POETRY AND CULTURE:
POEMS INSPIRED BY TRAVELS TO SPAIN AND ITALY

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Spring 2020
OVERVIEW

+ How did travel writing begin?
+ What is travel writing now?
+ Poets Elizabeth Bishop and Federico García Lorca
+ Craft elements
+ Creative research in Italy and Spain
+ Poems written while traveling
Travel writing originated with the embellished documentation of individuals’ journeys, such as Odysseus in *The Odyssey* and Columbus’ diaries from his travels to the Americas (edit down)

The genre has evolved over time to allow for wider conversations about the traveler and their experiences
WHAT IS TRAVEL WRITING NOW

+ Travel writing can be creative nonfiction, blog posts, poetry, and more
+ Travel writers Peter Chilson and Joanne B. Mulcahy write, “[o]pen up the metaphor of the border and you find intriguing situations where stories live: a border crossing is a place or situation in flux” (112)
WHAT CONSTITUTES AS TRAVEL

+ Well... everything:
  - Death, "travel" back to childhood memories, and more
LORCA'S TRAVEL WRITING

+ *Poet in New York: Collected Poems*, Federico García Lorca
+ Place as a metaphor for the poet's state of mind due to the isolation the Spanish poet felt while in New York
+ Poems divided into geographical sections
BISHOP'S TRAVEL WRITING

+ Collection of poems, *Questions of Travel*, comprised of two sections
  - Brazil
    × Discusses travels to Brazil, neocolonialism, and absence of the speaker's mother
  - Elsewhere
    × Discusses death and childhood
CRAFT ELEMENTS

+ Imagery ensures the reader is situated in the place the writer has traveled to
+ Metaphor allows the destination to become more than just a place
MY TRAVELS

+ 2018 study abroad in Sevilla, Spain
  – Similarities between Spanish culture and my culture as a Mexican-American
  – Colonialism and Columbus

+ 2019 conference abroad in Postignano, Italy
  – Explored the home of my religion, Catholicism
  – The role of family
John Keats’ deathbed over- and underwhelmed me. 
He didn’t sleep or die there. 
The Pope ordered the original bed to burn 
to stop the spread of tuberculosis. 
Keats and his fears of ceasing to be…
Walking around his room 
with you, neither of us coughed up 
blood. I ignored the signage – 
typical tourist – and touched 
the comforter. It was green. 
I turned to you, expecting a scolding – 
where did you go? 

Back downstairs? 
I circled the tiny room again, blinded 
myself making sure the sun still shone 
outside the small window. Love, 
to nothingness, does sink.
I was nineteen, finding that I could never love a man, and looking up at a statue of one whose words I could love. A man with a nineteen-year career—stopped dead in its tracks—holding flowers on his hundred and twentieth birthday, a dulling but not yet dead pink bouquet shrouded in greenery that somebody must have placed between his outstretched bronze arms and the outstretched wings of the bronze bird in his hands. A red rendering of Velázquez’s meninas waits a few yards behind him.
“Madrid a Federico García Lorca” reads the inscription with a penciled-in tilde.

He wasn’t worried to be born, he wasn’t worried about death, but looking up at him, and living where he died, I can’t help but fear, perhaps irrationally, I will have the same end. In Granada, I climbed to the top of a mirador with another poet for a view of the Alhambra, a sight Lorca surely knew well before his execution. We argued about what ravine may be your resting place. The place doesn’t matter. Atop this hill, looking out onto the top of another, I become that bronze bird.

June 2018
POEM: A DAY IN THE VATICAN

You inherit nothing from your father apart from Catholicism and bipolar. 
You ditch the former and smoke the latter out.

Meet where it began, formally, 
the first Holy Father buried below 
the Basilica’s altar, footsteps falling 
with your father’s,

following his path into the side chapel 
to say a quick Hail Mary or two, 
his path to alcoholism that reveals itself upon leaving

the Basilica, approaching a vendor, 
buying two beers, downing them both while greeting two nuns. Dangerously close, Chad Davidson writes,

as if there were another kind of nearness.
The nuns respond in English, the beers a normality, expected for the duo standing a foot apart, one smiling.
Did you know they filmed *Star Wars* there? It was built in Sevilla in 1929. In 1929, my buelita was born in Villa de Santiago, México. El pueblo mágico. In 2018, I wandered through the Sevillana monument, too unsure of its present purpose to find a way inside. Alone. Too unsure to find a way out of my meditative trance until I hit a roadblock, a street performer, playing percussion, trash at first sight, drums on further inspection. Es una celebración de Iberoamérica, Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the Americas. Columbus set sail across the ocean blue on August 3, 1492. On August 13, 1521, the Aztec Empire fell. A lot happens in 30 years. You can get married, have a baby, immigrate to the United States, leaving behind el pueblo mágico por la ciudad del odio. In the summer of 2018, I witnessed this celebration of Iberoamérica, crossed one of the bridges to get to the central fountain, escaping god knows what. The story says Moctezuma thought Cortés a god. It was too perfect, the eagle on the cactus eating the serpent. Something about perfect symmetry makes me uncomfortable. The perfect symmetry of the Spanish Square is no exception. The Spanish Square is not a square. I can’t paint this picture for you. It’s *Attack of the Clones*. They won’t tell you it’s the worst *Star Wars* movie, but I know better.
WORKS CITED

