



Study abroad.

## SYLLABUS

### **PROSE, POLITICS AND PLACE: TRAVEL WRITING IN ITALY**

**Professor Lorraine Gallicchio Mercer**

**Contact Hrs: 45**

**Language of Instruction: English**

### **SIENA, ITALY**

A Nineteenth Century guide book for English speaking travelers has this advice regarding Italian boatmen: “If you are going on board a steamer at Naples they are apt to be extortionate, as they know you are leaving port and are not likely to give them any trouble with the police. If you are strong, and carry a cane or good umbrella, a threat to break his head, accompanied with a gesture to that effect, will generally cause him to proceed. If you are weak and timid, the best way is to say nothing, and if you are tough in conscience and don’t mind meeting downright rascality with a white lie, you can nod assent and let him go on.” [From Thomas W. Knox, *How to Travel: Hints, Advice, and Suggestions to Travelers by Land and Sea All Over the Globe*, New York, 1881. (quoted in, *The Norton Book of Travel*, Paul Fussell, (464-465).]

Around the same time the transcendentalist and writer Margaret Fuller, a New Englander previously never at a loss for words, wrote “There is very little that I can like to write about Italy. Italy is beautiful, worthy to be loved and embraced, not talked about. Yet I remember well that when afar I liked to read what was written about her.” In spite of this claim, Fuller went on to write a great deal about Italy, including descriptions of landscapes, art, cities, political events and also her impressions of the many travel writers who had come before her to record their own impressions of the country. Fuller also said

“The traveling English, as a tribe, seem to me the most unseeing of all possible animals. There are exceptions; for instance, the perceptions and pictures of Browning seem as delicate and just here on the spot as they did at a distance; but, take them as a tribe, they have the vulgar familiarity of Mrs. Trollope without her vivacity, the cockneyism of Dickens without his graphic power and love of the odd corners of human nature. I admired the English at home in their island, But they do not look well in Italy.”

From advice about Neapolitan boatmen, comments on the English, and a host of other travel writing, theory, and advice this course will wallow in the best (and some of the worst) British and American travel writing about Italy from the last 250 years. Through this study we will attempt to discover for ourselves, as did Fuller in the Nineteenth-Century, both an appreciation for the travelers who attempted to describe their experiences, and a way to record our own thoughts and appreciation for the experience of travel. In addition, the course works as both seminar on travel writing **and** as an intensive writing workshop. Each week will combine reading, discussion and analysis of readings from the packet, **and** practice in the art of keeping a personal travel journal. Many of the writing assignments will be location specific to Siena and the surrounding area. We will employ various techniques to write about personal experience and the art of travel. Elbow’s text provides writing practice in voice and tone, the use of metaphor in descriptions or places, concepts, and pieces of art. Berger’s essay provides a thoughtful springboard to begin thinking about ways writers and travelers look at, experience and interpret the complex experiences of travel.

**Requirements** include daily responses to assigned readings, (2 page minimum) and weekly journal writings. **Grades** will be based on the above and also on an in-class presentation, a formal essay on the assigned reading, and a final polished piece of personal travel narrative from the writing journal. Attendance and participation in all class activities are essential to the course and will also feature in the final grade.

**Texts:** Susan Cahill, ed. *Desiring Italy*  
Alice Leccese Powers, *Italy in Mind*  
Peter Elbow, *Writing with Power*  
Reading Packet and supplemental materials including selections from:  
Henry James, Margaret Fuller, Edith Wharton, Mark Twain  
Charles Dickens, John Berger, and others

**Excursions** are especially important for this class, so in addition to all group excursions to Rome, Venice, Florence, etc., much of our time will be spent on location at various sites in Siena, including statues, parks, fountains, piazzas, museums, churches and of course, gelaterias.

### **Reading Schedule For the Week of:**

Week 1	Introduction to the Course Elbow, pps. 3-46 and Norton readings in our packet
Week 2	Elbow, 47-77 and <i>Desiring Italy</i> , Introduction and Overtures, and from the section on Tuscany: Francesca Alexander, Kate Simon, Iris Origo
Week 3	Elbow 237-277 and DI: Lisa St. Aubin de Teran Packet: Henry James and Virginia Woolf
Week 4	Elbow 77-119/ <i>Italy in Mind</i> : Brodsky, Byron, Shelley DI: EBB, "Casa Guidi Windows," IM: EBB Letters, and RB "Up at a Villa"
Week 5	Packet: Mary McCarthy, Mark Twain, John Berger IM: Matthew Spender, Tim Parks, John Mortimer
Week 6	Elbow 177-278/ DI: section on the Veneto: Mary Shelley, Jan Morris, Marcella Hazen, Muriel Spark and IM: John Ruskin and Mary McCarthy
Week 7	DI: Section on the South: all selections IM: Calvin Trillin, Mark Twain, Susan Sontag Packet: Soldiers Guide to Sicily and Hester Piozzi
Week 8	Elbow 279-338 and DI: Section on Rome: Nightingale, Fuller, Clark, Wharton, Eliot
Week 9	Elbow 339-373 and IM: Paul Hoffman
Week 10	Review, Read-a-Round, Presentations
Week 11	<b>Final exam/project due</b>