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Professor Sweeney

English 100

Travel Writing: What Is It *Really*?

Introduction

The profession that most interests me is journalism, and even more specifically, travel writing. Travel writing combines two things that I personally am passionate about: traveling and writing. It is the perfect fusion of professional journalism and adventure that makes the profession of travel writing so appealing to me, which is why I have chosen to focus on it in terms of rhetorical lenses. Aside from interviewing a journalist who spent time interviewing people like the Dalai Lama, I have also chosen to profile either the American Society of Journalists and Authors, which is an organization of various writers that span to include travel writers, or Great Escape Publishing, another organization that houses many writers and photographers important to travel writing society. Through these interviews I wish to discover more information about the genre of travel writing as whole, in an attempt to reveal the truth about how exactly it works within the discourse community.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of conducting this research is to examine the discourse community which belongs to travel writers in order to discover the fallacies- if any- behind travel writing. Travel writing may seem from the outside as some sort of dream come true for writers like myself who are infatuated with the idea of writing *and* traveling as a career, and it is because of this too-good-to-be-true feeling that raises some skepticism, which will guide me on this exposé of travel writing. Through my pursuit of information about travel writing and what it entails, I wish to expose what it really is, compared to what it is made out to be to the outside world, essentially minimizing the knowledge gap that spans between observer and participant. By the end of the study, I hope to have successfully profiled the genre of travel writing itself, and determined the realistic experience it entails.

Questions and Hypothesis

In order to determine the “real” travel writing as opposed to the notion of travel writing, I am going to focus on these questions:

1. How does one get started in the travel writing industry?
2. What is a generalized example of an assignment in travel writing?
3. What type of experience or background is necessary in either writing or traveling?
4. What is the actual travel aspect like? (rooming, food, money, mode of transportation, destinations upon arrival, etc)
5. What is the difference between being a sponsored writer and a freelance writer of travels?
6. What are some ways in which it is similar to and different from initial expectations?

I believe that focusing on these questions will allow me to prove that there is a large difference between what people *think* travel writing entails and what it *actually* entails; that travel writing is not all that it appears, and is in fact much less glamorous than people believe it to be.

Literature Review

In this analysis of travel writing, I intend to use the activity theory in order to look at the various parts of travel writing. Using activity theory allows us to account for aspects of a system to better understand the nature of the activity, as well as analyze how parts of a system work together. This will coincide well with my research because I am going to be looking at how travel writing truly works, and by looking at the tools used within the genre, I can determine what it really takes to succeed within the specific genre community and use those results to compare to what travel writing is generally thought to comprise of.

Aside from an interview with a journalist who has traveled the world, I will be looking at two different organizations which support and house travel writers; the American Society of Journalists and Authors, and Great Escape Publishing. I chose these two organizations because they are two well-known sites in the travel writing community that support travel writers and provide some examples of writers who have excelled in their travels. I will also look at an article from Transitions Abroad, which is a website that is solely dedicated to providing information about all things regarding traveling and academics abroad.

Transitions Abroad Article

The specific article that I am going to be studying is one titled “The Seven Myths of Being a Travel Writer.” It is written by an award-winning travel writer who has published multiple books on traveling, and in the article he exposes what he personally believes are the main seven fallacies or myths that surround travel writing, all of which he determined through his own experiences. The author lists both in-depth explanations of why they are myths, as well as exposes the reality behind the myth. It provides a realistic look into the life of a travel writer, and bluntly legitimizes the myths that have conspired over the years.

American Society of Journalists and Authors

This association has been around for almost 70 years now, and is home to nearly 1,200 freelance writers in the broad spectrum of nonfiction. Multiple success stories from members of this site claim that this organization is the platform that got them to their current profession which was tailored to each individual, where their interests and passions were turned into their life careers. This organization provides information about all of the writers in their community and shares how people have gone from unemployed freelance writers to experienced and successful journalists.

Great Escape Publishing

This publishing company is more than just that, it is an organization which is genuinely interested in recruiting more writers and journalists who can fit into any of the eight main categories they have; travel writing, travel videos, photography, creating tours, microgigs,

language learning, import export, and blogging. Having such a wide range of opportunities may seem overwhelming, but it proves the diversity amongst the writers within the organization. This organization actively sends out articles and tips on travel writing and the various components of being a journalist, and repeatedly comes up with new events, conferences, and opportunities for people who might already be involved or are looking to be involved in the business to help create an awareness and draw people in. Their “Get-Paid-to-Travel” programs span the eight different categories and provide a lot of aid in getting started within them.

Research Design

Participants

The journalist who I will be interviewing is going to remain anonymous to protect her identity, unless she wishes to be named in the study. She is a faculty member at St. Mary’s College of California who worked as a journalist for many years before she came to St. Mary’s. She has traveled to various places to write articles, although I am not sure as of right now whether or not she ever worked under an organization or corporation, or she worked as a freelance writer. I am also planning on surveying a random group of people about what they think travel writing entails in order to gather a sufficient amount of information about what people’s general thoughts about travel writing are. The survey answers would come to me anonymously and there would be no names attached to the answers, so I will not know who the answers came from, only the names of the random group of people I send the survey out to.

Interview Procedure

For the interview with the experienced journalist, I will be conducting it in person. If authorized, I am going to use a recording device to ensure that all answers to my questions are fully recorded. Aside from the recording device, I am going to bring a notebook with the questions and record the answers as well as make any notes or even add on additional questions that I may think of during the interview process.

For the online anonymous survey, I am going to create an online quiz comprised of questions that ask people about what they know about travel writing based solely off their own knowledge. The survey will be sent out to a random group of individuals at St. Mary's College of various ages, races, etc in order to try and eliminate any biases or validity issues.

Data

I am going to gather my data about the reality of travel writing from the personal interview, the online article written by the well-experienced travel writer, and also partially from the organization sites. I am going to compare the data and results that I gather to the information about what people *think* travel writing is. I am going to provide extra data about people's beliefs about travel writing through the online anonymous survey. Ultimately, I am going to generate a general synopsis of what people think travel writing is-based off the survey, article and personal interview- and a general synopsis of what travel writing truly entails- based off the personal interview and the online article. It is through this comparison that I will make my own conclusions about the gap between what travel writing is thought to be and what it really is.

Back-up Plan

I know for a fact that I will be able to conduct an interview with the experienced journalist, but I am still waiting to hear back from both of the organizations I have looked at. If neither of the organizations respond, I will rely on the personal interview and the online survey to provide the data for what travel writing entails and what people think it to be, respectively.

Interview Questions

The following are the main guiding questions that I will have written down to initiate conversations, but I expect other questions and topics to arise throughout the duration of the interview that will potentially help me in my research.

1. When did you become a journalist?
2. Were you a freelance writer or did you work for an organization?
3. Was it easy or hard to work freelance? (or for an organization, depending on answer)
4. What places were you sent to write your articles?
5. How was the traveling handled? (money, destinations, etc)
6. What do you define travel writing as?
7. Were there any preconceived idealizations you had about being a travel writer that you realized were false as you continued your work? What were they and how were they exposed to you?
8. Do you think that there is a knowledge gap in general regarding travel writing?

Sources

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