

GONZAGA-IN-FLORENCE SYLLABUS

Course: ENGL 305: The Writing Traveler
Credits: 3 Credits
Instructor: Dr. Baret Magarian



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This is a course tailor-made for the student who comes to Italy and wishes to preserve something of his experiences here in journal form. Thus, whilst having its origins in the strictly personal it will ultimately outsoar this rather subjective frame by incorporating some of the elements of formal travel writing, memoir and the essay, attempting to give the student techniques with which to enrich, and structure, his work. This will be achieved, partly by studying classic travelogues and observational texts, as listed below, and partly by instruction and lecture from myself. I would also hope ideally to be able to forge a link between a personal, subjective experience and its evocation and a larger, more penetrating truth. Thus on some level the course would also seek to draw philosophical meaning out of the kind of social encounters and situations found whilst travelling. This course will ultimately also develop into a workshop in which students can read and critique each other's work. The instruction will cover strategies for some elements of creative writing and focus on the rich subjects and themes provided by our travels here. While this course requires a lot of writing, the writing will issue out of the experiences afforded by life in Italy and the various GIF weekend and cultural trips, and much of the drafting will occur within journal pages during travel. The syllabus, including reading and writing assignments, will be adapted as necessary to circumstances that arise in Florence.

TEXTS:

All available for purchase in Florence:

- DH Lawrence, *Twilight in Italy*
- *Literary Traveler: an Anthology of Contemporary Fiction*. Ed. Larry Dark
- *Italy: True Stories of Life on the road*. Ed. Anne Calcagno
- a blank journal is recommended

on reserve in the library:

On Writing, Stephen King

- *The Stones of Florence*, Mary McCarthy
- *Vaporetto 13*, Robert Girardi

PURPOSE

This course will focus on the writing of non-fiction autobiographical works, observational pieces, fiction, and travel writing with an emphasis on the subjects, themes, and experiences of the traveler. Students will practice the techniques of creative writing, and at the same time use their writing to deepen their cultural engagement with Italy and Europe. Students will review and practice the various elements of fiction, and non-fiction prose writing. For fiction writing this will include plotting, characterization, dialogue, description, along with symbolism, atmosphere, theme, and imagery. For non-fiction writing it will include elements such as structure and voice, tone and more idiosyncratic effects based in personal tastes and tendencies.

REQUIREMENTS

Weekly writing assignments, weekly reading assignments, participation in weekly class and workshop activities, and regular attendance. Some analytical writing on works from the syllabus. Final exam.

CLASS STRUCTURE

Class time will be divided between formal instruction on the elements of travel writing, discussion, and writing workshop. Students will be required to write toward the completion of at least one travelogue, and one essay, but will write in genres of their own choosing for most assignments. The first few weeks will focus on invention strategies and the processes of writing for the different genres, and then the class will shift into a workshop in which the class will discuss the writing of individual class

members.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

There will be a handful of specific assignments, such as to write a story using only dialogue, or to evoke a building without reference to its visual aspects, but the majority of the weekly assignments will be open for students to write in a style of their choosing. There will be extensive opportunity for brainstorming and collective idea generating and I will devote some space to the history of Florence and some of its artistic and cultural aspects. Themes will also be discussed in a broad sense. All work turned in must be typed and proofread. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day indicated on the syllabus or arranged during the preceding class.

SCHEDULE

- Introduction to the course; introduction by the teacher, introductions from the students, why write, why travel? Assignment: write a state of mind piece
- The basic tenets of travel writing, journalism vs. literature. The cultural agenda and how to perceive it, readings. A vivid description without using clichés.
- The five senses, observation vs. description, detail, the evocation of place. How did the week go?
- The idea of the journey, extracts from Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Chatwin's In Patagonia. What is the point of writing in the age of the digital camera?
- The moral of the story, assignment: a Florentine landmark, a building as a metaphor for something else.
- The twist and how to hook the reader: the sympathy of the reader, what was it like to travel in the 19th century.
- Drafting and re-writing, the laser vs. the screwdriver, when does a tourist cease to be a tourist and start to become a resident
- Humor, a voice, irony, opinion.
- The idea of the article and how to present it, Orwell, Hazlitt
- Different personas of the writer
- Writing as boxing, when literature smells, Cormac McCarthy. Kafka, America.
- Supplements, magazines, the journal as the initiation
- How to draw a philosophical truth from a situational starting point.
- Fiction techniques, characterization, voice, dialogue
- The writer's journey.