

TRAVEL WRITING SUMMER 2007

Michael Goldfarb

Cell: 07963-798071

"Journalism at its best and most effective is education."

"I wrote very fast, as I had to; and I was always afraid that I would forget the exact sound, smell, words, gestures which were special to this moment and this place."

"The only aspect of our travels that is guaranteed to hold an audience is disaster."

"Serious Travel writers not only see and understand everything around them but command erudite cross references to history, literature and related travels."

Martha Gellhorn

Course Description

What the great Martha Gellhorn is getting at in the above selection of thoughts on journalism and the journey is this: the skills necessary for good "Travel Writing" are the foundation of all good non-fiction work including journalism. In the end, the mere listing of facts is not enough to engage a reader or viewer or listener in your recounting of an event. Something extra is needed to give the audience a sense of the meaning of an event especially when the news is happening far from where a person is learning of it. That something extra is a sense of place. This course is aimed at developing the writer's eye (and the rest of his or her senses) so that that sense of place finds its way into their work. It will also focus on developing the writer's "I", his or her ability to tell a personal story.

And because travel writing is also a way to survive in an increasingly freelance world we will look at the commercial side of travel writing so that you will learn the skills necessary to hopefully earn a bit of money as a journalist as well.

We will read broadly and historically. Going back centuries to read the travel writing of Medieval masters like Ibn Battutah and reading contemporary masters like Ryszard Kapuscinski. We will also study how creating a sense of place is an essential tool of good daily reporting whether filing from war-torn Baghdad or the American suburbs.

Guest speakers with a wide range of professional experience will offer their expertise to you.

And you will write. London will be your topic. There will be weekly short assignments: the art of the thumbnail is an important one to master. There will be one group assignment of greater length and a final personal travel essay of at least 1,000 words.

Before You Arrive:

Prepare for your time in London as you would for any assignment. Look through the local press online, (Guardian.co.uk, TheTimes.co.uk, TheSun.co.uk and Timeout are excellent places to start) browse some guide books, read a recent non-fiction book about the city (or a novel like White Teeth if you haven't done so already) but leave room in your mind for fresh impressions. I will hand out short readings at the start of the course but before then I would ask you to get a hold of a copy of the Granta Book of Reportage and go through it thoroughly.

Grades:

The summer session is only six weeks and we have a lot to cover. I have paced the assignments and readings taking into consideration that we are in London and keeping it manageable. You are expected to attend every class, keep up with the readings and contribute to class discussions. A missed deadline means an automatic “F” on that assignment. That said, there’s every reason to do well in this class—having fun in the process—and, come August, to be proud of the grade you earned.

N.B. Journalists must be accurate so you must be scrupulous in your reporting. Cheating, fabrication and fiction will not be tolerated. You will fail this course immediately if you re caught plagiarizing, inventing sources, piping or doctoring quotes.

Journalism majors: A grade of C or better is needed for the course to count toward your major. Grading will conform to the Journalism Department’s policy:

A= publishable as is

B= publishable with light editing

C=publishable with a rewrite

D=major problems with facts, reporting, writing

F=missing key facts, containing gross misspellings, plagiarism or libel

Assignments

Assignments are expected to be handed in on time, preferably via e-mail as an attachment. If your assignment is late, even by an hour, you will be downgraded one full grade. You will be graded for research, reporting and writing, as well as spelling and grammar. On the last page, list the names/titles/contact info of your sources for research.