French 900

Le Pays et dépaysement d’Apollinaire, Guillevic et Char, à Proust, Duras et Le Clézio

Van Kelly, 3:00-4:15 MW

We will explore the notions of rootedness (being in the Place) and its antonyms (being uprooted, exiled, nomadic, out of place, without a place, in the right place at the wrong time) in modern literature from Guillaume Apollinaire and Marcel Proust; through the mid-twentieth century with René Char, Eugène Guillevic; and finally to more contemporary writers including Marguerite Duras and J.M.G. Le Clézio. Is the right place a state of mind the author creates with memory words (Proust’s Combray, Apollinaire’s Paris)? Is the good spot a country of the mind that a poet like Guillevic visits from poem to poem and rhythm by rhythm in his construction of poetic landscapes? Perhaps the Country is what poets Char call a mental backcountry or haven, an « arrière-pays » that exists as a base for subversion and resistance, which was the case for this poet in the occupied France of World War II. Or perhaps the Place is the illusion of a return to the native country (Cameroon) fabricated with light and shadow on celluloid by filmmakers, like Claire Denis. Sometimes the Country is an unspeakable darkness within (Duras’s vice-consul); or the fleeting light of Le Clézio’s anticolonial and postcolonial utopias. But whatever the Country is, it is a place where the reader must seek identity as a function of time, space, nation, landscape, mindscape, traveling, sound track, image, memory, aspiration, despair, society, solitude, communion…..

Tentatively, we will study the following, in the order indicated, with the first part of the course devoted to poetry, the second part to prose:

We will start with Claire Denis’s film Chocolat as an initial representation of « le Pays » and « l’anti-Pays », to frame later discussions.

Apollinaire, Alcools
Char, choice of poems from Fureur et mystère
Guillevic, Du domaine and Terraqué
Marcel Proust, Combray (Ph.D. candidates who have already studied Combray in a course at KU will read instead Le temps retrouvé)
Marguerite Duras, Le vice-consul
J.-M. G. Le Clézio, Ourania (now on the revised M.A. reading list), « Mondo »

Course work:
Exposé
Final Exam
Research paper