

Glimpses into the Exotic: 7 Travel Writers and a Photographer in the 20's & 30's

Wednesday, October 23 to December 11, 2024 - 10am to 12 noon

In Person at Fairfield Seniors Centre

www.learningunlimitedetobicoke.com

Coordinator and Presenter: Jeffrey Canton

Course Overview: This course looks at some of the overlooked travel writers of the 1920's and 1930's and extraordinary portraits of the world that they offered contemporary readers before the world was turned upside down by World War II. Their travel books provide us with a sense of the excitement of travel in a world that was still largely unexplored by the ordinary traveler. Full of a sense of adventure and joie de vivre, their works reawaken much of the mystery of going abroad that has disappeared in the 21st century.

NOTE: *This is not a mandatory reading list but a list of the books to be discussed in the lectures.*

Wednesday, October 23: Stella Benson: Confronting Colonial, Taking on the World: China and Hong Kong

We'll start in 1920 and go to Japan, China and Hong Kong with British writer Stella Benson after she and her husband drove across the United States in a Ford.

Books: Stella Benson *"The Little World"* (1925) and *Worlds Within Worlds* (1928)

Wednesday, October 30: Alexandra David-Neel: Into the Forbidden City, Tibet in 1924

When we follow Belgian-French explorer, anarchist, Buddhist and writer Alexandra David-Neel, we'll have a chance to see the holy city of Lhasa in Tibet at a time when it was forbidden to foreigners.

Book: Alexandra David-Neel *"My Journey to Lhasa"* (1924)

Wednesday, November 6: Freya Start: Marvels of the Middle East in 1927

It's 1927 when British-Indian explorer Freya Start takes us into the wilderness of western Iran, parts of which no Westerner had ever visited. These included the fabled Valley of the Assassins, the subject of the first of more than 2 dozen travel books she wrote about her travels in the Middle East.

Book: *"The Valley of the Assassins and other Persian Travels"* (1934)

Wednesday, November 13: The Other Fleming: Peter Fleming (and Ella Maillert) go from Moscow to Peking in 1930

We'll join British adventurer Peter Fleming (older brother of James Bond creator Ian Fleming) as we travel from Moscow to Peking, a journey he shared in 1930 with Swiss adventurer and photographer Ella Maillert. Their very different perspectives on what they saw and experienced are very illuminating. Fleming is particularly interested in sharing a sense of the politics of China and Japan.

Books: *"One's Company: A Journey to China in 1933"* (1934)
"News from Tartary: A Journey from Peking to Kashmir"

Wednesday, November 20: Flipping the Perspective: Ella Maillert (and Peter Fleming) from Moscow to Peking in 1930

Whereas Peter Fleming's account of the journey he shared with Maillert is polished, witty and with an off-the-cuff irony, written to enhance the glory of the British Empire, she writes of the difficulties they faced including the heat, thugs, and food poisoning. Maillert is much more sensitive to the environment and empathetic toward the Nomadic peoples they encountered.

Books: *"Forbidden Journey: From Peking to Kashmir"* (1937)
"The Cruel Way: Switzerland to Afghanistan in a Ford" (1947)

Wednesday, November 27: When Chiang Yee Came to England: A Chinese Poet and Artist Visits London

To throw a twist into the mix, we'll see what London looked like to a Chinese poet and calligrapher Chiang Yee who started teaching Chinese at the University of London in 1933 and whose book chronicles his experiences in the English capital in the 1930's.

Book: *"A Silent Traveller in London"* (1938)

Wednesday, December 4: Walking Across the World with Patrick Leigh-Fermor from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople in 1932-1934

Our final travel writer, Patrick Leigh-Femor, set off in December 1932 to walk from the Hook of Holland and ended in Istanbul in 1934. Particularly interesting is that he didn't chronicle this trip until 1977 when he published the first of what was a projected, but unfinished, trilogy. However, his books "A Time of Gifts" (1977) and "Between the Woods and Water" (1986) as well as "The Broken Road", a volume based on his draft manuscript and extensive diaries, are considered among the greatest works of travel literature in the 20th century.

Books: *"A Time of Gifts: On foot to Constantinople from the Hook of Holland to the Middle Danube"* (1977)
"Between the Woods and the Water: on foot to Constantinople from the Middle Danube to the Iron Gate" (1986)
"The Broken Road: Travels from the Iron Gates to Mount Athos" (2014)

Wednesday, December 11: Richard Scheuer Visits Europe in 1934

We'll finish the course with a look at a series of photographs taken by 17-year-old Richard Scheuer who, in the summer of 1934 (when Hitler declared himself Fuhrer), traveled across Europe with his father, Simon and a 35mm camera. They visited France, Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, and the other parts of what would become the USSR. Scheuer took and developed 13 rolls of film, but never enlarged or printed any of the images which were discovered by his son in 2008. Scheuer's photographs brilliantly complement the literary account proved by Patrick Leigh-Femor and offer insights in a world swallowed by the deluge of World War II.

Book: *"Street Visions: Europe 1934"* Exhibition Catalog, Dr. Bernard Heller Museum, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York August 22-December 15, 2022.

Biography

Books, reading, and writing are at the heart of Jeffrey Canton's teaching practice and a lifelong desire to share his passion for learning. Since 2016, Jeffrey Canton has been teaching in 50+ programs across the GTA creating a diverse range of innovative and intriguing courses for the LIFE Institute, the Chang School's Programs for 50+, The Baycrest Classroom, the Baycrest Learning Academy, Baycrest at Home, COSAP, Storytelling Toronto and Learning Unlimited Etobicoke.

Jeffrey was also founding member of York University's Children's Studies Program where he lectured for over a decade. His courses range from explorations of Great Gardens of the World, Great Cooks, The Armchair Traveller, Scandinavian Noir, Monet's Giverny and Walking the World. Since 1985, he's also been a literary journalist and is currently the Children's Books columnist for The Globe and Mail.

As a writer and performer, Jeffrey has told stories at the Toronto Storytelling Festival, Trophy, the Provocations Festival, Nuit Blanche, Museum Intersections, the Hamilton Fringe Festival and was a Storytelling-in-Residence for the 2022 Toronto Biennial of Art.

Committee Contact: Glenn Yaffee