

ENGLISH 650-01: MODERN LITERARY AND CULTURAL THEORY (3.0 CR.)
Cultural Paradigm and Paradigm Shift in the Twentieth Century:
Modernism, Postmodernism, and “After”

Fall 2009
Professor Christian Moraru

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You are contemporary if you turn your eye not to your time's clarity but to its obscure side.
—Giorgio Agamben, *What Is the Contemporary?*

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND GOALS: English 650 is a modern literary-cultural theory seminar with an intellectual history emphasis. This semester, our focus is the concept of paradigm and paradigm change in the contested transitions of and shifts among “modernism,” “postmodernism,” “postcolonialism,” and “globalization.” We will sort out these terms, trying to figure out what they mean across various places, moments, and literary-critical traditions and how such concepts and cultural practices play out in emblematic, theoretical-philosophical as well as literary texts. Authors discussed include Fredric Jameson, Ihab Hassan, K. Anthony Appiah, Bruce Robbins, David Damrosch, Frederick Buell, Charles Taylor, J.M. Coetzee, Don DeLillo, and Zadie Smith, among others.

The basic question we will ask throughout is, How might we conceptualize the history (histories) of the post-1900 artistic and intellectual period? In answering, our course follows, up to a point, the beaten path of the classical sequence modernism-postmodernism with its oft-invoked milestones and stylistic landmarks but only to redefine and reposition them so as to argue for a major, late 1980s paradigm shift in U.S. and world culture. As we shall note, a watershed in recent history, the fall of the Berlin Wall was both an American and a world event. Granted, the U.S. did not exactly “cause” it, nor did it happen this side of the Atlantic. But, for one thing, America had been deeply involved in it. For another, the Wall's collapse has been playing a profoundly transformative role in American society. Much like the rest of the world, the U.S.—our main focus—changed forever in or “about” 1989. Most historians concur now that the 1970s and even the early 1980s had allowed only inklings of the post-1989 global setup. Those decades were shaped by a prevailingly antinomian geopolitical logic of blocs, regions, and countries separated by all sorts of walls, curtains, barriers, and checkpoints. As humans, “we” may have been “together” back then, if not since day one, as Jean-Luc Nancy says; ontologically and sociologically, this “communality,” this “being-together-in-the-world,” may be the perennial signature of the human. However, to paraphrase the same philosopher, after the Wall came down our becoming what we have always been has itself become unprecedented in scope, pace, impact, and obviousness, at home and abroad. With another vocabulary, the period following the Cold War witnesses the onset of hypernetworked, “strong,” or “late” globalization.

In theory, post-1989, late globalization should be a “with-world,” ideally conducive to scenarios of identity refashioning across former borders and limits. After all, as has been pointed out, what distinguishes it from earlier globalization is its superiorly “webbed” makeup, its high connectivity. We are living in a “network society” where the “production” of identity and meaning individually and collectively, in and of “our” culture, involves, indeed, necessitates recurring references to other cultures. The pre-1989 global setup had been admittedly less technologized and hence less networked, more country- and region-focused, in brief, “thinner.” By contrast, what comes after is “thicker”: conspicuously more systemic, more technological and thus more integrated transnationally and cross-regionally. Critics like Martin Albrow and Roland Robertson believe the transition from one to another occurs over a longer time span (1945-1990s in Albrow, 1960s-1990s in Robertson), whereas Thomas L. Friedman revisits the “1989 argument” he made in *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999) and then remade three years thereafter in *Longitudes and Latitudes* to conclude that a “new whole era: Globalization 3.0” commences circa 2000.

1989 is, according to our course’s timeline, what Jean-Pierre Warnier would deem a true *année charnière*, a “hinge year” on which turned the doors opening, in the U.S. and elsewhere, onto the highly interconnected world of late globalization. A turning point in modern history, 1989 does herald a “new order” in the U.S. and beyond. But this is neither of the orderly nor the disorderly kind. It is not an order of the world per se either, a neatly unified geopolitical or economic setup. I find such grand narratives wanting, first and foremost because they miss the “micro” level, in particular the place of the individual and individual communities in the global scheme of things and principally the role played by the imagination in the production of this scheme or “order.” The order I am talking about is a certain still insufficiently articulated, still self-contradictory *structure of imaginings*, a certain *cultural imaginary* that obtains, as I argue, with increasing force and expanding consequences in post-1989 America. What has so far emerged *across* fairly established discourses, genres, and complex U.S. formations such as postmodernism and ethnic literatures is not so much another canon, although this too seems to be in the offing, as a new imagination modality. This novelty is far from absolute but hesitant, slow in coming, and unabashedly redolent of prior stylistic and thematic hallmarks—in short, a “soft” paradigm.

Over the past two decades, then, a) we have gone through a “turn” away from postmodernism; b) this turn or shift fundamentally shape these decades as our present, defines their “presentness”; c) this present replaces the “present,” the “recent,” or the “contemporary” articulated by available literary and cultural periodizations—that is, given the radical significance of the Wall’s fall, it is for the first time since World War II that we may have to consider resetting the boundaries of the present, with the “contemporary”—the contemporary in a “strong” sense, if you will—commencing not at the end of World War II but at the end of the Cold War and with the latter no more than the former’s belated closure. I further submit that d) the lynchpin of the new paradigm is *relation itself*—the concept and practices of “relationality” in narrative, theory, and other areas of post-1989 American culture. What U.S. artists and thinkers drive home with symptomatic acumen after the Berlin Wall’s collapse is that, as David Hollinger puts it bluntly, “There are fewer and fewer places to hide,” where self and other could opt out of the mutually “defining” context of each other’s proximity, influence, and inquiring gaze. Our “historical situation” in the U.S. and beyond in the “age of networks” is one of unparalleled panopticity, of a hitherto peerless scopic presence of individuals, groups, and cultures to one another.

The course is organized primarily around the 1989 (“post-postmodern”) shift. To understand this shift, we also have to address the previous, modern-postmodern transition; to get a handle on the evolving contemporary—and to be contemporary critics ourselves, according to Agamben—we need to wrestle with present and past “obscurities,” cultural as well as theoretical. For this reason, we will begin with a discussion of modernism, modernity, and their “consequences,” moving on after that to the post-1960s onset of the postmodern and the postcolonial, to their complex relationships, and the postmodern’s protracted twilight—to the transitional stage we are currently going through. We will look at how works of literature convey all these shifts, and we will also examine some of the most relevant attempts made by critics to adjust their tools, frameworks, and timelines so as to respond to the most recent developments in American and world literature and culture. Along these lines, special attention will be paid to trends such as transnational and comparative American studies, the new comparatism, global analysis, hemisphere studies, and transatlantic studies.

More generally, the course aims at familiarizing the students with recent vocabularies and instruments in theory, criticism, and cultural history. Further, in this class students learn about and apply the research methodology needed in the professional study of literature. Likewise, we will emphasize the ability to identify the dynamic and features of core concepts and models of current critical and cultural analysis including text, intertext, context, and their literary-cultural history; local/global; self/other; modernism and modernity; postmodernism and postmodernity; identity and community. We will place these notions in their appropriate traditions; we will study their origins in modern theory as well as their forms in cultural history. Classroom work and individual projects are geared toward this goal. See the Professional Development note below for the more specific objectives graduate students will reach in this class.

METHODOLOGY AND CLASS FORMAT: Running for almost three hours, this seminar combines lecture, extensive discussion, student presentations, and group work. Our typical meeting will open with a lecture by the instructor providing historical and cultural background and placing the scheduled readings in the appropriate framework. Following this introduction, students give 15-20-minute individual presentations on specific aspects of those readings. Then, we discuss collectively and in groups the materials for the day. I will set aside time to prepare and evaluate writing projects, exams, and other assignments.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES: Graduate students will use this course to put their work in the larger, more demanding and competitive perspective of professionalism and academic performance. The class is geared toward graduate reading and writing carrying potential for publication and presentation outside UNCG. While fulfilling the course’s requirements is your main goal, I urge you to take these requirements as an opportunity to think about yourselves as part of the academic community, with its standards, language, methods, tools, and venues. Along these lines, here are a few questions for us: Where do I stand as a scholar, teacher, critic, and writer, and which are my goals? What is, or will be, my audience? In what kind of scholarly conversation do I wish to intervene based on what I learn in this class? What steps do I have to take to do that? What are the available resources? Which are the outlets for my work? What do I have to do to turn my seminar presentation/paper into a conference paper/journal article/dissertation chapter/writing sample? (more details in class and individually).

REQUIREMENTS:

1. Papers and Exams. Given the amount of reading, there will be a midterm exam (take-home, 4-6 double-spaced pages) and a final paper (20-25 double-spaced pages).

For the final paper, you are responsible for submitting (to me and ahead of time), for duplicating, and circulating among class members a 1-p., single-spaced proposal, which will be presented and discussed in class toward the end of the semester. We will meet individually to discuss your proposal before its presentation. I urge you to consult with me on the topic of your paper.

2. Individual Presentations. Each student signs up for a) a 15-20-minute oral presentation on the readings scheduled for a particular day and b) for an individual presentation (10 min.) of their final projects (papers) later in the semester. The presentations need not be written, but some kind of argument sketch, possibly accompanied by a handout, should be helpful.

Presentation guidelines: these presentations (a) cover a relevant aspect or material for the day. Do not attempt to fully cover or explain the assignments or even one of these assignments. I ask you to briefly outline the argument or content of the readings you intent to talk about; identify one major element or theoretical problem in these works, which should help us open up our conversation; as an option, you may use criticism on your subject, but if you do so, you need to identify your source, present its thesis, outline its argument and research, judge it overall, and finally tell us where you stand vis-à-vis the critic's viewpoint. Feel free to consult with me before you pick your presentation topic.

3. Attendance and Class Participation. Both are expected and will factor into the final grade (see below under course policies).

CONFERENCES: Please meet with me during my regular office hours or make an appointment to discuss your specific interests, goals, or any aspect of this class. Feel free to make a first appointment early on in the semester. I am willing to schedule these meetings right away. I will also hold a round of conferences before the semester ends to discuss your 1-p. proposals for the final paper and your progress in this class.

COURSE POLICIES:

1. Late Papers: No late papers—and any other kind of late work for that matter—accepted. However, if you foresee any deadline-related problems, come to see me ahead of time. We will work together to find a solution.

2. Absences: You are allowed no more than 1 absence during the semester for illnesses (which you must document afterwards), religious holidays, or emergencies preventing you from attending. No undocumented absences allowed. Should they occur, they will affect your final grade. I will subtract 5% from the latter for any undocumented absence. Since we meet once a week, attendance is particularly critical to the success of our work in this class. If you are the victim of an emergency, please stay in touch with me by e-mail or phone.

GRADING: As a general rule, no incompletes (but come to see me if you anticipate any problems). The quality of your work will be reflected in the final grade as follows:

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|----|---|-----|
| 1. | Midterm exam | 25% |
| 2. | Final paper | 60% |
| 3. | Oral participation (includes presentation): | 15% |

Note: I would like to discuss these percentages and our requirements in general on the first meeting.

REQUIRED READINGS:

A. THEORY:

Appiah, K. Anthony. "Is the 'Post-' in 'Postcolonial' the 'Post' in 'Postmodern'?" in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 420- 422. Or in: *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1991): 336-357. UNCG Library online.

Bauer, Ralph, "Hemispheric Studies." *PMLA* 124, no. 1 (January 2009): 234-250

Best, Steven, and Douglas Kellner. *The Postmodern Turn*. New York: The Guilford Press, 1997.

Buell, Frederick. *National Culture and the New Global System*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Carmichael, Thomas, and Alison Lee, eds. *Postmodern Times: A Critical Guide to the Contemporary*. DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000.

Damrosch, David. *What Is World Literature?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Dimock, Wai Chee, and Laurence Buell, eds. *Shades of the Planet: American Literature as World Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.

During, Simon. "Postcolonialism and globalization: towards a historicization of their inter-relation." *Cultural Studies* 14, nos. 3-4 (2000): 385-404. UNCG Library online.

Elias, Amy J. "Interactive Cosmopolitanism and Collaborative Technologies: New Foundations for Global Literary History." *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 705-725. UNCG Library online.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.

- Giles, Paul. "Reconstructing American Studies: Transnational Paradoxes, Comparative Perspectives." *Journal of American Studies* 28, no. 3 (1994): 335-358. UNCG Library online.
- Gross, Robert A. "The Transnational Turn: Rediscovering American Studies in a Wider World." *Journal of American Studies* 34, no. 3 (2000): 373-393. UNCG Library online.
- Gupta, Suman. *Globalization and Literature*. London, UK: Polity, 2009.
- Hassan, Ihab. *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature*. 2nd ed. Madison, WI: Wisconsin University Press, 1982.
- Hopper, Paul. *Understanding Cultural Globalization*. London, UK: Polity, 2007.
- Jameson, Fredric. "New Literary History after the End of the New." *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 375-387. UNCG Library online.
- Manning, Susan, and Andrew Tylor, eds. *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.
- Moraru, Christian. "Cosmopolitics, Paroxysm, Global Talk: Emerging Issues and Approaches." *symploke* 7, nos. 1-2 (1999): 197-202. UNCG Library online.
- . "The Global Turn in Critical Theory." *symploke* 9, no. 1-2 (2001): 80-92. UNCG Library online.
- . "Postmodernism, Cosmopolitanism, Cosmodernism." *American Book Review* 28, no. 3 (March/April 2007): 3-4. UNCG Library online.
- Nagel, Thomas. "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" *The Philosophical Review* 83, no.3 (1974): 435-450. UNCG Library online.
- Poster, Mark. "Global Media and Culture." *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 685-703. UNCG Library online.
- Robbins, Bruce. *Feeling Global: Internationalism in Distress*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Taylor, Charles. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Veit, Walter F. "Globalization and Literary History, or Rethinking Comparative Literary History—Globally." *New Literary History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 415-435. UNCG Library online.
- Wald, Priscilla. "Minefields and Meeting Grounds: Transnational Analyses and American Studies." *American Literary History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 199-218. UNCG Library online.

B. FICTION:

Coetzee, J.M. *Elizabeth Costello*. New York: Penguin, 2003.

DeLillo, Don. *Cosmopolis*. New York: Scribner, 2003.

Smith, Zadie. *White Teeth*. New York: Random House, 2000.

WEEKLY SYLLABUS:

(Note: All assignments are due in class under the day indicated in the syllabus.)

Week 1

Tue 08/25 Introduction to the course: topics, scope, structure, format, requirements.
Planning ahead, getting organized: individual presentations and conferences; discussion groups; signing up for presentations
Cultural paradigm and cultural history: introductory lecture

Week 2

Tue 09/01 Modern, modernism; modernity, modernities—competing histories in American and world culture; time, space, and history; modernism, postmodernism, globalization
Assignments:
Giddens 1-111
Jencks, in Carmichael and Lee 141-152
Lunefeld, in Carmichael and Lee 111-126 (optional)
DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*

Week 3

Tue 09/08 Modernism and “disjunctive” aesthetics. Difference, disjunction, and the subject. The negative poetics and the politics of “novelty” in modernity and after
Assignments:
Hassan xi-23; 139-176
Elam, in Carmichael and Lee 41-49
Giddens 112-178
DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*

Week 4

Tue 09/15 The postmodern turn
Assignments:
Hassan 259-271
Best and Kellner, esp. 8-78; 253-282
DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*

Week 5

Tue 09/22

Postmodern aesthetics and literary history

Assignments:

Jameson "New Literary History after the End of the New" (*NLH*)

Lovejoy, in Carmichael and Lee 95-109

Readings, in Carmichael and Lee 201-207

DeLillo, *Cosmopolis***Week 6**

Tue 09/29

The postmodern, the postcolonial, and postmodernism's global-age afterlife

Assignments:

Appiah, "Is the 'Post-' in 'Postcolonial' the 'Post' in 'Postmodern'?"

During, "Postcolonialism and globalization: towards a historicization of their inter-relation"

Buell 217-262; 325-343

>Preparing the midterm exam

Week 7

Tue 10/06

The "global turn" in the humanities; the global and the cosmopolitan

Assignments:

Robbins 1-60; 127-174

Hopper, esp. 1-59; 157-190

"Introduction" to "The Nation and Cosmopolitanism" section in Manning and Taylor 17-22

Moraru, "The Global Turn in Critical Theory" (optional)

>Midterm exam assigned

Week 8

Tue 10/13

Fall Break; no class

Week 9

Tue 10/20

Literary-cultural studies after globalization: the new library of Babel and the scandal of "we"

Assignments:

Gupta, esp. 62-170

Arac, in Dimock and Buell 19-38

Giles, in Dimock and Buell 39-61

Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*

Nagel, "What Is It Like to Be a Bat?" (optional)

>**Midterm exams due****Week 10**

Tue 10/27

Against "fragmentation": cultural internationalism and authenticity after "tradition"; ethnicity and ethicity

Assignments:

Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*
Smith, *White Teeth*

Week 11

Tue 11/03

The “worlding” of national traditions: toward a new comparative literature
Assignments:
Damrosch, esp. 1-144; 281-202
Smith, *White Teeth*

Week 12

Tue 11/10

Comparative American studies and American literature as world literature
Assignments:
Giles, “Reconstructing American Studies”
Gross, “The Transnational Turn”
Wald, “Minefields and Meeting Grounds” (optional)
DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*
Presenting final projects

Week 13

Tue 11/17

U.S. literary scholarship at the crossroads: hemispheric and transatlantic studies
Assignments:
Pease, “National Narratives, Postnational Narration,” in Manning and Taylor 39-43
Bauer, “Hemispheric Studies”
Manning and Taylor, “Introduction: What Is Transatlantic Literary Studies?” in Manning and Taylor 1-13
Gilroy, in Manning and Taylor 139-146
Dimock, in Manning and Taylor 160-164
Presenting final projects

Week 14

Tue 11/24

U.S. literature and new U.S. literary history: local and global (I)
Assignments:
Roach, in Dimock and Buell 171-183
Palumbo-Liu, in Dimock and Buell 196-226
Buell, in Dimock and Buell 227-248
Presenting final projects

Week 15

Tue 12/01

Final meeting
U.S. literature and new U.S. literary history: local and global (II)
Assignments:
Veit, “Globalization and Literary History, . . .”
Poster, “Global Media and Culture”
Elias, “Interactive Cosmopolitanism”

Presenting final projects

Overview

Student evaluations

>**Papers due in class**

