

PROPOSAL for COLLEGE HONORS

Creative Project

1. Title: Returning to Penelope

2.) Abstract:

The purpose of my project is to write a six-part, creative non-fiction narrative. Proposed at 65 pages in length, each section, or essay of ten to fifteen pages, will explore my travel experiences over the course of the 2002-2003 academic year. Each composition will focus on a single trip: arrival to Bologna; hiking solo through the Swiss Alps; the pursuit of beauty in Umbria; the midnight walking tour of Brussels over Belgium beer; carnival in Cologne; and the charter of a boat through the Mediterranean. Research and personal experience will highlight the features and history of diverse cultures. By bringing these people and places together through rich storytelling, I will explore ideas of culture shock and one's wonder, displacement, and fragility in encountering "Other-ness."

3.) Description of the Project:

The proposed creative project will include six chapters, each a voyage reconstructing around a dramatized encounter with foreign people, places, and culture. I am using this word, the Other, as a term that comes to me through the work of Emmanuel Levinas, a post WWII philosopher who sought to reconcile and understand the relationship between "I and the Other" so that the horrors of WWII could not reoccur. Each chapter will be a meditation in an encounter with the Other. Through each narrative essay, I will creatively draw upon my experiences of 2002-2003 to reenact scenes for the reader that forever changed my own approach in embracing the complex features of diverse cultures.

Through this work I hope to accomplish a variety of tasks. The first is to translate my experience into art, into a form that brings memory to life and makes past experience present. In writing about another culture, I also hope to demonstrate myself to be an informed writer. My role as a non-fiction writer will require that I perform background research into the places explored through my writing. Familiarity with history and contemporary issues will allow me to present the reader with a more detailed and multi-layered portrait of foreign culture. A third hope for this project involves just myself, in my attempt to enter the writing world. This honors thesis will provide me with a look at the *work of book writing*, including background research, decisions about style and structure, the revision processes, and the development of my narrative voice. Part of learning about the work of book writing will include the study of a variety of travel writers to help me in my decision-making about style, methodology, approach, and structure.

birthday on a twelve hour ferry ride, and leads into the staging of my birthday and the return to Bologna. This chapter will look to highlight a found balance between myself and the Other as Italian and American friends gather together to celebrate through food and music.

4.) Previous Work

This collection of narrative essays will mandate my continued study of travel writing over the course of this project and raise my consciousness as to the techniques and decisions behind the writing process. To assist my own writing, I will be studying the following travel writers, as well as others.

- In *Seek: Reports from the Edges of America and Beyond*, Denis Johnson puts together a collection of essays and articles that are part travel journal, part self-exploration. Johnson addresses a world in which he finds horror and beauty in close proximity to one another. Johnson places his work's emphasis on transcendence.
- Rainer Maria Rilke, in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurida Brigge*, utilizes poetic prose as one of the 20th century's greatest poets. Rilke is cited for his structural uniqueness and purity of language. Themes in this novel include the alien life of the city and the realities that exist beneath appearances.
- In *Yoga for People Who Can't Be Bothered To Do It*, Geoff Dyer writes about losing himself through transcendental moments while traveling. He uses his eloquent, understated prose to speak to feelings of both frustration and calm, a feeling of trying to be at home in times of constant coming and going.
- Milan Kundera inspires the novelist in his work *The Art of the Novel*. "Beauty in art: the suddenly kindled light of the never-before-said." He inspires the writer to aim writing at discovery. This is essentially what this project is all about, discovery: to continue to make discoveries and reflect over my rich experiences of last year and to foster discovery in readers, to travel through the words on the page.
- Lastly, in 1947 Emmanuel Levinas writes *Time and Other*, a major contribution to 20th century European thought. The influence of his work concerning social responsibility has effected such figures as Jean-Paul Satre and Jacques Derrida. Levinas speaks to such themes as to where individuality may authentically exist. Levinas is also concerned with the destructive effort to reduce the Other to sameness through an attempt at mastery. His writing constructs a stage on which *I* may encounter the *Other* and where neither *I* nor the *Other* are stripped of our respective qualities.

Additionally, I will be working with my faculty advisor, [REDACTED] throughout the next month to seek out additional travel writers who may help me to better understand my position as narrator.

- The history of statue, “Little Boy Peeing,” from Brussels, Belgium
- Geographic information on Swiss Alps

IV. Develop outline for each individual essay

V Begin writing: I am to complete the first chapter by November 13th. This is so I may have my opening chapter, crucial to the establishment of structure and themes recurrent to the work as a whole, undergo examination and critique by peers. This will occur in a writing workshop, part of a creative non-fiction seminar taken with advisor, [REDACTED]

Perform preliminary revisions necessary to the first chapter.

Complete all chapters and perform preliminary revisions of all work by April 1. The following chart constructs an outline for my work, each chapter assigned a completion date.

Chapter	1	2	3	4	5	6
Completion Date	November 13	December 11	January 1	January 15	February 12	March 11

Revise, revise, revise! Then revise some more. It is crucial that I have sufficient time at revision. I have been well advised as to its importance in creative writing.

7.) References

David Brett, The Alps from End to End, Victor Gollanz, North Promfet, 1983

Karl Baedeker, Cologne and Bonn, MacMillan, New York, 1961

Geoff Dyer, Yoga For People Who Can't Be Bothered To Do It, Pantheon Books, New York, 2003.

Christopher Duggan, A Concise History of Italy, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994.

Denis Johnson, Seek, Reports from the Edges of America and Beyond, HarperCollins Publishers Inc, New York, 2001.

Milan Kundera, The Art of the Novel, Grove Press, New York, 1988

Emmanuel Levinas, Time and the Other, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1987.

Gary Paul Nabhan, Songbirds, Truffles, and Wolves: an American Naturalist in Italy, Pantheon Books, 1993.