

Conference Panel Proposal for “Water in the World: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Access and Sustainability,” November 6-7, 2015

Faculty Presenter: Dr. Casey Cothran

Undergraduate Student Presenters: Laurie Hilburn, Jennifer Oliver, Hayley Neiling

Title: *Skinny Dip*: Carl Hiaasen, Detective Fiction, and the Murder of the Florida Everglades

Topic:

Carl Hiaasen’s 2004 novel, *Skinny Dip*, reworks the typical structures and tropes of detective fiction to argue that the most significant “murder” in this text is the large-scale destruction of the Florida Everglades. Using farce and humor to explore the ridiculous circumstances surrounding Charles Perrone’s failed attempts to kill both his wife and girlfriend, Hiaasen quietly draws the reader’s attention to the ways that humans both ignorantly and willfully destroy wild spaces. In the novel, both individual persons and multi-million dollar corporations misuse water, water systems, and reptiles because of their failure to understand or value the natural world around them.

This novel was discussed in Professor Cothran’s Spring 2015 course, ENGL 200: Mystery and Detective Fiction. Dr. Cothran will introduce the author, his novel, the work’s popular and critical reception, and briefly discuss how it was incorporated into the classroom. Then three Winthrop undergraduates will share their papers on the book’s themes, using eco-criticism to illustrate its exciting, evocative form and message.

In Jennifer Oliver’s piece, “Finding a Factual Victim in Funny Fiction,” she claims that “Hiaasen skillfully draws the attention of his audience to a critical matter while concurrently providing entertainment. Even persons who may seek an easy read of amusing prose find themselves exposed to heartrending truths about the environment, which are key components of the plot.” Her piece explores the how an artist can simultaneously entertain and enlighten readers.

In Hayley Neiling’s “The Judgment of the Environment,” she argues, “In the novel *Skinny Dip*, crimes committed against other people are portrayed as humorous and entertaining; however, there is an underlying, more serious tone about crimes committed against the environment, and while most of the characters participate in actions of questionable morality, the environment plays a key role in determining ultimately whether a character is ‘good’ or ‘bad.’” While all of the humans in the novel make questionable ethical choices, the way they treat the natural world becomes the ultimate litmus test that marks both heroes and villains.

Laurie Hilburn’s “A Woman’s Nature: Ecofeminism in Carl Hiaasen’s *Skinny Dip*” discusses how “Hiaasen’s ecocritical subversion of the detective fiction formula transforms main character Joey from the victim into the victor, empowered as the detective of the personal crimes against her as well as the larger crimes occurring against nature.” Because the violent crime enacted on her person transforms her into a detective rather than a dead body (with no voice or agency), the female victim in this work is empowered to speak for herself and for the environment.