

# The Cannibal and the Explorer

## Ethics of Travel Writing

ROMS 1102.104

Cornell University

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T-Th 1:25-2:40pm

White Hall B04

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Office:

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Detail of Sebastian Münster's Map, Cannibals, New World

### About this class:

**“All that is gold does not glitter,  
Not all those who wander are lost”**  
JRR Tolkien

Sailors, explorers, pilgrims, wanderer, pioneers...Their stories constitute some of the oldest source of entertainment for humanity. Why do travelers fascinate us so much? And why is one of their favorite subjects cannibalism? This class will explore the relationship between travel and ethics of compassion. By studying declensions of travel writing, we will explore the interactions between an “us” and “others”, and consider what travel writing tells us about who we are, and what it means to be human.

### Readings

**To buy at the bookstore:** Jules Verne, *Five Weeks in a Balloon*.

**Online on Blackboard:** Jean de Léry, *History of a Travel to the Land of Brazil*,  
Frank Lestringant, *Cannibals*.

**Online:** Modern Language Association Style Manual

**Optional:** The Best of American Travel Writing 2016

\*Note: online texts should be printed or bring them on your tablet, for reference

## Assignments:

### Three reading reactions: 15%

This assignment is designed to help you with the preliminary organisation of your thoughts when writing an analytical paper.

Each reaction paper should be **no more than 2 pages double-spaced, no less than 1 1/2 pages.**

In each, choose a particular aspect in the readings and discuss its relationship with overall themes of the class.

### Three analytical papers: 30%

This assignment is designed to help you write academic papers, and develop your critical thinking.

Each analytical paper should be **no less than 2 pages double-spaced, but no more than 5 or 6 (as indicated).** Each will pick up from your reaction papers.

For each, you will write an introduction and an outline for your peers to review, before you turn it in to me.

### Two creative papers: 20%

This assignment is designed to help you write your own travel writing, and help you with style, and creativity.

Each of these paper should be **no less than 3 pages double-spaced, but no more than 6, as instructed.**

For each, you will do workshop work. You will write a first draft, using the workshop work as a start. I will then give you individual feedback on these, before the final version.

### Blog posts: 10%

This assignment is designed to help you write in a low-stake environment, and promote class discussions.

You will participate each week, except when a reaction paper is due, or when you have an oral presentation.

Each post will be **at least 100 words**, and I will grade them as an overall item, although you will get weekly feedback. **Engagement** with the class is integral to this assignment.

### Oral presentation: 15%

This assignment is split into two: one is an in class **10-15 minutes** presentation linked to travel. This is to help you learn about research, and research tools concerning visual material.

For this assignment, you will prepare a presentation on a map or an engraving.

The second oral is a presentation of your portfolio, at the end of the semester.

### Class participation: 10%

In class, we will do several **writing workshops**, as well as at least one session at the library to discuss maps and original editions of the books we study in this class.

I expect you to come prepared, and be **respectful of one another.**

I also expect you to be **on time, and assiduous.** You will be allowed no more than **3 unexcused absences.**

## DOs and DO NOTs (or my pet peeves):

**Do:** cite short quotes from the text; be on time; double-space; read your material.

**Do NOT:** misattribute citations, or use long ones to make up for your lack of work; be more than 20 minutes late; use also at the beginning of sentences, finish them with adverbs.

## The long story (how this class works):

First, a warning: some of the material we will study contains graphic descriptions of cannibalism, and pictures depicting nudity—if that is something you are sensitive to, I will do my best to let you know ahead of time, come and see me to talk about it after the *first session*.

How the week will go: Every week you will be assigned readings in this class, and I expect you to do them.

For each of the readings, you will find a brief introduction of the work on our website (Blackboard). Depending on the week, you might be asked to do one or two short blog entries about the reading, a reading response, or a paper. Please refer to the assignment section.

I expect **every one of these to be yours**, and **timely**. (see aside “About Me”). We will also do in-class writing workshops and exercises—and acquiring the Modern Language Association handbook is not mandatory but will help with these. You will also get, **on the website**, handouts with clear guidelines for each paper, under the tab **Assignments**.

For each hour in class you should expect about two hours of work. For each written assignment (and blog posts if applicable), I will give you extensive feedback. **Read it: if I find twice the same error, I am likely to be more impatient with it the second time around.**

**Please do not throw away anything** you write. **At the end of the semester, you will bring all your productions together in a portfolio.** The portfolio will contain: all your drafts and final versions of every assignment, a print out of your blog posts, and your oral presentation’s material. At the end of the semester, you will present your portfolio to me, with any modifications or presentation format you would like to make, and assess your own progress, and decide what you can do to make your writing even better. You will also give me a global bibliography of works you cited during the semester. **For formatting purposes: use the MLA handbook (I am happy to proof-read your bibliography before you hand it in).**

### About me:

I did my PhD in that other Ivy, Brown University. It is in Providence, RI.

I work on nineteenth-century literature and history, and specifically on travel literature and colonization.

My office is in Karman Hall 142, and I am generally there every day, and I will happily sit down to chat, preferably in the morning.

I collect cameras. My oldest is from the 1880s, and I have over 60 of them.

I have nothing against granting extensions in extenuating circumstances, but be aware that once I have set a deadline, if you give me your paper after that, you run the risk of not getting it back until the end of the semester, which **will** be a hindrance to your progress—your choice.

If you would like to learn more about my research and past teachings, feel free to stop by at [acsieffert.wordpress.com](http://acsieffert.wordpress.com)

## Intended learning outcomes (what you will learn with me):

In this class you will:

- Learn about different genres related to travel writing;
- Study portraits of travelers, whether in texts or in films and other media;
- Learn the basic of what defines travel writing;
- Learn how to discern the authenticity of a source or not, and what we mean by “truthful” source;
- Learn about the intersection of race and gender in travel;
- Learn about the history of colonization, and its influence on travel writing;
- Write about travel critically in the setting of an academic paper, but also creatively when you write your own travel writing, and tune the style of your writing;

Be also advised that I really do not mind opinions that diverge from mine, as long as you are prepared to do the work to find citations in the text sustaining what you say, and to bring secondary readings to the table.

In the same spirit, padding your writing is not something I appreciate. Like John Steinbeck, I prefer the earnest scholar to the eloquent one (see *Travels with Charley*). You will learn conciseness, and clarity, in this class. Throughout the semester, I will repeat this: for academic papers, **one idea=one paragraph** is my golden rule.

The main intended goal of this course is to teach you how to write academic and non-academic writings. As such, you will have writing prompts that will require of you critical and close readings (I am, after all, a literature and language professor!), for which I will give you context and tips. But this class will also provide you with prompts for travel writing—in several formats, or genre, that we will delineate throughout the course. As you will soon discover in this class, there are no standard formula for travel writing, except this: writing should be a thoroughly personal experience, and you should enjoy yourself!

“When I was very young and the urge to be someplace else was on me, I was assured by mature people that maturity would cure this itch. When years described me as mature, the remedy prescribed was middle age. In middle age I was assured greater age would calm my fever and now that I am fifty-eight perhaps senility will do the job. Nothing has worked. Four hoarse blasts of a ships' whistle still raise the hair on my neck and set my feet to tapping. The sound of a jet, an engine warming up, even the clopping of shod hooves on pavement brings on the ancient shudder, the dry mouth and vacant eye, the hot palms and the churn of stomach high up under the rib cage. In other words, once a bum always a bum. I fear this disease incurable. I set this matter down not to instruct others but to inform myself....A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike. And all plans, safeguards, policing, and coercion are fruitless. We find after years of struggle that we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.”

John Steinbeck, *Travels with Charley*

## Fine print (the rules):

By taking this class, you abide by three codes:

**1) The Academic Code of Integrity:** available here, <http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>, it basically states that plagiarism is a capital sin, and that you should do your work alone—expect when explicitly instructed to work in groups.

**2) The Campus Code of Conduct:** available here, [https://assembly.cornell.edu/uploads/Elections/Campus\\_Code\\_of\\_Conduct.pdf](https://assembly.cornell.edu/uploads/Elections/Campus_Code_of_Conduct.pdf), protects every member of the community and states that equal access to education should be granted *regardless of “race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, gender (including pregnancy), sexual orientation, marital status, religion, disability, age, or ex-offender or military status.”* Basically, I expect you to treat each other decently, and you can expect me to treat you equally regardless of any of the above. **If you have a disability I should know about, so I can accommodate you, please let me know:** I am committed to making this class accessible to everyone.

**3) My class rules:** I do not take well to bullying, in any shape or form. I also do not take well to repeated absences, lateness, laxness in preparation, plagiarism, and I do not think Wikipedia is a valid source. I also do not like repeating myself, so to make sure everyone reads this syllabus, there will be a bonus point each in your class participation grade if you: give me a bibliography of every work cited in this syllabus (and I mean **every**) in the MLA format; find the Harry Potter reference hidden in the Blackboard site; find out why a 1507 map produced in St-Dié, France is significant to us, here and now.

Attendance is mandatory, and you are allowed only **3 unexcused absences**, after which I will take off 0.5 points off of your **final, overall class grade**. **Lateness of more than 20 minutes** will be considered **an absence**.

### Writing submission guidelines:

1. Times New Roman, size 12, **double-spaced**: my comments will be unreadable if I have to scrawl on single-spaced pages.
2. One-inch margins all around: wider margins are not acceptable.
3. Include on the upper left hand corner my name, the semester, as well as your name and the assignment number (and draft number if applicable). **Number individual pages (unlike the syllabus, your assignments will not be stapled, so number them).**
4. Use the Modern Language Association guidelines for formatting. You can find an online version of the guidebook (which is also at the Library) at: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01>. A Kindle version (8th edition) is \$10.
5. Your assignments will be turned in via Turnitin, to make sure you do not plagiarize your paper—any papers previously turned in will come up as plagiarized, so do not try this.