

**ENGLISH 704-01:**  
**STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY LITERARY AND CULTURAL THEORY (3.0 CR.)**  
**The “Planetary Turn,” Post-Cold War Geopolitics, and New Literary-Cultural History**

Professor Christian Moraru  
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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This is a graduate seminar that focuses on emerging, geopolitical and “deep-time” models of literary history in the “postnational” aftermath. Our premise is that, by and large, post-Cold War developments in trade, finance, demographics, the arts, and the humanities have increasingly exposed the limitations of the traditional, nationalist-territorialist paradigm of cultural analysis. Along these lines, the so-called planetary turn in critical theory reflects scholars’ effort to respond to the growing pressure to adjust their frameworks, timelines, concepts, and tools overall.

Of course, this is not entirely unprecedented. When French philosopher Basarab Nicolescu put forth in his 1994 book *Théorèmes poétiques* a “new vision of the world” that revisited the geopolitically and culturally-disciplinarily “discrete” over against the backdrop of the planet and even the cosmos, “the resurrection” of the *planetary episteme* and kindred inquiry models and vocabularies such as the world-systemic, the global, and the cosmopolitan had been reshaping literature, the arts, and criticism for some time. One of Nicolescu’s precursors, economist and historian Immanuel Wallerstein was and has certainly remained a fixture in a debate that, without his trailblazing contribution, would look very different today. As early as in the first volume of *The Modern World-System* (1974), Wallerstein took up the framework of “cosmology,” or “the study of the functioning of the system as a whole,” to work out a “totality” distinguished from “completeness,” more broadly, a dialectical “utopistics” or future, global-scale structure of arrangements in which the planet’s particularisms would restore “the universal reality of liberty and equality.”

Alongside Wallerstein, we will discuss such theorists of the geopolitical and the planetary as Emily Apter, Franco Moretti, Masao Miyoshi, Paul Gilroy, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Susan Stanford Friedman, David Harvey, Fredric Jameson, and Robert Fine, among others. We will also read Joseph O’Neill’s 2008 novel *Netherland* to put to test these critics’ insights and, more generally, ask questions such as: How do theorists and writers imagine nationhood, Americanness, and their discursive representations (literature, the arts, etc.) inside and outside the nation’s traditional space? How do they locate America in the world and the world in

America? Does American imply location (or location only), and, if so, does location always imply territoriality? What is the dynamic of territoriality and discourse? How are the U. S. and its various spaces and identities produced narratively? What are the ingredients, tools, methodologies, venues, and agents of this production, and how does the process—the fictional making of America, Americans, and Americanness—evolve historically? We will also ask constantly if the ongoing “turn to the planet” and generally to supranational categories is a recent development possibly limited to late globalization or, to the contrary, perhaps predates (and if so, in what form) the end of the Cold War. Either way, we will also wonder, What does it mean to read (the U. S., its place, history, and ourselves ultimately) with “others,” with the world, in brief, *geopolitically*? Last but not least, what does it mean to do U. S. literary and cultural history today, in the wake of a world-systemic epistemology whose subsets are the global, the cosmopolitan, the trans- and even post-national, and, of late, the planetary?

**PEDAGOGICAL METHODOLOGY AND CLASS FORMAT:** Running for almost three hours, our survey combines lecture, extensive discussion, student presentations, and group work. Usually, our meetings will open with a lecture by the instructor providing historical, cultural, and theoretical background and placing the scheduled readings in the appropriate context. Following this introduction, students give 15-20-minute individual presentations on specific aspects of those readings. Then, we discuss collectively the materials for the day. I will set aside time to talk about papers, final project presentations, and so forth.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES:** Graduate students are encouraged to 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? What kind of scholarly conversation do I wish to join based on what I learn in this class about specific works, genres, styles, critical paradigms, on the one hand, and research techniques and professionalism overall, on the other hand? Where do I stand right now in terms of my preparation for intervening in the scholarly debate and, if I am not quite ready, what steps do I have to take? What are the available resources? Which are the outlets for my work? What do I have to do, for instance, to turn my seminar presentation/paper into a conference paper/journal article/dissertation chapter/writing sample?

#### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

##### **I. Midterm Exam and Final Paper:**

1. A take-home midterm exam (4-5 single-spaced pp.)

2. A final paper (20 double-spaced pp. min. plus notes and Works Cited). For this project, the first step is a **1-p., single-spaced, paper proposal** describing what you want to do, your focus, working thesis, the integration of theory and primary sources, etc. While the project should broadly pursue the general theme of the course, feel free to deal with prose material outside our reading list. I would like to get your proposal at least a few hours prior to the one-on-one meeting where we will discuss your paper; I urge you to make an appointment for that meeting. If that meeting does not take place, I would appreciate getting the proposal a few days before the class when you are scheduled to present your final project.

II. Individual presentations on the materials for the day. Guidelines for presentations: Students sign up for their final project presentations and for their oral presentations right away so that we can spread out the presentations over the course of the semester. Each student will give a brief, 15-20-min. talk on the scheduled readings. The presentations need not be written. Presentations cover a relevant aspect or material for the day. I do not expect you to fully analyze or explain the assignments or even one of these assignments. I ask you to a) briefly outline the argument or content of the readings you intent to talk about; then, b) identify one major element or problem in these works, which should help us open up a conversation in tune with the core problematic of the course as articulated above. Feel free to consult with me before you pick your presentation topic.

III. Final Project Presentation: Students give a 10-min. presentation of their final paper (see syllabus, last weeks).

IV. Attendance and Oral Participation. Both are expected and will factor into the final grade (see below under course policies). Students also do group work (in-class).

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:

1. Midterm: 25%
2. Final exam or paper: 45%
3. Oral participation (includes group work and all presentations): 30%

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. We will also talk about your plans for the final project.

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

Absences: You are allowed no more than 2 (two) justified absences 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.

REQUIRED READINGS:

**Note: Materials in print only (no e-books). Latest paperbacks whenever possible.**

Theory:

i. Books:

Apter, Emily. *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*. New York: Verso, 2013.

Moretti, Franco. *Distant Reading*. New York: Verso, 2013.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

Palumbo-Liu, Bruce Robbins, and Nirvana Tanoukhi, eds. *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World: System, Scale, Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Gilroy, Paul. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Fine, Robert. *Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Harvey, David. *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

ii. Articles:

Dimock, Wai Chee. "Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents." *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (January 2006): 85-101.

Dimock, Wai Chee. "Literature for the Planet." *PMLA* 116, no. 1 (January 2001): 173-188.

Dimock, Wai Chee. "Scales of Aggregation: Prenational, Subnational, Transnational." *American Literary History* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 219-228.

Friedman, Susan Stanford. "Planetary: Musing Modernist Studies." *Modernism/Modernity* 17, no. 3 (September 2010): 471-499.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "World Systems and the Creole." *Narrative* 14, no. 1 (January 2006): 102-112.

Fiction:

O'Neill, Joseph. *Netherland*. New York: Vintage, 2009.

DAILY SYLLABUS:

**Week 1**

Tue Jan 14 Presentation of the course, syllabus, readings, requirements, etc. Discussion groups. Individual presentations sign-up: presentations and final projects  
Start reading *Netherland* (due Jan. 28)

**Week 2**

Tue Jan 21 The states-system model vs. the world-system model  
Assignments: Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis*

**Week 3**

Tue Jan 28 The world as epistemological problem  
Assignments: Palumbo-Liu, et al., eds., *Immanuel Wallerstein and the Problem of the World* 1-98 (essays by Lee, Moretti, Tanoukhi)  
*Netherland* and the world system: the novel as world system

**Week 4**

Tue Feb 4 The nation-state, the world, and the humanities; world and genre  
Assignments: Palumbo-Liu et al. 101-137; 223-226 (essays by Brenner, Wallerstein); Dimock: "Genre as World System"; Spivak, "World Systems & the Creole"

**Week 5**

Tue Feb 11 The geopolitical and criticism as cognitive mapping: space, world, power, genre  
Assignments: Jameson ix-87;  
Reading O'Neill with Jameson

**Week 6**

Tue Feb 18 Cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan epistemology  
Assignments: Fine (esp. the first three chapters, ix-58)  
O'Neill fictional cosmopolitanism

**Week 7**

Tue Feb 25 World, cosmos, geography, power: geographical reason and the critique of cosmopolitanism (I)  
Assignments: Harvey: Prologue and Part II (1-14; 123-283)  
Preparing the midterm, I

**Week 8**

Tue Mar 4 Critiques of cosmopolitanism (II): cultural difference and the planetary  
Assignments: Gilroy  
 O'Neill, race, culture, and planetary community  
 Preparing the midterm II

**Week 9**

Tue Mar 11 **Spring Break; no class**

**Week 10**

Tue Mar 18 **Midterm exam due in class**

**Week 11**

Tue Mar 25 Geography and the problem of world literature today  
Assignments: Moretti 1-135

**Week 12**

Tue Apr 1 Geography and "distant reading"  
Assignments: Moretti 137-240  
 Reading *Netherland* from a distance

**Week 13**

Tue Apr 8 Planetary, scale, and literary history  
Assignments: Friedman; Dimock, "Literature for the Planet" and "Scales of Aggregation"

**Week 14**

Tue Apr 15 World literature or "against it"? Translation and the world-system: space, language, meaning  
Assignments: Apter 1-114; 298-342  
 Final project presentations

**Week 15**

Tue Apr 22 Final project presentations  
 Last class  
 Course overview  
 Final evaluations  
**Final paper due in class**