

Université de Montréal
Département de littératures et de langues du monde
Études anglaises
Fall 2022

Instructor: Prof. Heike Härting
Class: Tuesdays 1 pm to 4 pm
Office: C-8118, Pav. Lionel-Groulx
Office Hours: Tuesdays 4-5 pm, or by appointment (zoom or in person)
Telephone: 343-6192
E-mail: heike.harting@umontreal.ca

ANG 6480 – Literary Practice, Narrative and the Planetary Imagination

Course Description:

Planetary cultural and literary studies is an emerging research area that reaches across multiple disciplines in the humanities, the natural and social sciences. More than disciplinary thinking, however, planetary thought trains the creative and decolonial imagination and encourages “irreverent” and unruly forms of “scientific thinking” (Walter Mignolo). If the planet has emerged as a new epistemological and cultural paradigm, its vast and miniscule, but often unimaginable, dimensions of time, space and transformation—from continental drifts to viral upheavals—often appear overwhelming. To many, the planetary seems most manageable when understood as a synonym of the Anthropocene. This correlation, I suggest, constitutes a categorical and eco-centric fallacy we will examine collaboratively through a range of different stories and genres. How, then, do we address this fallacy?

In his seminal book *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, the historian and postcolonial critic Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that “the global reveals the planetary,” implying that the global and the planetary remain inseparably linked. Indeed, the planetary may be read through various narratives and configurations of global violence, including “slow violence” (Rob Nixon), epistemological violence (Gayatri Spivak), the “war of attrition” (Achille Mbembe), the ongoing genocide against indigenous peoples, eco- and “omnicide” (Amitav Ghosh). The planetary, however, emerges through the planet’s revolt against these multiple and often overlapping forms of violence. While “planetary revolt” or transformation may appear to be threatening and apocalyptic, it also demands constructive ways of imagining planetary life—indeed, life itself-- and its relational and asymmetrical ontologies; it requires a rethinking of human and nonhuman in relation to each other and of the animate and inanimate. To do so, it is crucial to sense different modes of embodiment and perception (conscious and unconscious) through which we experience and, thus, shape the planet.

This course, then, seeks to sharpen the students’ critical and perceptive faculties of the planetary. To this end, each class will begin with a 10-minute meditation. We will then collectively investigate the various configurations of the planetary, as they appear in different narratives of war, dispossession, displacement, colonial terraforming, and violent extraction. Drawing from different literary genres, visual arts, and film, the course invites students to appreciate and practice the creative imagination as a profoundly relational means of planetary transformation. For this reason, each student will have to lead the class discussion at least once, engage in a collaborative

group work project that analyzes representations of the planetary in social media discourses and/or the visual arts (to be presented as a collaboratively written paper or digital poster), and write one research paper.

Course Readings:

Texts (Available on Kindle or at the *Librairie/ UdeM Bookstore/ any edition is permissible*):

1. Gosh, Amitav. *The Nutmeg's Curse. Parables for a Planet in Crisis.* (2021)
2. Rice, Waubgeshig. *Moon of the Crusted Snow.* (2018)
3. Arudpragasam, Anuk. *The Story of a Brief Marriage.* (2016)
4. Ali, Mohamed Abdulkarim. *Angry, Queer Somali Boy: A Complicated Memoir.* (2019)
5. Addonia, Sulaiman. *Silence Is my Mother Tongue. A Novel.* (2020)
6. Negarestani, Reza. *Cyclonopedia. Complicity with Anonymous Materials.* (2008)
7. Kellough, Kaie. *Magnetic Equator.* (2019) (Selected Poems)

Films:

Weiwei, Ai. *Human Flow.* (2017)

A selection of theoretical texts by Gayatri Spivak, Achille Mbembe, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Ian Baucom, Emily Apter, Elisabeth Povinelli, Jane Bennet, Donna Haraway and others (links will be available on StudiUM at the beginning of the term.)

Class Assignments:

Leading a class discussion	20%
Collaborative Group Work Project (collaboratively written and presented digital poster or paper of 15 pages/ 5 pages per group member)	25 %
Annotated Bibliography	10%
Research Essay	35%
Participation	10%