

Nathan Dize
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Library Award Scholarship
French and English 2013

A Yearlong Process

My research project is an essay that I wrote for my English Honors thesis. Research projects in the humanities can often have the appearance of a hands-off approach, but after a year's worth of work I'm prepared to say that is simply not true. Since I worked within the framework of the English Departmental Honors Program, I had to follow the prescribed structure of the department, meaning I had to: take courses with a group of my peers in literature, attend weekly workshops, produce proposals, and court an advising professor. These standards gave me stability in the early stages of my work that helped me focus my research questions and queries within a structured environment, which would later prove to my advantage during the more independent stages of the process.

I decided to work on the two novels of the Guadeloupien writer Myriam Warner-Vieyra, *As the Sorcerer Said (Le quimboiseur l'avait dit)* and *Juletane*. I encountered the second of these two out-of-print novels in a course on the writing of the Francophone Diaspora in Africa and the Caribbean during my first semester at Maryland and I have been asking questions about it ever since. My questions about *Juletane* lead me to the first novel, the one that is considerably harder to find, *As the Sorcerer Said*. Ultimately deciding that the goal of my thesis would be to explore the question of female identities in the transnational space and how they stabilized themselves under the forces of patriarchy and cultural essentialism.

Starting with broad concepts of patriarchy, racism, and colonialism it was clear that I would have to narrow my focus and begin reading widely. My research is indebted to WorldCatUM for its easily manipulated search options and because many of the works I consulted were in French as well as out of print I used the system often to find books outside of the University of Maryland Library System. I also made use of interlibrary loans frequently due to the rarity of the texts of Myriam Warner-Vieyra.

After the spring semester I began by reading about fifteen to twenty books ranging from literature to anthropology and psychology to literary criticism. I covered a lot of ground during the summer in terms of reading only to find that writing was another issue indeed. If I had to break down the process of writing my thesis I would have to say that the spring of 2011 served as a period of questioning and reflection on which topic I wanted to explore. The summer was largely spent reading with a great deal of writing marginalia. Finally the fall and winter months largely comprised my writing period.

Looking back now, I had no idea how to plan a research project over the course of a year. During various stages I questioned my competence, my will, and even my desire to continue with the project. My two advisors were instrumental in forcing me to push myself and discuss issues I was and still am uncomfortable with. Dr. Valérie Orlando encouraged me to look at the French texts and conduct my own translations of my French sources adding to the comprehensiveness of my work and its complexity. Dr. Collins has worked with me on my prose, helping me elegantly weave sentences together with preciseness and felicity. My two advisors also stand on different sides of the debate on "Post-colonial literature", which is something that I saw as a conversation that could greatly enrich my paper discussing novels from an island that is still under the imperial

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arm of France. At first I was timid in approaching the debate, mainly because I had done very little reading on the theory of post-colonial literature, and Dr. Collins and Orlando did not push me into the discussion. Later on, after attending a conference held by the English Department on post-colonial literature, I embraced the notion of my paper being involved in a contemporary debate.

Under the tutelage and direction of my advisors and the English Department my thesis has been the most enriching experience of my undergraduate career. I wish to continue to conduct research on literature in French and English as well as Spanish once I reach the level of reading proficiency. I plan to continue my studies by pursuing a PhD in French while focusing on literature of the Caribbean in Anglophone, Francophone and Hispanophone contexts.