

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:

- 21. Oct. Introduction: Margaret Atwood and the Canadian Environmental Imagination**
- 28. Oct. The "Green Vision" – Atwood's Early Poems**
Main text (required):
M. Atwood, "Progressive insanities of a Pioneer," "Sundew" (from: *The Animals in That Country*, 1968).
Additional reading:
M. Atwood, "The Animals in That Country," "The Trappers," "Arctic Syndrome" (from: *The Animals in That Country*, 1968).
- 04. Nov. Passages into the Wilderness**
Main text (required):
M. Atwood, "Disembarking at Quebec," "Further Arrivals," "Death of a Young Son by Drowning," "Dream 2: Brian, the Still-Hunter," "Thoughts from Underground" (from: *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, 1970).
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):
M. Atwood, "Survival" and "Nature the Monster" (from: *Survival*, 1972).
Additional reading:
M. Atwood, "What, Why, and Where Is Here?" (from: *Survival*, 1972).
Frederick P. Grove, "Snow" (1922).

- 18. Nov.** **“The lake is tricky...” – Atwood’s *Surfacing I***
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, *Surfacing*, ch. 1-3 (1972).
 Additional reading:
 Ethel Wilson, “On Nimpish Lake” (1961).
- 25. Nov.** **“The creature in me, plant-animal...” – Atwood’s *Surfacing II***
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, *Surfacing*, ch. 21, 24-27 (1972).
- 02. Dec.** **Human Nature**
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, “In Search of the Rattlesnake Plantain” (from: *Bluebeard’s Egg*, 1983).
 Additional reading:
 “Polarities” (1971) (from: *Dancing Girls*, 1996 [1977]), also as film by Canadian Television.
- 09. Dec.** **Feminist Dystopia**
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985). Film adaptation by Harold Pinter & Volker Schlöndorff (1990).
- 16. Dec.** **Hauntings**
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, “Death by Landscape” (from: *Wilderness Tips*, 1991), also as film by Canadian Television.
 Additional reading:
 M. Atwood, “The Sunrise” (from: *Bluebeard’s Egg*, 1983), also as film by Canadian Television.
- 23. Dec.** **Swallowed by the Wilderness**
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, “The Age of Lead” (from: *Wilderness Tips*, 1991).
 Additional reading:
 M. Atwood, “Wilderness Tips” (from: *Wilderness Tips*, 1991).
- 13. Jan.** **The “Malevolent North”**
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, from: *Strange Things: The Malevolent North in Canadian Literature* (1995).
 Additional material:
 Atanarjuat/Fast Runner (dir. Zacharias Kunuk, 2001).
- 20. Jan.** **Ethics and Nature**
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, “Moral Disorder” (from *Moral Disorder*, 2006).
 Additional reading:
 M. Atwood, “The Art of Cooking and Serving” (from *Moral Disorder*, 2006).
- 27. Jan.** **“Listening to the tide coming in...” – *Snowman in Paradise***
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, “Mango,” “Flotsam,” “Voice,” “Wolvogs” (from: *Oryx and Crake*, 2003).
 Additional reading:
 M. Atwood, “Paradise” & “Footprint” (from: *Oryx and Crake*, 2003).
- 03. Feb.** **Apocalyptic Vision: Global Disaster and Biodiversity**
 Main text (required):
 M. Atwood, “The Garden,” “The Year of the Flood,” “Creation Day,” “The Earth Forgives,”
 “Acknowledgments” (from: *The Year of the Flood*, 2009).
 Additional reading:
 M. Atwood, “The Feast of Adam and All Primates,” “The Festival of Arks,” “Saint Julian and All
 Souls” from: *The Year of the Flood*, 2009).

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!