

Imagination, Movement and the Geography of Travel

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Aims and Objectives:

At various points throughout history people for numerous reasons have decided to leave environments that are familiar, understood and comfortable in order to travel. The purpose of this course is to examine the tales these travellers tell in order to understand not only the different kinds of imaginative geographies that can emerge from travelling, but how engagements with the unfamiliar can provide insights into fundamental geographic concepts such as scale, landscape, place and boundaries. The course is organized thematically around case studies, each of which raise various geographic concerns. Some of the themes explored are: holiday and escape; identity, disguise and trespass; the textualised journey; the search for pleasure; the inner journey; and travel and liminality. The reading list will include actual texts from travellers, academic work (in geography and elsewhere) on travel, fictional travels (such as those found in novels and film) as well as a number of philosophical and theoretical musings on the nature of voyage and movement. The overall aim of the course is to explore the different ways writers and thinkers have engaged in the practice of travel and how they have drawn upon those practices to make determinations about the world's geography and their place within it. You should leave the course with an understanding not only of how various people in various places engaged with, reacted to and thought about the unfamiliar, but, more importantly, how these engagements facilitated a set of ideas, concepts and philosophies that are interesting beyond the particular context of their journey. Indeed, the purpose of this course is to broaden and deepen our understanding of the social geographic world by exploring the ideas that exploration and travel elicit.

The issues raised in this course are by nature contemplative, theoretical and philosophical. While the course does include various analyses of travel itself (e.g. tourism, empire, conquest, etc.), its main concern is the *ideas* surrounding the practice of moving, seeing, wandering and imagining. In this sense this course is about travel, travel writing and travellers' tales as well as about the various ideas that have emerged from these practices.

Learning Outcomes: The desired learning outcomes for this module are the following: (1) an ability to describe and assess significant concepts, ideas and philosophies in social theory; (2) an ability to synthesize ideas from a wide range of travel literature and finally (3) an ability to write coherent and well organised essays. The design of the course is predicated on the expectation that students take responsibility for their learning and actively use and learn from the materials I provide. Students are not expected to leave this module knowing all there is to know about travel writing and at no point will you be asked to rehearse the material covered in lecture. However, you are expected to use the material provided to explore your own research interests, devise your own research questions and ultimately write your own essay on a topic that intrigues you.

Learning Format: 1 hour lecture followed by 1 hour discussion

The learning format is divided into three areas: readings, lecture and discussion. In order of importance the emphasis is on the reading. Reading is your primary source of ideas and insights into this topic and the carefully selected reading list is, without question, the heart of the course. Students should spend the majority of their time familiarizing themselves with the texts listed and following those readings in the directions that interest them most.

The second source of information is lectures. The aim of the lectures is to tie together a number of readings and authors that pertain to the theme in question. The lectures situate and explain the readings by putting the issues they raise within a broader theoretical and philosophical context.

All lectures will be posted in 'prose' form on blackboard throughout the term. Please note that while there are only 8 lectures delivered there are 9 lectures listed on blackboard. In addition, there is often more content in the 'prose' lectures on blackboard than what I actually deliver in class. I invite and encourage you to use these lectures, and the extra content they provide, both in discussion and in preparation for your essays.

The final source of learning is discussion. At the end of each lecture period you will be given a worksheet that includes a short reading that relates in some manner to issues raised in lecture. The worksheet will also include a reading list as well as a number of discussion questions. You will be expected to use the readings, the text and the questions, to prepare a number of ideas for a discussion the following week. The format for the discussion will be small groups and during the period I will go from group to group in order to help facilitate conversation and clarity. Each discussion section relates to the previous week's lecture. This gives you time to familiarise yourself with the readings as well as think about the questions provided. The aim of the discussion is to clarify the lecture as well as help generate ideas for potential essay questions and topics. There is no penalty for non-attendance to the discussion. They are provided for your benefit and should be seen as an opportunity to work through the readings collectively and as a means to generate ideas for the assessment.

Method of Assessment:

The main assessment for the module is an essay (max 4000 words) that critically assesses a travel book of your choice using one of the themes we have discussed in class. The essay should be approached as a critical analysis of a text, what is sometimes called an *exegesis*, rather than as an essay on travel per se. In this sense, you are required to choose a travel book and write about how that book illustrates a theme from class (travel and disappointment, a journey too far, a heroic quest, see example titles listed below). The essay should provide specific examples from the book to back up your claims.

The travel tale you choose is up to you. It can be historical (e.g. Mary Kingsley's *Travels in West Africa* or Sir Richard Burton's *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madinah and Meccah*), contemporary (e.g. Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines*, Jonathon Raban's *Passage to Juno*, Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar*, William Least Heat-Moon's *Blue Highways*), documentary (e.g. Amos Oz's *In the Land of Israel*, John Simpson's *Wars Against Saddam*) or fiction (e.g. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, Jules Vern's *Around the World in Eighty Days*). In some cases, I have allowed students to critically assess a travel film (such as *Easy Rider*, *Apocalypse Now* or *Thelma and Louise*) but the student must show that they have found sufficient secondary literature on the film to handle the topic appropriately.

To complete this assignment, you need to understand how to analyse a text. The books you read will not necessarily address the themes discussed in class directly. However, they will deal with the themes in a variety of ways - sometimes very obviously and other times more obliquely. For example, Jonathon Raban's book *Passage to Juno* is about a sailing trip he took from Anchorage, Washington to Juno, Alaska along the northwest Pacific passage. This is its literal topic. However, it is a book that also captures up a number of other deeper, less literal, themes – such as ideas about loss, loneliness, abandonment and isolation. Your job is to find one such theme within your chosen book and analyse it. To be clear, these are things that are not always obvious from the books – they have to be looked for, thought about and discussed. I would strongly recommend thinking about some of the themes we discuss in class while you are reading your book to see if any of them fit.

The assessment is divided into two parts: part one is the essay proposal (30%) and part two is the essay itself (70%).

Assignment 1: the proposal

The essay proposal is a 1-2 page (max 1000 words including annotated references) discussion of your proposed topic. Before you write the proposal you should have: (1) read your book carefully, (2) chosen which theme from class you will use, (3) read the appropriate literature (including secondary literature on your chosen book) and (4) chosen appropriate examples from the book that illustrate your argument. The reason this aspect of the assessment is weighted heavily is because it assumes a great deal of reading and thinking around your topic before you start to write. A successful proposal will reflect an in depth knowledge of your book, a full understanding of your argument and the examples you will use to illustrate it.

The proposal should include: (1) a brief description of the travel book you have chosen, (2) a clear statement about what theme you are using and why it is relevant, (3) a description of scenes and contexts from the book that illustrate this theme (do not need specific examples from the text at this point) and (4) a list of 3 or 4 annotated references. The list of references should signal the key texts you plan to use for your argument. I ask you to annotate the references in order to make sure you understand the arguments they present as well as to make sure they appropriately relate to your overall proposal.

The most central piece of advice I can give about your proposal is that you are clear about what you are going to argue. Most essays lose significant points because they never distinguish or clarify their argument. Be clear that the aim of this assignment is for you to choose **one** theme even though several maybe appropriate. A common mistake is for students to read their book and then illustrate how their book exemplifies many or all the themes discussed in class without ever arguing for any one of them in particular. For guidance I have posted examples of good proposals on blackboard from past students.

Finally, please note that while the assignment is short in terms of writing, it is weighted according to the amount of work it requires to complete successfully. Posing a good question is an involved and difficult process and necessitates a great deal of reading and reflection. The proposal will be discussed with you before you embark on the essay.

Assignment 2: the essay

There are four points of guidance I would offer for assessing the quality of your own work for this essay and establishing whether or not it is ready for submission: the first point is whether the essay makes a clear argument. Is the case you are attempting to establish lucid? Is it stated in a clear and comprehensible fashion? The more successful you are with assignment 1, the clearer these issues will be. The second point involves assessing whether the essay is well-organized. Is there a clear structure to the argument? Does each paragraph have a point? Is the argument built carefully and methodically? Do you ever draw any conclusions? The third point is whether or not you prove your argument. Are there clear examples from the text that 'prove' that this journey really is an example of a 'heroic quest'? Are there examples that illustrate that the author has embarked on a 'journey too far'? Finally, make sure that the essay is well edited. An abundance of typos, misused words and poor grammar will indicate to the reader that the essay was not carefully proofed and was hastily submitted. I offer these points to you as a guide for measuring the quality of your own work. Please consider them carefully before submitting your essays.

The due date for Assignment 1 is **xxx**. My expectation is that you will read and review course material throughout the term and use it to develop potential research questions as you go. I will be using class time in week 12 to review your proposal with you and provide guidance for assignment 2. While I do not look at drafts for either assignment I encourage you to use my office hours throughout the term to discuss readings as well as your ideas for the assignments. The due date for assignment 2 is **xxx**. This is an essay on the title submitted in your proposal. Essays should be submitted on A4 in 12pt. 'Times Roman' (or 'Times New Roman') font with a 2.5 cm border on all sides. The word limit includes the bibliography but not the title page. Please include page numbers on your text. Also please note that January 17th is the final submission date for all modules in the Department of Geography. Any essays that are submitted after this date will incur normal departmental penalties and no extensions will be permitted. Any points lost due to extenuating circumstances will be re-applied pending approval by the extenuating circumstances committee.

Final note: While I have purposely made course information readily available to you on blackboard, lecture and discussion sections are the appropriate places to clarify concepts, talk through ideas, discuss various essay topics and develop connections between course material and your assignment. If you come to my office at the end of the semester expecting me to offer extra time for such discussions, when you did not effectively use the time provided, you will be disappointed. If you want assistance working through course material in relation to your assignment I strongly encourage you to use the time and space provided. If you would like to discuss the material beyond class time you are more than welcome to use my office hours or make an appointment.

Examples of past topics:

- Travel writing and the search for 'escape' in Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence*
- Travel and disappointment: a comparison of *Easy Rider* and *Wisconsin Death Trip*
- A smooth space: Sal's nomadic journey in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*
- Travelling through memories: journey as healing process in *Skating to Antarctica*
- *Seven Years in Tibet*: colonial exploration or rite of passage?
- Travel and liminality in W.G. Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn*
- Examining the 'Condition of Travel' in Ma Jian's *Red Dust*.
- Examining the consumer tourist in Baudrillard's *America*
- Unwilling nomads: travel and vulnerability in Nabokov's *Lolita*
- Travel and sentimentality in the TV programmes *Holiday* and *Wish you were here*
- Travel as a rite of passage in Jonathon Raban's *Passage to Juno*
- Photography in National Geographic Magazine and its impact on the traveller's gaze
- Hardy's Wessex in his novel *Tess of the D'urbervilles*

Schedule of Lectures

Week 2:	Lecture 1: The condition of travel Lecture 2: Travel and escape
Week 3:	Lecture 3: The textual journey Discussion: Nomad art
Week 4:	Lecture 4: Travel, anticipation and disappointment Discussion: The Blue Guide
Week 5:	Lecture 5: Rites of passage Discussion: Wisconsin Death Trip
Week 6:	Easy Rider
Week 7:	Reading Week
Week 8:	Lecture 6: Travel identity and liminality Discussion: Easy Rider and the road movie
Week 9:	Lecture 7: A journey too far Lecture 8: The condition of travel II
Week 10:	Clinic
Friday:	Assignment 1 Due
Week 11:	No Class
Week 12:	Feedback on Assignment I