



Hello writer friends,

Happy December! I hope this is a season of reflecting on and writing about past travels. In this newsletter, I have some inspiration for you that can lead to some excellent travel memoir writing with clear models and precedents. But first, a question to ease us into this writing prompt:

Who are the travel figures that have inspired you?

I don't only mean explorers or other travel writers of the past, although that certainly counts as well. I also mean famous authors, actors, legends, and general figures of renown that came from or resided for a time in the place where you visited. Such obvious examples are Jane Austen in Bath, Lucy Maud Montgomery, author of *Anne of Green Gables*, in Nova Scotia, and King Arthur in Tintagel, England.

The figure you choose must be someone whose work and life you are passionate about. Writing about a person or legend you feel ambivalent toward won't work. The person doesn't have to be the most famous person you can think of, either. In fact, obscurity might be a benefit, as many people have written about the most famous people in connection to their well-known haunts.

If you are passionate about such a person, odds are that when you visited Paris or Bali or Nova Scotia, you sought out places in connection with them. **In this newsletter, I aim to inspire you to write about that encounter.**

For such stories, the narrative arc is pretty much already built in:

1. Narrating **the anticipation** of visiting this historic home / city / woodland / cabin / museum that connects to the historical figure you admire
2. Depicting **what it's like to be in this space** that this figure inhabited. Does the place live up to your expectations? Where / when are you disappointed? Where / when have your expectations been met or exceeded?

(Throughout step #2, sprinkle in your backstory in relation to this figure. **Why are you drawn to them?** Did their art help you out of a tough time? Did your mother watch their movies and you saw her anxiety slip away? Does this person serve as a model or anti-model for your own life? Why do they hold your fascination?)

3. Portraying **the moment you leave** this place and move on, reflecting on what you have learned.

Here's a short excerpt from my own attempt at this type of story, published in *The Common Review* in 2006. The magazine is no longer circulating. This excerpt depicts step #1 (the anticipation):

After I moved to London, I often watched the 319 bus stutter through the mid-day traffic along Kings Road, "Streatham" written across the top like a personal advertisement. I wondered what I would find there, at the last stop. One thing I knew I wouldn't find was Hester Thrale, the woman famed for her intimate and, in the end, caustic friendship with literary giant Samuel Johnson. Still, every time I watched the 319 bus go by, I searched the faces of the passengers on the lower deck as if looking for Mrs. Thrale, the famed eighteenth-century hostess, with plump frame and vivacious manner, stilted poetry and thwarted family hopes. I imagined her former home in Streatham Park, hosting literary gatherings of writers and thinkers like Dr. Johnson, Edmund Burke, and Oliver Goldsmith—all attracted to the comforts and dazzling conversation of Mrs. Thrale's drawing room. In that home Mrs. Thrale also experienced the casual indifference of her husband, the deaths of eight of her twelve children—and finally, the shocking, scandalous love affair between her and Gabriel Piozzi. I knew the reality could be no match for my mind's picture of Streatham; I knew that I was headed for disappointment if I should go there. But every time the bus pulled up, I wanted to get on.

And one day, I did. To alleviate my anxieties, to stave off the disappointment of not finding the Mrs. Thrale I had imagined, I told myself that I would go to Streatham for a very different reason: to look at a flat and view the town as a possible future resident. Even though I soon learned that Mrs. Thrale's former home had long since been torn down and turned into a string of council flats, I nevertheless called one of the many landlords offering rooms to let in Streatham and set up an appointment for that evening. I came home from work and hopped on the red double-decker bus, casually, as if I did it every day. On the top deck I sat close at a window, watching the familiar Kings Road give way to Battersea Bridge, the bus taking me in a direction I'd never been before.

For full models of this type of writing, see:

[The Accidental Hitchhiker](#) by Celeste Brash

[A Not-So-Literary Tour of South-Central Mexico](#) by Peter Ferry

[Searching for Hunter S. Thompson in Texas, Bolivia](#) by Brian Kevin

See if you can pick out the 3 steps, and have a go at writing each step yourself, for your own journey!

Craft book recommendations:

[The Art of Voice: Poetic Principles and Practice](#) by Tony Hoagland: While this book is focused on poetry, it has really helped me clarify what people mean when they talk about 'voice.' Hoagland has really allowed me to understand how I could manipulate my

voice for certain affect, and why I would make that choice. For that reason, I highly recommend this book for any kind of creative writing pursuit.

Seven Drafts: Self-Edit Like a Pro from Blank Page to Book by Allison K. Williams: I've just read the sample of this one and yes, I am going to read the whole thing. This book is great for any kind of story telling, but since Allison primarily writes and teaches nonfiction, this book is particularly directed toward true stories. I like the way she breaks down the considerations that go into telling one's story in a way that is clear and comprehensive.

Writing prompt: List some historical figures, well-known to all or more obscure, who have inspired you throughout your life, who have perhaps served as models, or even anti-models, to the way you've chosen to live. Have you ever visited a place in connection with their life or work? Write the story of that encounter. Did you feel disappointed, relieved, satisfied? What did you learn about the person by being in a place where they lived / worked?

Question for you: Would you rather visit the place of a historical figure you love and be disappointed, or never make it to that museum / house / location and always wonder what it would have been like?

Write Your Travel Memoir: A Step-by-Step Guide by Jillian Schedneck

"I loved this book and I learned so much. I wish I'd had this before writing my memoir, but believe me, I'll use it from here on."

Marilyn Abildskov, author of The Men in My Country, Professor, MFA Program in Creative Writing, Saint Mary's College of California

