposes travel writing might meet. Together, we will build something of a class reading list, drawing from recommended readings as well as favourite, or go-to, blogs, websites and news stories.

*Homework assignment:* For next class, bring one photo from a recent travel experience to share.

**May 14: Basic reportage**

*Objectives:* Brainstorming for specific audiences; critically evaluating the work of others to identify interesting elements of travel stories. This is a collaborative effort similar, in a newsroom, to talking through your story with colleagues.

*In-class exercise:* Share the picture from your recent travel experience with the class, explaining why you picked it, what it brings to mind, and what it might communicate to someone else.

*Homework Assignment:* Drawing on the photograph you selected, or another from your travels, write 300-500 words about a particular experience -- what does the photograph depict? What voices, smells, tastes, or memories does it bring to mind? What should someone who has never been know about this place or this moment you experienced?

*Objectives:* Practice synthesizing and organizing a variety of experiences in a clear, concise manner.

**May 21: Legal, ethical and safety considerations**

*Homework Assignment:* Write a pitch for a feature-length story you would like to write during this course session. For some, this will be an opportunity to plan out the story you have been waiting to tell. For others, this may entail looking for a new story, by doing preliminary interviews with people in Montreal, researching the city's festival scene, or doing something else entirely. Maximum 250 words, including draft "lede."

## **June 4: Writing**

*Guest speaker:* Magalie Boutin, Media Relations, Tourism Quebec

*In-class exercise:* Discussion of final projects -- what and where are people writing about? Who are they writing about? We will map out projects, discuss what needs to be done to meet a final deadline, and discuss options for pitching stories to standing publications or creating a class website to showcase work.

*Objectives:* Working as part of a feature-writing and -producing team to imagine seeing a work through to publication.

*Homework assignment:* Building upon instructor and class feedback, construct an outline for a feature-length story you would like to write for the final project. Include a description or plan for appropriate art. Maximum 400 words, including draft "lede."

*Objective:* Mapping out a feature-length story, which would usually be about 1,200 words.

## **June 11: Encountering the "other" and the "tourist gaze" (Urry 2002 [1990])**

*Discussion:* In his critical assessment of travel writing, Carl Thompson (2011) writes, "*If all travel involves an encounter between self and other that is brought about by movement through space, all travel writing is at some level a record or product of this encounter, and of the negotiation between similarity and difference that it entailed*" (10). What are the ethical responsibilities of travel journalists in a cosmopolitan -- and connected -- media space?

*In-class exercise:* Share story outlines, reflect together upon challenges, changes, publishing.

*Final project:* A feature-length travel story (850-1,200 words).

*Objective:* To develop a piece of long-form, publication-ready journalism.

## **June 18: Conclusion**

*Guest speaker:* Evangeline Sadler, Travel Editor and Urban Expressions Magazine Editor-in-Chief at the *Montreal Gazette*

*Presentations* of final projects.

## **Recommended Readings**

### ***Travel-writing and journalism in general***

- George, D. (2009). *Lonely Planet's Guide to Travel Writing*. Lonely Planet Publications.
- Hamilton, J.M. (2010). Introduction, Reporting From Faraway Places: Who Does It and How? *Nieman Reports (Online Exclusive)*.  
<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/article/102443/Introduction.aspx>
- McKercher, C., A. Thompson and C. Cumming. (2010). *The Canadian Reporter: News Writing and Reporting* (3rd Ed.). Nelson College Indigenous.
- Press Freedom Index. (2013). *Reporters Without Borders*. <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013,1054.html>

### ***Critical assessments***

- Szabla, Christopher. (2013). Heart of Snarkness. *Maisonneuve: A Quarterly of Arts, Opinion and Ideas*. <http://maisonneuve.org/article/2013/09/27/heart-snarkness/>

- Thompson, C. (2011). *Travel Writing*. New York: Routledge.
- Urry, J. (2002 [1990]). *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Zilcosky, J., Ed. (2008). *Writing Travel: The Poetics and Politics of the Modern Journey*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

#### ***Long-form and travel journalism***

- Goldstein, J. (2012). Why Travel: A Journey to Bali [Podcast]. *CBC Radio Wiretap*. <http://www.cbc.ca/wiretap/episode/2012/11/16/why-travel-a-journey-to-bali/>
- Jobey, L., Ed. (2011). *The New Granta Book of Travel*. London: Granta Publications.
- Kerrane, K. and Ben Yagoda, Eds. (1997). *The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism*. New York: Scribner.
- Spalding, L., Ed. (2013). *The Best Women's Travel Writing, Vol. 9*. Palo Alto, California: Solas House, Inc.

#### ***Longer journeys***

- Baggett, J., H. Corbett and A. Pressner. (2011). *The Lost Girls*. New York: Harper. (Their work continues online, at <http://www.lostgirlsworld.com/>)
- Blixen, K. (Isak Dinesen). (2001 [1937]). *Out of Africa*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- Bryson, B. (1989). *The Lost Continent: Travels in Small-Town America*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Krakauer, J. (2007). *Into the Wild*. Anchor Books.
- Mack, D. (2012). *Europe on 5 Wrong Turns a Day: One Man, Eight Countries, One Vintage Travel Guide*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Mayer, F. (1996). *Under the Tuscan Sun*. Broadway Books.
- Orwell, G. (2012 [1933]). *Down and Out in Paris and London*. HarperCollins.
- Stackhouse, J. (2004). *Timbit Nation: A Hitchhiker's View of Canada*. Vintage Canada.

#### ***Telling tales***

- King, T. (2003). *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press Inc. (As a CBC Massey Lecture, this can also be found and listened to online, <http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/massey-archives/2003/11/07/massey-lectures-2003-the-truth-about-stories-a-native-narrative/>)
- Taylor, C. (2011). *Londoners: The Days and Nights of London Now -- As Told by Those Who Love It, Hate It, Live It, Left It and Long for It*. London: Granta Publications.
- Theroux, P. (2013 [2011]). *The Tao of Travel: Enlightenment from Lives on the Road*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

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McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information).

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