

“Us and Them: Travelers and Travel Writing”
English 120/13630 College Composition II (3 credits)
Spring Term 2006 North Dakota State University

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TTH 9.30-10.45

Minard 209

Office Hours: 2-3.00 pm TTH

Blackboard: <https://bb.ndsu.nodak.edu>

Objectives

In his essay “Why We Travel,” Pico Iyer tells us that “We travel ... to lose ourselves; and ... to find ourselves.” Visiting new and different places and meeting new and different people causes us to think about what exactly makes those people different from us and in turn who we are and what our community is. One way of looking at these questions of difference is to examine how we “Other” people to understand ourselves. In simplest terms, the Other is everything I am not. Put another way, I know who I am because I construct the Other as different than I am. Travel writing is an especially rich opportunity for investigating how we regard (construct? represent?) the Other when we are away from home. We will pursue a number of connected questions in this course to help us understand how we create our own identity amidst and among people who are similar to us and people who are different. In what ways does the Other help us understand who we are and our place in our community? In what ways does the Other prevent us from knowing who we are and obscure our place in our community? Because we are away from home when we travel, cut off from the comfort of the familiar, might we become the Other and lose our identity? And perhaps most importantly, how does a knowledge of Othering help us to a critical understanding of diversity and community?

We will work toward answering these questions by reading, viewing, discussing, and writing about a variety of texts. We will read some short fiction and non-fiction, a memoir, two graphic narratives, view a film, and examine on-line material. In the end, through investigating the Other, we will have a richer understanding of our ourselves, our world and our place in it. Academically, we will refine our critical thinking, reading, and writing skills as well as research strategies, and facility with on-line materials. The variety of texts helps us to understand the interdisciplinary nature of travel writing. The authors, living and dead, American and not, represent a range of cultures and experiences and can be a guide to our own understanding of the Other.

Requirements

We will work toward the above outcomes through a number of interrelated tasks, including small and large group discussion, informal in-class writing, and formal papers written outside of class. Details of these assignments are described below.

Grading (on Blackboard gradebook)		Scale	
4 Summaries (25 points each)	100 points	A	100-92 %
Story Presentation	100 points	B	91-82 %
Subjective Essay	100 points	C	81-71 %
Final Essay	100 points	D	70-60 %
Discussion Leader	50 points	F	59-0%
Web Project	50 points		
Total	500 points		

Texts

The Call to Write, John Trimbur

Carnet de Voyage (Travel Journal) Craig Thompson

Travels with Charley in Search of America, John Steinbeck

Safe Area Goražde, Joe Sacco

Short stories available on course website

A dictionary (bring to every class)

A floppy disk dedicated to this class

Students with Special Needs

Any students with disabilities or other special needs who need special accommodations in this course are asked to share these concerns with me as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty

I assume that all work you turn in for this course is yours, and any material that you have acquired from an outside source is documented properly. Failure to do so is considered plagiarism and may result in failure of the course.

Late Papers

Late papers will lose ten points per day until they are turned in. You are responsible for turning in all work assigned in this class. Failure to do so will result in failing this class.

Attendance and Participation

University policy recognizes the importance of class attendance

(<http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/policy/333.htm>) and important parts of the work for this course will be done in small and large groups. This means that your consistent

presence is important to the success of the class as a whole. If you are unable to attend class, you must contact me via phone or email within twenty-four hours. You are still responsible for any work done or due in class that day. Similarly, you are responsible for contacting your group members if you miss a class.

Participation includes not only contributing to class discussion, it also covers prompt attendance, listening and responding constructively to your classmates, attending class prepared to discuss the readings, and bringing your books and writing material to every class meeting. If you miss more than three class meetings, this includes leaving early or attending but unprepared, you may lose one letter grade from your final grade. Missing a scheduled conference is equivalent to missing two class meetings.

Paper Format

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are to be type-written, double-spaced, with one-inch margins, in twelve-point Times font. Your name, the date, the class, my name and the assignment are to be at the top of the first page. Do not forget to title your work. Any papers longer than one page must have page numbers and be stapled.

Calendar (subject to change)

*The titles marked with an asterisk are available on the course blackboard site.

** We will meet in a computer cluster (IACC 114) on these days.

- 10 January Introductions and interviews
Group Story Project assignment
- 12 January “Why We Travel” by Pico Iyer*
Discussion of travel motives and identity
(Statement of Group Ethics for Story presentation due)
- 17 January Discuss Subjective Paper and “Why We Travel”
Call to Write Chapter 2
- 19 January Sylvia Townsend Warner, “Siegfried on the Rhine” * Group 1 Presentation
Summary 1 due
- 24 January *Call to Write* Chapter 5
- 26 January William Plomer, “Local Colour” * Group 2 Presentation
Summary 2 due
- 31 January Outline of Subjective Paper due **
Call to Write Chapter 17
- 2 February Diane Johnson, “Cuckoo Clock” * Group 3 Presentation
Summary 3 due
- 7 February Subjective Paper due**
- 9 February Anita Desai, “Scholar and Gypsy” * Group 4 Presentation
Summary 4 due
- 14 February Websites**
Call to Write Chapter 20
- 16 February Timothy Findley, “An Unforgettable Journey” * Group 5 Presentation
Summary 5 due
- 21 February Search engines, evaluating websites**
- 23 February *Safe Area Gorazde*
Website evaluation**
- 28 February *Safe Area Gorazde*
- 2 March *Safe Area Gorazde*

7 March *Carnet de Voyage*
 9 March *Carnet de Voyage*
 Web project due**
 (Statement of Group Ethics for Discussion Leaders due)

14-16 March Spring Break

21 March No class
 22 March (Wednesday) Conferences
 23 March Conferences

28 March Conferences
 30 March *Travels with Charley*, Part 1
 discussion leader: Group 1

4 April *Travels with Charley*, Part 1**
 6 April *Travels with Charley*, Part 2
 discussion leader: Group 2

11 April *Travels with Charley*, Part 2**
 13 April *Travels with Charley*, Part 3
 discussion leader: Group 3

18 April *Travels with Charley*, Part 3**
 20 April *Travels with Charley*, Part 4
 discussion leader: Group 4

25 April *Motorcycle Diaries* (film)
 27 April *Motorcycle Diaries* (film)

2 May First draft of final essay due**
 4 May Final Essay due

Course Work

Summaries

You will write four summaries in this course, one on each of the short stories we will read, except the one on which you are presenting. These are to follow the paper format guidelines above and be exactly 250 words long and on one page. (Use your word processor to count the words and note the number of words at the top of the page). The summary should give the reader a brief, objective description of the story or excerpt you have read. Basic information such as title, author, setting, main characters, point of view should be included in the summary. Summaries are written in the present tense, using the third person.

The first sentence of your summary should give the reader all the basic information he or she will need to understand your summary. For example: "Set in modern India, 'Scholar and Gypsy' by Anita Desai traces the difficulties an American married couple encounter while the husband researches his thesis." The rest of the summary will fill in the details, the characters' names, the nature of the conflict and its resolution, details about the setting (if necessary).

Points will be deducted if your summary fails to meet all of the above criteria.

Subjective Essay

On the first day of class you will be interviewed by a partner about a memorable trip you took. Your partner will take notes on this interview, and give the notes to you at the end of class. We will then do some free writing on this journey. Using this interview and the free writing, write a two to three page (500 – 750 word) narrative of that journey. Keep in mind the motives that Iyer suggests we have for travel. Did your trip conform to Iyer's reasons for travel? Which reasons?

Web Project

While in the computer classroom, we will examine and analyze a number of visual representations of the Other. In this project, you will identify and analyze another example. Go to the National Geographic Society's on-line Photography Index and click on History and Culture: (<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/siteindex/photogallery/history.html>). In the section labeled "People of Today," locate at least five images that you feel represent the Other, either for yourself or someone else. For your essay, choose one of the images and in a 2-3 page (500 – 750 word) paper discuss how the image represents the Other, and what the maker of the image seems to value. Be sure to print a copy of the image you are writing about. Think about the terms we will have discussed: foreground, background, framing, lighting, black and white vs. color. Is this visual representation similar to the representations in the stories we have read so far? How? Do images of the Other affect the viewer differently than verbal descriptions? How?

Final Essay

In this course we have read and seen a variety of travel narratives, and we have discussed how meeting the Other is a means by which we form our own identity. For your final essay, I want you to return to Subjective Essay 1. After having discussed and investigated travel narratives, how have your ideas about your journey changed?

In a five to six page essay (1,250 – 1,500 word) essay, revisit your travel narrative and reflect on your experience through free writing. Then conduct some research about your destination? Can you find some images of the place? How does it present itself to the world? How do others react to that place? Then turn to your own response to that place. To what extent did your trip involve an encounter with the Other? How did the journey affect your sense of self? I encourage you to draw on the course materials as way to compare or contrast.

Group rules

You have two major projects that will be conducted in groups. In order for evaluation and grading to be consistent and reflect work done by individuals, a number of procedures must be followed. Ethical group participation means that each member is responsible for the group's performance. Each member must contribute as well as encourage others to contribute.

During the first group meeting, the group must generate an agreement that describes the group's goal. The goal will be to earn a high score on the project, but in a way that values the opinions of all members. Group members must be committed to the group's goals, complete their individual tasks, avoid interpersonal conflict, encourage group participation, and keep the discussion focused. The group must compose a "Code of Ethics" that describes the goals and responsibilities of the group. This is to be no more than one page, it must list the group number, each member's name and contact information (whatever means is most reliable), the group's goal, and the responsibilities of members. Each group member and the instructor must receive a typed copy of this.

Each group must meet at least three times outside of class for each project. Time will also be provided in class for group work.

On the day the group project is due, each group member must fill out and turn in a *Group Member Evaluation Form* for each member. Each member must also fill out and turn in a *Peer Rating of Group Members*. Points will be deducted if these forms are late. These forms are available for download from the course website.

The group will earn a single score for the project. This score will be modified by the peer response forms in order to determine each student's score.

Group Projects

Story Presentation

Each group will be responsible for a class period. Your group will be assigned a short story on which to present. Your goal is to help your classmates achieve an interpretation of the story and a sense of how that interpretation relates to the other course material, in particular how the Other is represented and what it tells us about the writer/narrator. Specific requirements include:

1. a vocabulary lesson based on the story

- choose the words you believe need special attention, either because they are unfamiliar, especially important to the story, or used in specific or unusual ways.
- devise a means of communicating and explaining these words beyond simply defining them or asking students to look them up

2. an author biography

- include a bibliography of the writer's major works and critical works on the writer, in MLA style that you will distribute to the class

3. a discussion of the geographical, historical, and cultural background to the story

- present the material to the class without simply lecturing. You may use any technique that you feel will be effective. If you need any technical support, VCR/TV; computer/projector, stereo, let me know at least a week ahead of time
- prepare a handout with a bibliography (MLA style) of the sources you used

4. a discussion of the story itself

- cover the basics: setting, character, plot
- cover any literary figures that appear in the story, e.g. metaphor, irony, symbol, figurative language
- bring out the important ideas/themes of the story
- find ways for the story to connect to other stories or ideas expressed in class

5. some form of evaluation of the students

- somehow evaluate what your classmates have learned from your presentation. This may be a quiz, an exercise, a worksheet. As a group, you will be responsible for reading and responding to these evaluations. That is, you must evaluate it.

You must also turn in a *Group Member Evaluation Form* for each member and a *Peer Rating of Group Members*.

After each presentation we will have a brief class feedback session about the presentation.

Discussion Leaders

For each section of *Travels with Charley*, each group will be responsible for conducting a discussion of the work. This is not to be as elaborate as the group presentation, but you must meet at least twice ahead of time to prepare. The goal is to carry on a discussion of the work in terms of the questions about travel writing and the Other that we have been investigating this term. You must also turn in a *Group Member Evaluation Form* for each member and a *Peer Rating of Group Members*.

We will also have a feedback session after these presentations.

Grade Guidelines

These descriptions apply to the final grade in the class and the score on particular assignments.

A work is outstanding. It goes beyond the basic requirements of the assignment and the class. The work shows evidence of critical and original thinking. Ideas are clearly supported and explained.

B work is more than satisfactory. It shows understanding of the given task and an understanding of the rules for writing as set out in the syllabus. Thinking is clear, though not necessarily highly critical or highly original. Ideas are supported and explained, although not always clearly or consistently.

C work is satisfactory. It shows familiarity with though not a complete understanding of the given task and rules for writing as set out in the syllabus. Thought shows inconsistent critical engagement or originality. Ideas are too broad and not clearly supported with evidence. Writing tends to summarize or describe rather than analyze.

D work is below average. It shows an inconsistent understanding of the given task, text, and rules. Thought and writing are often disorganized and do not communicate an understanding of audience or genre. Paper seems to be written quickly with little attention to revision or proofreading.

F work is unsatisfactory. It shows little if any understanding of the given task, text, or rules. Thought and writing are disorganized and do not communicate an understanding of audience or genre.

First Day Reading

The Mexican Pet

A friend told me a story that couldn't possibly be true. She knows of a woman who recently vacationed on the Gulf Coast of Florida with her family. While vacationing they befriended a stray dog. It stayed with them while they vacationed and they treated the dog like any other pet: the dog slept with them, shared food, etc. The kids had grown attached to the dog and when it was time to return home they wanted to take the dog with them. The mother insisted they could not take the dog because they already had a dog and cat at home. The kids won out and they took the dog home with them.

They returned to their normal routines, the kids went to school and the parents went off to work. Upon returning home from work the mother found her family pets horribly mutilated and dead. The stray however was fine. She took the stray to the vet who couldn't find anything wrong with the dog but wanted to keep the dog and run some tests. The vet calls back a hour or so later to say that the dog was not a dog, but a Korean Rat. My friend who told me this story said that the vet couldn't tell it was a rat by looking at the "dog" and only knew because of the bloodwork. They say the "dog" looked like a long-haired wiener dog.

Source:

"The Mexican Pet," *Urban Legends Reference Pages*
<<http://www.snopes.com/critters/lurkers/mexpet.htm>>.