

ENGLISH 347: TOPICS IN POST-1800 LITERATURE –
Globalization and the Geopolitics of Identity in the Recent World Novel
(3 CR.; GLC)

Professor Christian Moraru
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School of Education 102
MW: 3:30 – 4:45 PM

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COURSE DESCRIPTION - FOCUS, FORMAT, GOALS: A required English course in the major, this Topics in Post-1800 Literature section has been developed on the existing English 347 template to achieve all four Global Engagement objectives listed below under Student Learning Outcomes. The course's thematic focus, the teaching/learning methodology, as well as the requirements are all geared toward pursuing these “overarching student global learning competencies” as part of the broader effort made by UNCG within its Global Engagement Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), 2014-2019 (<http://globalqep.uncg.edu>).

Thus, this English 347 class looks at contemporary international fiction as a *geocultural* site for the redefinition of human identity in the 21st-century global world. More specifically, we will be dealing with the kind of books that, of late, have been called, “world novels”—novels whose plots span countries and continents and whose “arch-theme” can be said to be the gradually integrating world. The basic premise of the course is that the overhaul of the modern dynamic of cultural identity (and culture more generally) and place has been an increasingly defining development worldwide since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Simply speaking, the “umbilical cord,” as some have put it, between culture and the physical location where cultural expression and identity have been historically deemed to “stem” from has weakened and, in some cases, has been severed altogether; one way or the other, the shape, content, and path of this link are nowadays changing fast. This and cognate post-1989 realignments attest to the rise of new ways of being in the world and of thinking about what it means to be in this world—about ourselves, our communities, our traditions, and places at the dawn of the 21st century.

These ways come to the fore in open conflict—and oftentimes in fruitful tension—with the nation-state model of understanding the correlation between identity (who we are) and territory (where we are, come from, and express ourselves). Notably, this correlation is no longer stable. The stability it used to entail, at least compared to our times—a stability of political territory, sovereignty, cultural authority, as well as a limitation in space, of where we could be or get, how fast, and for how long—has eroded especially since the end of the Cold War. After 1989, globalizing processes have kicked into high gear, and globalization overall has entered,

accordingly, an “accelerated,” “strong,” or “hypernetworked” era. Ours is a fluid and porous world in which at-distance interaction and border crossing of all kinds simply force us to reconceptualize a whole set of fundamental practices and values geoculturally. First and foremost, they pressure us to rethink ourselves—how we grow and function, how we perform socially, and how we form communities—in contexts much larger and far more complex than those of traditional ethnic, religious, linguistic, and political units. Most importantly, the novels studied in this class show, time and again, that this rethinking shines light on identity formation as a relational, indeed, as a geo-relational protocol. This means that we are—we come to be and we preserve who we are—more and more as we connect with and learn from others not like us, from elsewhere. Basic as it may seem, this queries the classical understanding of cultural identity, tradition, “personality,” originality, authenticity, specificity, and the like. Coming to terms with the changes undergone by these and other concepts is a major challenge faced by humanists across disciplines today.

Our course has a multiple global focus. First, it has a cross-cultural, transnational, and, indeed, global scope, covering as it does a wide range of literary and cultural traditions, Western and non-Western, and spanning several continents. Second, it zeroes in on a quintessentially global theme: mobility (fluidity, travel, and so forth). Third, the works discussed here are very recent (published during the past ten years or so) and thus speak to a growing, worldwide feeling that we have entered the new age of “time-space compression,” “network society,” and the “global village,” in which peoples, cultures, and communities around the world are more interconnected and more “liquid” but perhaps also more vulnerable than ever before. Our authors are American, Somali (Somali-South-African), Irish-Turkish, French, and British. All required readings are novels written in English. There will be some secondary readings to go with our primary literature and theme overall.

This course covers material lodged at the shifting intersection of the postcolonial, the transnational, and the postmodern/experimental, movements, categories, and features that will also be addressed in our class. Interpretively (analytically) and pedagogically, our approach is cross-cultural and comparative and will be employed with an eye to illuminating the geocultural (relational) scenario of identity formation. That is, we will see how these texts talk to each other over national, linguistic, geographic, and cultural divides and how, in doing so, they foreground the notion of territorial-cultural boundaries as well as these boundaries’ increased porousness and the latter’s bearings on identity performance after the end of the Cold War.

At the same time, we will read our novels from a global perspective also, asking ourselves, among other things: What does it mean to learn about others in order to learn about ourselves? What does it mean to experience, in the late global world, our bonds with our kin and kind *via* connections with the wider world—what does it mean to live in a *globally mediated* universe? Along the same lines, how important is it to understand that being in relation with others—no matter where you are located physically—involves in the 21st century the need (and the inevitability) to engage with values and perspectives potentially different from yours, to look at certain issues from a standpoint not necessarily “ours” or circumscribed locally? What does it mean to experience, accordingly, your own bias or “provincialism”? Finally, what does it mean to have no choice but to function simultaneously in a world of multiple languages, codes, value systems, and competencies? Otherwise, the course is broad and foundational in nature; it does not assume extensive familiarity with the texts and traditions at hand. It combines introductory lectures, class discussion, and group work.

GLCs STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLO): Students who have successfully completed this course will be able to:

- Explain environmental, historical, social, economic, political and /or cultural factors relevant to understanding a contemporary issue(s) within a global framework (QEP SLO 1).
- Compare and contrast at least two different ethical perspectives on a salient and contemporary issue in a global context (QEP SLO 2).
- Demonstrate a willingness to engage in diverse cultural situations (QEP SLO 3).
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate in a culturally informed manner in international, intercultural and/or multicultural contexts (QEP SLO 4).

TEACHING METHODS AND ASSIGNMENTS FOR ACHIEVING LEARNING OUTCOMES (all are keyed to our SLOs):

1. Examinations and papers: There will be a midterm exam (75 min. long, take-home; see syllabus for the date), which will cover our first three or four novels, and a paper, both word-processed. The latter will carry more weight. The exam will feature short questions and will require brief essays in response. The essays will have to identify and analyze the central issues and formal characteristics of the material. We will prepare both the exam and the paper carefully—the entire class is required to participate in the midterm overview of the course, selection of topics, and rehearsals. We will talk about exam format and grading in larger detail before the midterm.

We will do the same for the paper later in the semester. For now, note that this will be a 6-7-p., double-spaced, thesis-based essay for which some research will be necessary. As you incorporate research into your argument, keep in mind that 3-4 secondary sources (usually peer-reviewed articles or book chapters) should suffice. The format of your essay should be MLA. Make sure you reference your sources, put your name on your paper, number its pages, and staple them together. Before submitting the paper, students prepare and e-mail the instructor a 1-paragraph paper proposal in which they describe their project, indicating its thesis, focus, and related matters. The paper is due on April 18, in class.

2. Attendance and Participation: Both are required and will be reflected in the final grade (see below). I expect you to come to class with the assignments for the day completed and ready to participate orally, individually or in your group. Given that we read only novels, ideally you should have completed the reading of the entire book by the time we start discussing it. Also see the attendance policy below.

3. Group Activities: You will be assigned to groups of 4-5 members, which will complete brief in-class assignments. Groups discuss a specific material or problem and then designate a member to report their conclusions back to the rest of the class. Reports will be oral and rather informal, about 5 minutes long. Their main role is to help us speed up debates. Group work will be graded, too. Students in one group will get the same grade regardless of who gives the presentation.

CONFERENCES: Please meet with me during my office hours or make an appointment to discuss your work or any aspect of the course. I plan to have at least one round of “formal” conferences during the semester. I urge you to make a first appointment early on to talk about the course and what you hope to accomplish in it.

ENGLISH 347 CANVAS WEBSITE: Students must go to the course website before each class. I will post handouts, assignments, and announcements regularly. Those materials will have to be printed out and brought to class.

COURSE POLICIES:

1. Absences: You are allowed no more than 3 absences during the semester (which you must document afterwards). These are only for illnesses, religious holidays, and emergencies preventing you from attending. Any unjustified absences will seriously affect your grade; 3 undocumented absences may result in your being dropped. If you are the victim of an emergency or serious illness, please stay in touch with me by e-mail or phone. In addition, because tardiness disrupts class too, be aware that coming in late 3 times will count as an absence.

2. Electronic Devices and Classroom Ethics:

>As a general policy, no electronic devices whatsoever allowed during class time, except for students presenting documentation from UNCG’s Office of Accessibility Resources and Services. We will use exclusively books in print. Power off cell phones, etc. before the class starts. Using any device of this sort during class time will automatically get you an F for that meeting.

>You must bring your book for the day with you and use it to get credit for the specific class.

>You cannot talk with your peers during class time unless you have to as part of an in-class assignment.

> While I may not call on you on the spot if you are violating this and related policies, I make daily notes of all students who are not in compliance. If you are often among them, that will affect your final grade well beyond the 25% allotted to oral participation and classroom ethics below; in the more egregious cases—which usually result in class disruption—you will be dropped from the class, and a report may also be filed with the University.

3. Academic Integrity Policy and Plagiarism: Students are required to comply with the Academic Integrity Policy on all major work submitted for the course. They need to be familiar with, and abide by, the relevant standards, expectations, and policies described in UNCG’s *Undergraduate Bulletin*, which is available at <http://sa.uncg.edu/handbook/academic-integrity-policy/>. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of others’ materials both in form (wording) and substance (ideas). Any paper bearing your name signifies that you are the author, namely, that the words and the ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by quotations marks and paraphrases. Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an “F” for the whole course, and/or a report filed with the Dean.

GRADING: As a general rule, I am reluctant to grant incompletes. To pass the course, you must

take the exam and turn in the final paper on time, come to class prepared, do your readings regularly, and participate in group work and discussion. The final grade breakdown is as follows:

Participation and Classroom Ethics (includes group work and any possible pop quizzes)	25%
Midterm Exam	35%
Final Paper	40%

Please note the high percentage rewarding consistent, articulated, and ethical class participation.

REQUIRED READINGS (Books in print only):

I. Primary Sources

1. Houellebecq, Michel. *The Map and the Territory*. Translated from the French by Gavin Bowd. New York: Vintage, 2012.
2. Mitchell, David. *The Bone Clocks*. New York: Random House, 2015.
3. DeLillo, Don. *The Names*. New York: Random House, 1989.
4. Eggers, Dave. *The Circle*. New York: Vintage, 2014.
5. Mohsin Hamid. *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. New York: Riverhead, 2013.
6. O'Neill, Joseph. *The Dog*. New York: Pantheon, 2014.
7. Farah, Nuruddin. *Crossbones*. New York: Penguin, 2012.

II. Secondary Sources (book chapters)

1. Cowart, David. *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2002. eBook available.
2. Schoene, Berthold. *The Cosmopolitan Novel*. Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. eBook available.
3. Walkowitz, Rebecca L. *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. UNCG library PN241.W35 2015. On reserve.
4. Moraru, Christian. *Reading for the Planet: Toward a Geomethodology*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015. UNCG library PN56.G55 M67 2015. On reserve.
5. Patterson, Annabel. *The International Novel*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. UNCG library PN3503.P35 2014. On reserve.

DAILY SYLLABUS:

Week 1

M 01/11 Presentation of the course: focus, goals, requirements, topics, and policies.
Evaluation of student work; reading groups. Course syllabus and discussion.

W 01/13 Hamid
Walkowitz, Hamid chapter (189-199)

Week 2

M 01/18 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday – classes dismissed

W 01/20 Hamid

Week 3

M 01/25 Hamid

W 01/27 O’Neill
Moraru, O’Neill chapter (168-181)

Week 4

M 02/01 O’Neill

W 02/03 DeLillo
Coward, *The Names* chapter (162-180)

Week 5

M 02/08 DeLillo

W 02/10 DeLillo

Week 6

M 02/15 Farah
Patterson, Farah chapter (131-150)

W 02/17 Farah

Week 7

M 02/22 Farah

W 02/24 Farah

Week 8

M 02/29 Preparing the midterm exam (topics, discussion): bring all your books so far covered and your notes (the first three novels)

W 03/02	Discussing and circulating the midterm exam questions
Week 9	
M 03/07	<i>Fall Break: no class</i>
W 03/09	<i>Fall Break: no class</i>
Week 10	
M 03/14	Midterm exam due in class Discussing the final paper
W 03/16	Eggers
Week 11	
M 03/21	Eggers
W 03/23	Research workshop on Internet and library resources: Jenny Dale, Main Library computer lab, during regular class time
Week 12	
M 03/28	Eggers
W 03/30	Houellebecq
Week 13	
M 04/04	Houellebecq
W 04/06	Houellebecq
Week 14	
M 04/11	Houellebecq
W 04/13	Mitchell Schoene book, Mitchell chapter (97-124)
Week 15	
M 04/18	Mitchell Paper due
W 04/20	Mitchell
Week 16	
M 04/25	Mitchell Last meeting Course overview Course evaluations