

Valérie Loichot. French. Sunday, August 2nd, 2009.

FREN 488. "Caribbean Literature and the Environment"

Introductory Paragraph

Before participating in the "Piedmont Project Faculty Seminar," it was already obvious to me that questions of environment and sustainability were widespread concerns in Caribbean literature. However, this seminar allowed me to understand why. The definition of sustainability according to the "UN Bruntland Report" was particularly enlightening: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The idea of care and ethical responsibility towards future generations and their environment seems to be the polar opposite of the exploitation of people and land that occurs with slavery and colonization, two shaping forces of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Haiti, the three main examples I will analyze in the course.

Another eye-opening moment was our analysis of the definition of "Sustainable Community" around the "Triple Bottom Line." This model views "Sustainable community" as the three imbricated concentric circles of the Economy, the Society, and the Environment. This view allowed me to realize that sustainability is not limited to environmental issues, but also addresses the interconnectedness of the environment and all other human exchanges and productions. The idea of sustainability as interconnectedness convinced me to teach an entire seminar on Caribbean literature and the environment, instead of relegating sustainability issues to isolated modules. Indeed, sustainability shapes -and is shaped by- all manifestations of natural, cultural surroundings, and by their intermingling.

For instance: **Geology** and **Geography** (islands, archipelagoes -- isolating and connecting--, volcanoes, hurricanes, rain forest, mangrove, beach); **Agriculture** (deforestation, plantation agriculture, cash crops, lack of sustainable farming); **Economy** (exportation of monocultures --sugarcane, bananas; dependency on tourism and on economic assistance from colony or former colony; exploited working bodies who do not consume the product of their work since it is almost entirely exported; stark juxtaposition of starvation --of workers-- and bounty --of exported goods); **Law** (slave codes declaring that owned humans could not own land); **Politics** (disconnection from neighboring nations: Guadeloupe and Martinique belong to the EU, not to CARICOM; easier to travel from Guadeloupe to Paris than to Barbados); **History** (alienation from a land unto which slave ancestors were deported,

which leads to: lack of founding myth of origin; psychological distance between Caribbean subjects and their landscape whose monuments are sugarcane factories, mills, former slave markets; cane fields; Caribbean subjects for whom the sea does not mean leisure and vacationing, but a grave peopled with molding shackles and human remains; persisting pyramidal hierarchies based on race, class, culture, gender, urban vs. rural classifications); **Culture** (these series of disconnections from the local and dependencies on remote locations lead to feelings of devaluation of local cultural production, such as languages (Creoles), literatures (internationally renowned writers such as Aimé Césaire are not included in school curriculum), and food (tasteless imported apples are overvalued while fresh mangoes are devalued).

Beyond this pessimistic portrait, the course will reflect on the many ways in which Caribbean subjects reclaim their landscape, and work towards sustainability as re-connection. For instance: flowing symbiosis between bodies and landscapes, reclaiming or rebuilding monuments, fighting an economy imposed from the outside (colony, global markets) with local strategies (sustainable and local gardens, crops, and markets), privileging local aesthetics while linking them to the world.

Loichot. Syllabus FREN 488. “Caribbean Literature and the Environment.”

COURSE SYLLABUS

FREN 488-002. Caribbean Literature and the Environment.

Professor: Valérie Loichot

Office: Callaway N 404B

Office hours: TBA or by appt.

Phone: (404) 727-7950

Days and time: TBA

Location: TBA

Required Books

- Marie-Célie Agnant. Le Livre d’Emma.
- Aimé Césaire: Cahier d’un retour au pays natal.
- ---. Discours sur le Colonialisme.
- Maryse Condé. Traversée de la Mangrove.
- Jacques Roumain. Gouverneurs de la rosée.

Electronic Reserve:

Supplemental readings are available on electronic reserve.

Films:

The following films are on reserve at the Multimedia Library.

- Stephanie Black. Life and Debt.
- Renee Gosson. Terre-mémoire-histoire martiniquaise

Course Rationale:

The course will examine the literary and cultural production of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti. A special emphasis will be put on environmental questions, such as the effects of colonization, deforestation, tourism, and intensive agricultural production on the land.

Environmental concerns and problems are severe in these three islands, and are due, for example, to intensive deforestation in the case of Haiti, to intensive exploitation of the land for cash crops such as sugar-cane and bananas, to the destruction of the ecologically crucial mangrove-space to make room for tourist resorts in Martinique and Guadeloupe, to the scarcity of water (often imported), to the intensive production of trash that remains on landfills on the islands (the largest production of Martinique in volume is its trash) . These environmental concerns are frequently expressed in the fiction, poetry, films, and theoretical texts of Caribbean thinkers. For instance, we will read Maryse Condé's Traversée de la Mangrove (Crossing the Mangrove) in light of ecological studies on the effects of the disappearance of the Mangrove in Guadeloupe. Jacques Roumain's novel Gouverneur de la Rosée (Masters of the Dew) will illustrate practices of deforestation in Haiti and address the value of water, which is often seen as a given in our industrialized Western societies. Stephanie Black's Life and Debt which examines the economic and environmental effects of tourism in Jamaica. We will also look at the effects of the exploitation of the land by the plantation economy through Aimé Césaire's Cahier d'un retour au pays natal and read Suzanne Césaire's "Le grand camouflage," which reflects on how the beauty of the island erases economic and environmental problems that are not perceived by the tourist or the traveler's gaze. Also, texts by Patrick Chamoiseau and Edouard Glissant that reflect on the "bétonnification" (an urban landscape dominated by concrete) of Martinique would be helpful to understand how sustainable acts such as the cultivation of private gardens and local markets are increasingly replaced by malls and commercial structure

relying heavily on importation (99% of consumed goods in Martinique are imported).

Course objectives:

- To introduce students to the cultures, literatures, and politics of the Caribbean (particularly Martinique, Haiti, and Guadeloupe)
- To engage students in thinking about the natural world and sustainability
- To give students tools for cultural and cross-cultural analysis and to introduce them to terms and methods useful to the critical discussion and analysis of texts.
- To improve students' reasoning and writing skills.

Methods:

This class meets twice a week. Classes are devoted to lecture and discussion. The class is taught in French with the exception of four class discussion sessions held in English since the texts discussed are written in English. Lectures will be kept to a minimum (10 minutes) and group or class discussions will dominate the period. Students are expected to participate actively. As a result, it is imperative that students read the assigned number of pages of the day and prepare the assignment distributed beforehand. A large percentage of the final grade will be related to participation.

Grading:

Participation and attendance: 10 %

Your participation will be evaluated on your preparation, involvement and positive attitude in class activities, your punctuality and assiduity. Late arrivals disturb class greatly so please make sure to arrive on time out of respect for your peers. You will have study questions to prepare for each session. These questions are meant to help you understand the texts and films and focus on the important points. Since class discussion will be based on the points introduced in the questions, if you do not prepare them, you cannot participate actively. When you come to class, you are expected to be entirely there, body and mind, awake and engaged. Please turn off your cellphones during class time.

Midterm examination: 20 %

Identification questions on the readings discussed in class.

Oral presentation: 20 %

A 5-8 minute presentation on a topic related to sustainability, nature, or the environment in Caribbean literature. You will be required to read at least one theoretical reading linked to the theme of your presentation.

Papers: 50% (20% / 30%)

Students are required to write **one** 4-5 page **response paper** on documents and ideas discussed in class and **one** 8-9 page term paper.

Papers should be handed in on or before the due date. 5 points will be taken off the paper grade for each late day, including week-end days. You are strongly encouraged to consult with me at any point during the research and writing process. I will read a first draft of each paper and comment on content, language, structure, and style. I will not accept late first drafts. If you do not have your first draft completed on time, I will only read your final version. It is of course to your advantage to give me a first draft in order to profit from my comments. Your first draft will have to be in a finished form: no drafts with unfinished sentences, telegraphic style, or without conclusions will be read.

You are strongly encouraged to seek help and advice at the French Department Writing Clinic.

Papers should be computer printed, double-spaced, 12 points, Times. The style of footnotes, quotations, bibliography, margins, spacing, etc. should adhere to MLA guidelines. Consult Diana Hacker's A Writer's Reference (Boston: Bedford Books and Saint-Martin's Press) to verify the proper format.

A detailed explanation of each writing assignment will be handed out in advance of the due dates.

- Attendance policy.

Information is provided in class each day, which is not available anywhere else, and the small group activities which will be part of many classes provide learning experiences which cannot be replaced. At the same time, you are an adult and must make your own decisions regarding how you spend your time and whether you attend class. I have a responsibility to base your grade on what you have learned. A student who attends half the classes will learn less than a person who attends all the classes, even if the half-timer has better grades on the written assignments.

What this means is that, although absences can be officially excused, they can never entirely be made up. More than two days absence will deprive you of a substantial amount of the material included in this course. In addition to physical presence in the classroom, I will expect you to have read each day's assignment beforehand and to be prepared to discuss it. Since this class will operate as a *learning community*, your contributions to the learning

process as a whole will be evaluated as 15% of your grade. A few thoughtful comments, even comments made in small groups as opposed to the whole class, contribute greatly to the learning community. If you commit yourself to raising the questions which are on your mind you will do fine.

If a student arrives late for a quiz, examination, oral presentation, no extra-time will be allotted. If the student completely misses the test/quiz/presentation, s/he will receive an F.

It is understandable when infrequently a student may not have completed the homework assignment. If such is the case, class attendance is still preferable to cutting. The student should simply inform me before class begins, and I will not call on her/him that day.

These are the considerations I will have in mind when I assign a grade for participation and attendance (representing 15% of your final grade for the course) at the end of the semester.

Program

1. Landscape, Seascape, Slavery, Beginnings

Edouard Glissant: "La Barque ouverte"

Derek Walcott. "The Sea Is History"

Marie-Célie Agnant. Le Livre d'Emma.

Jana Evans Braziel: "Caribbean Genesis"

2. The Islands: Too Beautiful to Be Seen

Le Père Labat: Voyages du père Labat aux Isles de l'Amérique (excerpts)

A Selection of "doudouistes"*- paintings and poems

André Breton: "Martinique, charmeuse de serpents"

Lafcadio Hearn: Two Years in the French West Indies (excerpts)

Suzanne Césaire: "Le grand camouflage"

3. Colonialism, Plantation, Deforestation

Aimé Césaire: Discours sur le Colonialisme

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E.K. Brathwaite: "Caribbean Man in Space and Time"

Edouard Glissant. Le Discours antillais (excerpts)

Antonio Benítez-Rojo. "Sugar and the Environment in Cuba"

Jacques Roumain. Gouverneurs de la rosée.

Helen Tiffin: "Man Fitting the Landscape": Nature, Culture, and Colonialism"

4. Trash and Tourism

Stephanie Black. Life and Debt
Jamaica Kincaid. A Small Place
Ian Strachan. Paradise and Plantation (excerpts)
Renée Gosson: Paysage, histoire, Mémoire martiniquais
5. Reclaiming the Mangrove: A New Symbiosis
Maryse Condé. Traversée de la Mangrove
Wilfredo Lam: “The Jungle”
Suzanne Césaire. “L’homme-plante”

* “Doudouism” is a form of exoticism particular to the Antilles. It involves the eroticizing of native landscapes and women alike, also often turning these erotic bodies into sweet and fruity objects of consumption.