Margaret Atwood’s ‘Green Dream’

Ecology and Environmental Imagination in English-Canadian Literature

Lecturer: PD Dr. Stefan L. Brandt
Course type: Seminar, LV-Nr. 050642, 4 CP (Optionalbereich)
Room and time: GABF 04/614 (Süd), Wednesdays, 16-18

Short description:
It has frequently been argued that Canadian cultural practice is marked by “a preoccupation with landscape, and with the oppressiveness (as much as the sublime beauty) of nature” (Will Straw). This course wants to examine this claim with respect to various works crafted by Canadian authors dealing with environmental issues. Special emphasis will be given to the oeuvre of Ottawa-born writer Margaret Atwood. Beginning with Atwood’s poetry cycle The Journals of Susanna Moodie (1970), we will analyze what ramifications the recognition that “we are all immigrants to this place even if we were born here” has upon the formation of Canadian identity. Canada is delineated in Atwood’s writings as a “cultural mosaic” established on the grounds of native peoples and diversified throughout the centuries by Anglophone, Francophone and East-Asian influences. Her novel Surfacing (1972) as well as her “thematic guide to Canadian literature,” Survival (1972), make strong use of archetypes developed in Jungian psychology in order to sketch a mythopoetic image of Canada. The seminar will scrutinize the paradoxical concept of “home ground, foreign country” negotiated in Atwood’s fiction and non-fiction. Why does Atwood devote so many of her writings to the symbolic battleground between nature and city, landscape and cityscape, for example, in her collections of short stories, Wilderness Tips (1991) and Moral Disorder (2006)? While the course investigates the ecological aesthetics of Atwood’s own texts, it also pays attentions to the literary context of Canadian literature since the late 1960s, namely Earle Birney’s “Can. Lit.” (1962). How, for example, does the genre of literary regionalism interconnect with attempts in Canadian writing to fashion cultural identity as deeply rooted in nature? Which symbols and narratives lie at the heart of this national imaginary?

Course requirements and grading:
If you are taking this course as a Seminar, you have to a.) participate regularly and lively; b.) be part of an expert session (and develop a 1-page handout to be distributed in class); c.) write a final paper of ca. 10 pages. Grading: Competent participation in class discussions 1/3; expert session 1/3; final paper 1/3.
If you are taking the course as an Übung, you have to a.) participate regularly and lively; b.) be part of an expert session (and develop a 1-page handout to be distributed in class). Grading: Competent participation in class discussions 1/2; expert session 1/2.

Note: In any case, poor attendance or class participation will negatively affect your final grade.

Deadline for Final Papers: Monday, March 15, 2010. Note: There is no (!) extension of this deadline.

Syllabus:


Main text (required):
Additional reading:

04. Nov. Passages into the Wilderness
Main text (required):
Additional reading:
Susanna Moodie, “Brian, the Still-Hunter” and “Adieu to the Woods” (from: Roughing It in the Bush, 1852).

11. Nov. Homeground, Foreign Territory
Main text (required):
Additional reading:
Frederick P. Grove, “Snow” (1922).
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Texts are available online at Blackboard! Make sure you have registered at Blackboard to be able to download these materials.

For films, please go to the ‘Mediathek’, GB 03/33 (Nord). The ‘Mediathek’ is open Tue, 11-14, Wed, 12-16, Thur, 12-16. Important note: Films can be checked out only over night (!) or over the weekend. Make sure you return the film the next possible weekday at 12!