

Mount Holyoke College, Spring 2014
Environmental Studies 333
Landscape & Narrative



Lauret E. Savoy

Class Hours: Th 1:15 - 4:05 pm in Clapp 327

Office Hours: M 1:30 - 2:30 pm, Tu 10:30 am - noon, and by appointment

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Course Description

Different types of stories or narratives—whether myth, literature, maps, oral tradition, or scientific theory—have been created about nearly every region or environment on Earth as attempts to describe and understand that place and human connections to it. In this seminar we'll explore how braided strands of human history and natural history contribute to stories we tell *of* the land, and to stories we tell of ourselves *in* the land. We'll consider examples of how lifeways, homeplace, and identity are linked with environment or landscape. We'll also create written, visual, and/or aural narratives of our own.

The seminar will encourage you to:

- Reflect upon ways of understanding the land and defining “sense of place”;
- Look through various lenses of landscape study and explore different modes of thinking and writing;
- Engage artistic and literary forms of expression that are compelling to you;
- Create together a collaborative learning environment.

Texts and Other Materials

Class handouts and readings on our Moodle site

David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*

Barbara Bosworth, *To Be at the Farther Edge: Photographs along the New England Trail*

N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*

V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*

Tom Wessels, *Reading the Forested Landscape*

Pieces you bring in to share

Recommended:

Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*

Orion Magazine (online) www.orionmagazine.org

Course Requirements and Policy

Please come to each class with the scheduled readings completed. Weekly class attendance, careful reading of all assignments before class, and active, prepared participation are essential and required for an evaluation. All of us will be responsible for leading class discussions and giving oral presentations occasionally. Writing is also a major component of the course. Four

short papers and one longer project *or* seminar paper (c. 15 pages) are required for an evaluation and must be submitted on time. Late assignments will be penalized. Evaluations will be determined in the following manner:

Short essays/response papers (2 to 5 pages in length)	5-10% each
Active class participation (class dialogue, facilitation)	30%
Seminar project and presentation	35%

This is a course of exploration and craft, therefore your reading and viewing should be intuitive and acquisitive rather than analytical. Look for things that inspire your own writing or image-making, such as thematic questions, prose style, narrative voice or strategy. Please read as an image-maker and writer, paying attention to detail (in content and form), looking for what you can cull for your own work. The short response papers/essays will be opportunities to “play.”

Please turn off your cell phone before coming to class.

Schedule of Topics



1/23 **Coming to Narrative & Landscape**

1/30 **Sensing & Perceiving
What Is Knowledge of Place?**

Readings (on Moodle) -

Diane Ackerman, excerpt from *The Natural History of the Senses*

Lawrence Buell, “Representing the Environment” (Chp. 3) in *The Environmental Imagination* (If you are intrigued and want to read more just fyi, see “Place” (Chp. 8))

Dale Ritter, “The Geological Perception of Landscape”

Leslie Marmon Silko, “Interior and Exterior Landscapes: The Pueblo Migration Stories”

Anne Spirn, Chapters 1 & 2 in *The Language of Landscape* (p. 15-46)

Skim excerpt from Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*

Begin David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*

*Response paper/essay #1 due on 1/30

2/6 **The Beholding Eye: Conceptions of Landscape
Art Museum Workshop with Brian Kiernan, Painter and Museum Preparator**

Continue reading David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (for 2/13)

2/13

Elements of Landscape & Language
The Spell of the Sensuous – Perceiving & Telling the World

Readings -

David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous*

Anne Spirn, Chapter 4 in *The Language of Landscape*

*Response paper/essay # 2 due on 2/13



2/20

Mappings & Palimpsests

Readings & Viewings -

J. B. Harley, "New England Cartography and the Native Americans," in *The New Nature of Maps*

John Rennie Short, Chapters 1 - 2 from *Cartographic Encounters: Indigenous Peoples and the Exploration of the New World*

*Readings and maps you've found

Visit to "El Anatsui: New Worlds" exhibition (Art Museum) at end of class

2/27

El Anatsui: Creating from "What the Environment Throws Up"

*Seminar project description, working title, and preliminary references due on 2/27

3/6

Storytelling & Ways to Rainy Mountain

Class Visitor: Dr. Marli Miller – Photography & Geological Narratives

Readings -

Marshall Ganz, "Notes on Storytelling" and "What Is Public Narrative"

N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and excerpts from *The Man Made of Words*

3/13

Belonging: Cultures of Place and Time

Class Visitor: Dr. Robin W. Kimmerer – Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Reading -

V. S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*

Robin Kimmerer, "Learning the Grammar of Animacy"

Start reading Tom Wessels, *Reading the Forested Landscape*

Spring Break! 3/15-3/23

3/27

Barbara Bosworth: Photographic Narratives of Place

Readings -

Barbara Bosworth, *To Be at the Farther Edge: Photographs along the New England Trail*

Anne Spirn, from *The Eye Is a Door*

Continue reading Tom Wessels, *Reading the Forested Landscape* (try to finish & practice outdoors by April 1)

*Response paper/essay # 3 due by 3/27

4/3

Literatures of Place

Readings -

Wendell Berry, "A Native Hill" and "An Entrance to the Woods"

Rachel Carson, "An Island I Remember," "Our Ever Changing Shore," and "Four Fragments from Notebooks" from *Lost Woods*

Aldo Leopold, "Song of the Gavilan" and "Thinking Like a Mountain" from *A Sand County Almanac*

Barry Lopez, "Children in the Woods" and "The Passing Wisdom of Birds" from *Crossing Open Ground*

Danyelle O'Hara, "At Home with Belonging" from *Companions in Wonder*

Alfonso Ortiz, "Look to the Mountaintop"

Rebecca Solnit, "The Garden of Merging Paths" in *Storming the Gates of Paradise: Landscapes for Politics*

Wallace Stegner, excerpt from *Wolf Willow*

Henry David Thoreau, "The Pond in Winter" from *Walden*

4/5 or 4/6

Class Field Trip with Tom Wessels (Saturday, rain date Sunday)

Reading the Land: Elements of Discovery

Reading -

Tom Wessels, *Reading the Forested Landscape*



4/10

No Class – Work on Projects

*Response paper/essay # 4 due by Monday 4/14

4/17 - 4/24

Many Narratives, Many Landscapes: Your Ideas & Work

*Completed Project due by 5/4 (5 pm) for seniors, 5/5 by noon for everyone else

A Sampling of Important Events

El Anatsui: New Worlds

January 21 – June 8, 2014 at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum

This exhibition features six of Anatsui's large-scale sculptures—five are wall mounted and one extends into the viewers' space across the floor. The works are all constructed in Anatsui's signature technique of joining the bands and caps of liquor bottles into broad expanses of flexible sculpture. Brightly colored and richly textured, these works of art engage a host of issues—from consumer culture to environmental concerns—related to contemporary life in a globalizing world.

The works also build on the artist's engagement with Africa's global history. European traders introduced bottled liquor to the continent, and rum figured prominently in the triangle trade that brought so many enslaved Africans to the Americas. While humble, even seemingly inconsequential, these bits of detritus carry with them evidence of a painful legacy hundreds of years in the making.

Anatsui (Ghanaian, b. 1944) long enjoyed a well-deserved reputation for his sculpture in Africa, but he catapulted to international fame after his work was featured in the Venice Biennale of 2007. Since that time, his work has been the subject of countless one-person and group exhibitions.

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/artmuseum/el-anatsui-new-worlds>

The Eye Is a Door: Landscape Photographs by Anne Whiston Spirn

January 31 – August 31, 2014 at the Smith College Museum of Art

"The Eye is a Door" showcases the photographic work of renowned writer, scholar, and landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn. The author of several important books on landscape, Spirn's multi-disciplinary practice evolves from her photographic work. Her new book, *The Eye Is a Door: Landscape, Photography, and the Art of Discovery*, features this work and describes her approach.

This is the first major exhibition to explore how Spirn's photographs encourage a deeper understanding of the natural and built environment through the development of visual literacy. Visual literacy, or the ability to read and analyze visual information, allows people to question and interpret what they see, which has broad implications across many fields of inquiry and design. Spirn views photography as a tool that helps hone this ability by focusing attention on significant details in the landscape in order to discover the invisible. She has been on the forefront of the movement to make this kind of visual thinking a fundamental part of people's daily lives.

Go to <http://www.theeyeisadoor.com/#6>

<http://smith.edu/artmuseum/On-View/Upcoming/The-Eye-is-a-Door2>

"Geologic time and crustal extension in Death Valley, CA," Five College Geology Lecture by Marli B. Miller, Professor of Geological Sciences at the University of Oregon
Thursday, March 6, 2014 at 7:30 p.m. in Dwight 101, Mount Holyoke College.

Landscape, Design, and the Environment Speakers Series at Smith College,

Monday afternoons (2:40 p.m.), Weinstein Auditorium, Wright Hall

<http://www.smith.edu/landscapestudies/speakers.php>