

English 220: Nature Writing
College Hall 308 and the Gerace Research Center, San Salvador Bahamas

Glenn Freeman
Office: 207 South Hall, X4224
Block 6: Feb. 8 – March 2, 2016
Office Hours: On the beach whenever you want

Books:

Moore, Kathleen Dean, *Pine Island Paradox*

Hoare, Philip, *The Sea Inside*

A reading notebook/journal(s)

Handouts on moodle to be printed and brought to class; you must print handouts *before* we leave for the Bahamas.

Course Description:

For this course, we will have the extraordinary opportunity to explore one of the Bahamas' outermost islands, investigating its rich and varied ecosystems and its unique human history.

We will also learn techniques to communicate our understanding of this environment: how, and to what end, do we express our experiences of a new environment?

We will engage in environmental debates as we consider humans' role in managing (or not) such fragile environments, and attempt to come to a better sense of our relationships with the natural and human world.

We will read heavily (as John Berryman once said, a writer is really a reader who happens along the way to write something as well) and we will write. We will also explore a variety of approaches to conservation and environmental issues.

We will be focused on the lyric essay, or the essay as a kind of meditation. You will keep a notebook of writing exercises, observations, reading notes and quotes, etc. to try to weave into your own essays.

Essay (v.):

"to put to proof, test the mettle of," late 15c., from Middle French *essaier*, from *essai* "trial, attempt"

essay (n.)

1590s, "trial, attempt, endeavor," also "short, discursive literary composition" (first attested in writings of Francis Bacon, probably in imitation of Montaigne), from Middle French *essai* "trial, attempt, essay" (in Old French from 12c.), from Late Latin *exagium* "a weighing, a weight," from Latin *exigere* "drive out; require, exact; examine, try, test," from *ex-* "out" (see [ex-](#)) + *agere* (see [act](#) (n.)) apparently meaning here "to weigh." The suggestion is of unpolished writing.

We will use these historical meanings of the word essay to shape our approach: we will try things out, to test, to attempt as much as conclude, we will weigh. Another way to consider this is think of these as "creative" lyrical essays more than an argumentative, academic essay. Your goal will be to find a method to share your experiences, thoughts, imaginings.

The following objectives support the state educational priorities and outcomes of Cornell College. Students will

- Become familiar with the natural history of the Bahamas ecosystems (knowledge)
- Become familiar with Bahamian culture and history (intercultural literacy)
- Engage in research about a particular aspect of the natural or human history of the islands (inquiry)
- Learn techniques for creatively expressing, in written and oral form, our relationships with the environment and culture (communication)

Assignments:

- **Journal:** The most important thing you can do this block is to write, and write a lot. I will ask you to keep an ongoing journal throughout (we will discuss different kinds of journals and approaches to this process). These will be more than diaries in which you simply recount your day (though this is quite important for this project as well); you should consider your journal a place where you can put everything: reactions to readings, quotes, interesting images, bits of dialogue with peers or locals, philosophical meditations, exercises. You will not turn these in, but I do expect two things: you should have them when we meet and at least occasionally you should read from your journal. You do not need to do this every time I ask for volunteers to read, but you should do so consistently through the block. Second, we will talk about your journals at different times; I may ask to see some things you've done, or ask you to refer to specific entries, but this will be in the context of a larger, ongoing conversation. Back on campus, you will select particular passages to copy and submit to me to give me a sense of how you used your journal. 15%
- **Class Discussion:** You will all be assigned one passage for whom you will be in charge of leading class discussion. You will be the teacher for about a half hour. You should be prepared to discuss the text from a macro perspective (the subject matter, themes, implications, characters, pacing etc.) to a micro perspective (references to other texts, figurative language, sentence style, diction, etc). You should also have questions for your peers about the text. 15%
- **Research Project:** You will not be doing a full-fleshed research project/paper. You will, however, choose some particular aspect of life on the island that you want to know more about. The range of possibilities is quite wide, spanning from questions of slavery or history of the island, to wildlife, to weather systems, to whatever most intrigues you. You will then do some research on the particular question. Sources for this research will include internet research in the library (you will be expected to find reliable sources) and more informal research of people in the area—other Cornell faculty, staff at the station, locals in town, etc. You will then turn in to me a list of sources and an outline of your findings that you will use to share your research with

the class. In this way, we will all learn about the life of the island. 20%

- **Final Project:** The last day of class, you will be turning in a roughly 15-page essay. The essay will be a meditation on the questions we explore about our relationship with nature, with the island, with human history, natural history, philosophy and conservation. The essay, though, may take many different forms. It may, for instance, include poems, fragments of different material, etc—it may help to think of the essay as a collage of the most important pieces of writing you do over the block. portfolio of your work. 35%
- **Participation:** This is a discussion-based class: I expect everyone to keep up with the reading and to come prepared to contribute to the discussion. Your participation in your peers' discussions and in the discussion of your peers' work will be particularly important as I evaluate your participation. For our readings, you should come to class ready to speak. I will often turn to you for the discussion starting point, so you should generally have 2-3 observations written down (rather than having to search for things in the text when we get started) and 2-3 questions you would pose to your peers.
Participation for this class will also include general living dynamics: since we will literally be living together, it is important that we all work together and positively; that we have positive relationships with the staff, with locals, and with each other. Please remember that you have also signed a contract with the station that details some expectations of how you will purport yourself. You are an ambassador of Cornell and I expect you to act like one. 15%
- **Quizzes:** I will periodically give reading quizzes. These quizzes are not meant to be that difficult if you have done the reading carefully. You will be allowed to use any notes from your reading, but you will not be allowed to use the books. Keep up with the reading, read actively, and keep good notes! A failed quiz reduces your final point total by 10 (out of a 1000 point system)

Though I use a point system, it is easiest to give you grades as we go through the block. Grades roughly translate as the following: A+=98, A=95, A-=92, B+=88, B=85, B-=82, C+=78, C=75, C-=72, D+=68, D= 65, D-=62, F (points really depend on why one failed the assignment). These points are then assigned the percentage of 1000 total points.

Schedule:

On campus, we will meet from 1-3 in College Hall 308. On the island, our classroom will be determined. The schedule will by necessity be incredibly variable (excursions will change depending on weather, peer groups travels, etc); please try to be flexible. I will have a schedule of readings and assignments that should stay stable; for excursions, though, we will generally talk the day before about plans for the next day. Some things to keep in mind, though, about the schedule at the station: we will generally be out in the field at least part of the day every day, including weekends. Class sessions will not be constrained by our normal 3 pm ending; we will often hold evening class after a day out in the field. The one constant of the day's schedule will be meal times (except when we eat lunch in the field): breakfast, 7:30 am; lunch 12:00; dinner, 5:30 pm. You will not be able to print materials at the station,

so please print all of your moodle readings ahead of time and gather them into one collection.

Week 1

- Mon 2/8: Introductions, orientation, planning.
- Tue 2/9: Read Steinbeck, Dillard, and Walcott (M)
- Wed 2/10: Read *The Sea Inside*, ch. 1
- Thur: 2/11: Travel: leave by van from Cornell Commons, 3:30 AM—Do not be late!!
Arrive at Gerace Research Station, 5 PM; orientation
5:30, dinner, orientation, settling in
7:00 Lecture: Development of the Bahamian Archipelago.
- Fri 2/12: AM: Snorkel Graham's Harbour
PM: Snorkel at Cut Key
7:00 PM: Lecture on Sea Level and Bahamas Stratigraphy
- Sat: 2/13: AM: Read *The Vermilion Sea* and *The Sea Inside*, ch. 2
PM: Hypersaline Ponds; snorkel NE Coast
7:00 PM: Lecture on Corals
- Sun: 2/14: AM: On Base
PM: Lighthouse Cave
7:00 PM: Tide Pool Walk (Read Beston and Carson)

Week 2

- Mon 2/15: AM: Read *The Sea Inside*
PM: Watling's Quarry; snorkel French Bay; read plantation history
- Tue 2/16: Read *The Sea Inside*
PM: Snorkel Telephone Pole Reef
- Wed 2/17: Read *The Sea Inside*
PM: Gaulin's Reef
7:00 PM: Lecture, Resilience and recovery of San Salvador's coral reefs
- Thur 2/18: Read Kathleen Dean Moore
PM: Snapshot Reef
- Fri 2/19: AM: Pigeon Creek
PM: Pigeon Creek
Read Kathleen Dean Moore

Sat 2/20: AM: Research Presentations
Read Kathleen Dean Moore
PM: Boat trip for wall snorkeling

Sun 2/21: AM: On Base
PM: Inland “Death March”
Read “High Tide in Tucson”

Week 3

Mon 2/22: AM: Watling’s Plantation
Read “Shaping the Environment” and plantation histories
PM: Wall Snorkel, Bamboo Point

Tue 2/23: Work on drafts for evening reading
7:00 PM: Group Reading

Wed 2/24: Cockburntown

Thur 2/25: Depart GRC

Fri 2/26: No Class: rest and work on essays

Week 4

Mon 2/29: Peer workshops of final projects

Tue 3/1: Peer workshops of final projects

Wed 3/2: No Class: Final Portfolio due by 12 noon—no late portfolios accepted!