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## **The Uncanny Re-Worlding of the Post-9/11 American Novel, Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland*; Or, The Cultural Fantasy Work of Neoliberalism**

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From the day of its release in 2008, literary scholars welcomed Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* as the long-awaited post-9/11 novel that had lived up to their expectations. Its publication also marked the occasion for academic journals to publish critical assessment of the scores of novels about the events that took place on September 11, 2001. In an *American Literary History* (*ALH*) essay written in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse titled “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis,” Richard Gray criticizes an assortment of post-9/11 novels for their domestic focus and their tendency to reduce what he calls a “turning point in national and international history” to the dimensions of an “insular domestic dispute.”<sup>1</sup> To correct this tendency, Gray enjoins American writers to renounce their nationalist proclivities by reframing post-9/11 United States culture as itself a transcultural space — a setting for the interaction and transformation of conflicting national and transcultural constituencies. The value of such a ‘deterritorializing’ process, Gray argues, lies in the fact that ‘whether they know it or not — and as it happens, many of them do — Americans find themselves living in an interstitial space, a locus of interaction between contending national and cultural constituencies.’ (134)

As his title suggests, Gray is not interested in offering an objective description of the norms inhering in the rules of a new literary subgenre. Gray instead makes clear his intention to elevate the criteria he invokes to distinguish strong from weak examples of the post-9/11 US novels into the basis for the demand that US novelists act upon what he calls the “obligation” to write novels that “world” America differently after 9/11.<sup>2</sup> Michael Rothberg published a response to Gray in the same issue of *ALH* that correlates US novelists’ retreat into the domestic sphere with a species of xenophobic nationalism whose overcoming requires a change in orientation: “what we need from 9/11 novels are cognitive maps that imagine how US citizenship looks and feels beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, both for Americans and for others.”<sup>3</sup>

Two years later *ALH* featured essays by Elizabeth Anker and Caren Irr that, when read together, track a salutary change in the “worlding” prospects of post-9/11 US fiction. For her part, Anker diagnosed the forces that impeded such a change by offering a psycho-social rationale for US male novelists’ retreat into domesticity. According to Anker, post-9/11 US fiction includes an assemblage of elements — allegories of “falling” men; middle-class, middle-aged masculinity in crisis; retreat into the domestic and domesticity under attack; the “divorce plot”; the “menace to

paternity”; “conspiracy subplots”; amnesic connections to the past — out of which US novelists composed plots in which their male protagonists feel compelled to correlate the decline of American economic and military dominance to their own waning sexual prowess and to imagine the 9/11 attacks as a threat to the patrilineal bond at the core of their masculinity.<sup>4</sup>

Anker’s provision of this psycho-social rationale for post-9/11 male novelists’ retreat into domesticity seemingly foreclosed the possibility of their carrying out what Gray and Rothberg called their “worlding” obligations. However, Irr contributed an essay to this same issue proposing that several recently published fictions written by and about expatriates relocating to the United States had introduced salutary revisions to the norms of post-9/11 US fiction capable of liberating the genre from its nationalizing proclivities. Irr’s essay, tellingly entitled “Toward the World Novel: Genre Shifts in Twenty-First-Century Expatriate Fiction,” readily acknowledges the psychic impasses Anker finds embedded in versions of this genre written by US novelists.<sup>5</sup> However, Irr goes on to argue that expatriates in the United States alone are capable of installing the transcultural spaces that could transform US readers’ geopolitical orientations. Fictions of expatriation are uniquely empowered to carry out the “worlding” imperatives of the post-9/11 novel because expatriates in the United States are capable of representing what took place within the American scene without “universalizing its time-space.” (660)<sup>6</sup> The expatriate novels under Irr’s description decisively reshape the national novel by “incorporat[ing] politically charged elements of the global scene that foster sensitivity to the augmented presence of migrants and refugees” and awareness of the “increased interpenetration of global markets” across US culture. (660)

Gray and Rothberg, and Anker might disagree about the generic rules and norms at work in Irr’s account of the post-9/11 novel, but the four critics are unanimous in their designation of Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* as the gold standard for defining what post-9/11 fiction should and should not do. Gray describes *Netherland* as a new fiction of “immigrant encounter” that fosters American “deterritorialization.” Gray goes on to celebrate the kind of fiction typified by *Netherland* that explores difference and hybrid identity within a multi-racial post 9/11 New York where the idea of a Cricket Club promises to “start a whole new chapter in US history.” (141) As counterpoint to Gray’s “centripetal” demand for a globalized vision of domestic America, Rothberg underscores the novel’s “centrifugal” features that offer “a fiction of international relations and extraterritorial citizenship.” Hailing it as one of “the finest novels of the post-9/11 condition thus far” (156), Rothberg describes *Netherland*’s “deterritorialized recharting” of the “altered geographies” of a transcultural urban pastoral “in a fully globalized terrain” (156) as the much-awaited exception to Gray’s rule of domestic retreat. Anker singles out *Netherland* for bringing marginal urban cultures that rarely find a voice in mainstream American literature to the attention of readers. Irr describes *Netherland* as exemplary for its salient display of the elements within the post-9/11 expatriate novel — multi-stranded narration, broad geographical reach, a cosmopolitan form of ethics, and, most of all, a desire for a sense of community — that are unassimilable to the conventions of the national novel. Literary scholars have cited *Netherland*’s deterritorialization of established narratives of nationhood, its break from unilateral accounts of national trauma, its repositioning of the American nation toward the world, its movement of post-9/11 fiction past an insular focus while maintaining a multicultural,

postcolonial framing of global interests and identities, its promotion of a “cosmopolitan” disposition capable of binding in unprecedented ways the world’s peoples, traditions, and aesthetic practices, and numerous related examples of the novel’s “worldliness” to justify the academy’s enthusiastic embrace of Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland*.<sup>7</sup> *Netherland* was greeted with comparably extravagant praise within the popular press.

Writing in the *New Yorker*, James Wood called it “one of the most remarkable post-colonial books I have ever read...O’Neill finds in cricket a beautiful controlling metaphor; it comes to stand variously for upward aspiration; for camaraderie; for innocence; for fragile, ridiculous, sublime democracy — for all the things Hans feels he lost in the fall of 2001.”<sup>8</sup> In his review for the *New York Times*, Michiko Kakutani exalted O’Neill’s novel as “the wittiest, angriest, most exacting and most desolate work of fiction we’ve yet had about life in New York and London after the World Trade Center fell.”<sup>9</sup> Arguing that Hans van den Broek, the novel’s protagonist, displaced Gatsby’s unappeasable need for Daisy onto Khamraj (Chuck) Ramkissoon’s unrealizable dream of resurrecting Americans’ archaic passion for cricket, Declan Hughes described *Netherland* as a candidate for the Great American Novel that intentionally brings to mind and mood F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.<sup>10</sup> “It’s the post-September 11 novel we hoped for,” Zadie Smith remarks in her November 2008 *New York Review of Books* review, “Two Paths for the Novel,” “It’s as if, by an act of collective prayer, we have willed it into existence.”<sup>11</sup> These critics believe that the friendship between Chuck and Hans in *Netherland* is not based on business, but on a post-racial, post-national vision for which the cricket field creates a cosmopolitan fold.<sup>12</sup> Barack Obama added immeasurably to the novel’s cultural and literary capital when he added it to the top of his list as the one book to which he preferred to turn when he sought respite from the accumulating pile of briefs and policy papers. Christian Moraru affords the ethical imperatives threading their way through these enthusiastic popular and academic responses of the novel with a suitably magisterial formulation:

*Netherland* is a concrete, athletically embodied modality of presentifying or updating an America that, in the September 2001 aftermath, must re-constellate itself *qua* community so as to work through the meanings of not only the World Trade Center tragedy but also of the planetarization without which the traumatic event would remain meaningless. A community driven to the limit by the violently worlding world, the United States cannot afford *not* to use its new, liminal position in the world to think through its communal, cultural-ethical limits and spatio-temporal limitations.<sup>13</sup>

These are productive ways of reading the novel. No matter whether they frame it as an example of cosmopolitan precarity, an insurgent postcolonial imaginary, an example of the transnational /diaspora complex, or as an emergent planetary imaginary, these commentators have elevated *Netherland* to the status of a classic work of American world literature. In doing so, the reviewers and critics responsible for *Netherland*’s spectacular hyper-canonization have drawn on a pre-existing fund of democratizing values they have projected onto the cricket dream at the center of the novel. However, the critics who have assigned *Netherland* these quasi-utopian purposes, have attributed desires and aims to the narrator, Hans van den Broek, that bear scant resemblance to Hans’s account of his interactions with Chuck. Hans is not

connected to Chuck by way of storied memories. Indeed, there is no lasting bond between them: “A story that’s what I need,” Hans informs his readers at the beginning of his narrative. “Not so Chuck he died without a story. Chuck is on memory weighty, but what is the meaning of this weight, what am I to do with it?...Chuck was a clandestine man who followed his own instincts and influences and would rarely be influenced by advice — not my advice that’s for sure...I was capable of a Samaritan urge to save him. But I had troubles of my own and Chuck’s companionship functioned as a shelter — this taking of shelter.”<sup>14</sup> In the remarks that follow, I want to propose a different interpretive frame by re-describing the novel’s canonizing values — cosmopolitan planetarism, transnational democracy, egalitarian justice, non-identitarian resistance — as evidence of the neo-liberal fantasy work of *Netherland* whose purpose is to establish an imaginary relationship with the financialized-military complex Hans depends upon for his livelihood. Chuck Ramkissoon draws upon the key terms of this fantasy in the slogan — “Think fantastic!” — animating his tireless promotion of Chuck Cricket Inc.

“Cricket is instructive, Hans, it has a moral angle...Americans cannot really see the world. They think they can, but they can’t. I don’t need to tell you that. Look at the problems we’re having. It’s a mess, and it’s going to get worse. I say, we want to have something in common with the Hindus and Muslims? Chuck Ramkissoon is going to make it happen. With the New York Cricket Club we could start a whole new chapter in US history. Why not? Why not say so if it’s true? Why hold back? I’m going to open our eyes...Anyhow that’s what I’m doing here Hans. That’s why I’m ready to do whatever it takes to make this happen.”...

Hans said, “Chuck *get real*. People don’t operate on that level. They’re going to find it very hard to respond to that way of thinking.” “We’ll see,” he said, laughing and looking at his watch. “I believe they will.” (211–212)

The opening lines of this dialogue articulate Chuck Ramkissoon’s final sales pitch in his novel-long effort to persuade the Dutch financier Johannus van den Broek to provide the mezzanine financing needed to subsidize the New York Cricket Club, the prime speculative venture in the Chuck Cricket Inc. portfolio. Rather than signing on to this project, Hans says that people don’t respond to that way of thinking. Whereas Chuck’s motto is to “Think fantastic!” Hans, who is an analyst in the large cap oils and gas futures market, is not predisposed to exaggerate the value of a property. Hans’s job is to express reliable opinions about the current and future valuation of certain oil and gas stocks. At the time he offered Chuck this assessment, London’s prestigious *International Investor* ranked Hans number four among the world’s equities analysts. Indeed he was so good at evaluating the difference between non-risky investments and sure things that traders on the stock exchange floor sought out his assessment before closing their deals. It did not take long for the catchphrases — “Dutch” and “Double Dutch” — that Hans used to distinguish an ordinary recommendation from a strong recommendation to enter the popular idiom of the industry. “So what are you saying Dutch or Double Dutch?” (52) Millions of dollars could be made or lost at Hans’s response to this question.

But who does Hans presuppose as the referent for the people who would refuse to acknowledge social uplift, democracy, hospitality, mutual responsibility, intimate closeness as apt criteria for

adding their names to Chuck's list of investors? It is Hans's refusal to identify with the people Chuck presupposes as the audience for his bid that sets him apart from *Netherland's* reviewers and critics. These reviewers differ from Hans in that they have taken up the position of Chuck's addressees — apparently ready to do and say whatever it takes to turn his dream into reality. The cultural and political values that critics have attributed to *Netherland* are saturated with the liberal multi-culturalist tropes — the social justice of cricket, its trans-national and post-national participation, the multicultural legacy — that Chuck himself deploys to persuade Hans to proffer the mezzanine financing his scheme requires. In taking up this position of Chuck's implicit addressees, readers and reviewers acquire the subject positions of membership in a fully-achieved post-national, post-racial, multi-cultural democracy that the neoliberal economic order wants them to want.<sup>15</sup>

These critics and readers might be described as contributing the symbolic capital to Chuck's financial instrument — and to the novel that O'Neill initially intended to call the *Brooklyn Dream Machine* — that Hans van den Broek does not. In buttressing the market rationality of the neoliberal state, their collectively shared cricket fantasy does not merely distract readers from questions of economic inequality, this fantasy aggressively legitimates social and economic inequality.<sup>16</sup> Here is a representative instance of the fantasy production Chuck's Cricket Inc. motivates in Chuck's intended addressees:

Cricket, like every sport, is an activity and the dream of an activity. Cricket in this novel is much more than these associations: it is an immigrant's imagined community, a game that unites, in a Brooklyn park, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Indians, West Indians, and so on, even as the game's un-Americanness accentuates their singularity. Most poignantly, for Chuck, cricket is an American dream, or perhaps a dream of America; this man is convinced that, as he claims, cricket is not an immigrant sport at all but “the first modern team sport in America...a bona fide American pastime,” played in New York since the sixteen-seventies.<sup>17</sup>

Chuck's cricket field, as this quotation attests, is a symbolic fiction that supplies these interpreters with master signifiers seemingly capable of converting the losses of 9/11 into the gain of a “cosmopolitan” imaginary.

In the course of his narration, Hans van den Broek mentions the Enron scandal, the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, suicide bombings, the Iraq oil bonanza, the CIA's use of renditions, and related workings of the terror-security complex taking place contemporaneously. Although these calamitous matters incite his investors' desire for his cricket scheme as a quasi-utopian alternative, Chuck's over-idealization of the game is designed in part to deflect attention from them. He nonetheless connects the rationale of Cricket Inc. to the US security apparatus when he proclaims the sport's ability to render rowdy 3rd World cricketers from the Global South docile US subjects: “‘But cricket more than any other sport, is, I want to say,’ Chuck played for effect — ‘a lesson in democracy.’ ‘What this means is that we have an extra responsibility to play the game right...You want to know what it feels like to be a black man in America. Put on the white clothes of a cricketer. Put on white to feel black’” (16).

The space opened up between the events—9/11, the death of Hans’s mother, the declaration of war in Iraq, the break-up of Hans’s marriage, the endless series of financial scandals, Chuck Ramkissoon’s murder — and the retroactive causes the narrator assigns responsibility for bringing them about gets filled in and emptied out by the cricket field. Chuck turns his cricket dream into an affective mechanism to try and instruct Hans in how to want Chuck’s speculative, financial schemes. But Hans does not invest either his capital or his credibility in the culturally transformative values Chuck has imputed to cricket. The critics who have assigned *Netherland* this quasi-utopian purpose have attributed desires and aims to Hans that bear little resemblance to the motives Hans explicitly expresses for befriending Chuck.

My instinct was to keep him at a distance, at that distance certainly between ourselves and those we suspect of neediness. I was wondering when he was going to ask me for money for his cricket scheme...I’ve never been open to the fantastical side of business. I’m an analyst, a bystander. It’s the incompleteness of reveries that brings trouble — and that brought Ramkissoon the worst trouble. His head wasn’t sufficiently in the clouds, he had a clear enough view of the gap between where he was and where he wanted to be, and he was determined to find a way across. (102)

Unlike the book’s reviewers, Hans never takes up the symbolic identity — a Caucasian male who wants to “put on white to feel black”— to which Chuck attempts to interpellate him. Hans does not base his interactions with Chuck Ramkissoon on a shared post-racial vision. Hans’s perception of the cricket field is itself a racial formation. Indeed, from the first day they met to the day of their final leave-taking, Hans’s view of the game and field they share is the outcome of the workings of racial constraints that turns Hans’s teammates and opponents into a racialized, and potentially terrorist assemblage:<sup>18</sup> “The day I met Chuck...We, Staten Islanders, were playing a bunch of guys from St. Kitts...My own teammates variously originated from Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. That summer of 2002, when out of loneliness I played after years of not playing, and in the summer that followed, I was the only white man I saw in the cricket fields of New York” (10–11). When a Kittian onlooker threatens to settle a dispute over a call on the field with a gun he brought with him, Hans’s teammates back away in a panic. But Hans tightens the grip on his Gunn and Moore Maestro bat, ready to resolve the dispute after the manner of his Dutch settler ancestors, which is the symbolic identity Hans will learn how to re-acquire through his relationship with Chuck Ramkissoon, and which, as I will demonstrate shortly, affords the actual basis for Hans’s desire for this relationship.

*Netherland* is organized around two separate narrative tracks. One track concerns the changes in the psycho-geographical coordinates of Hans van den Broek, who lost his bearings after he was confronted with three unpredictable, and *uninsurable* losses — the death of his mother, the destruction of the Twin Towers, and the break-up of his marriage. That narrative is organized around movements back and forth from Hans’s memories of his childhood years in Holland where, following the death of his father when Hans was two, his mother raised him as a single parent — to memories of his life with Rachel and his son, Jacob, in 1998, 2001, 2002, 2003. It terminates in 2006 when Hans, happily reunited with Rachel and Jake at their home in the upscale Highbury neighborhood of London, receives a phone call from a *New York Times*

reporter with the news that the remains of Khamraj Ramkissoon's ("Chuck Ramkissoon" Hans corrects her) had been found in the Gowanus Canal. "There were handcuffs around his wrists and evidently he was the victim of a murder." (5)

*Netherland* travels backward and forward in time, arranging events by an affective, rather than chronological, order — and, in the process, creates the need for a space of emotional shelter that the cricket field fills in. *Netherland*, which starts as a murder mystery, becomes a post-9/11 novel about the mending of a marriage fallen apart. Although it is in the thrall of the disorderly comings and goings of Hans's involuntary memories and free associations, this narrative possesses the coherence of a *Bildungsroman* as Hans undergoes a shift in his disposition *from* the abject misery brought about by Rachel's announcement that she has decided to leave him shortly after 9/11 ("I felt shame that life was beyond mending, that love was loss, that nothing worth saying was sayable, that dullness was general, that disintegration was irresistible" [30]) *to* the more happily placed "idiomatic man who can take her or leave her."

The second narrative track consists of a chronicle of vignettes in which Chuck Ramkissoon plays multiple parts. Chuck's repeated failure to persuade Hans to invest in Chuck Cricket Inc. is offset by his success at guiding Hans through Brooklyn's hinterlands; by his success at persuading Hans to become his chauffeur as Chuck made drop offs and pick-ups at his kosher-sushi restaurants, at sundry gambling rackets and real estate deals; and by his success at teaching Hans how to bat cricket the American way. As Hans travels through Queens and Brooklyn with Chuck Ramkissoon, cricket brings the uneven development of New York's post-colonial cityscape into visibility.<sup>19</sup>

Chuck befriends Hans to gain access to the financial elite. Hans's narrative relation to Chuck is structured in finance capital's relationship to the class that it exploits and expropriates. Rachel and Hans are members of the transnational financial class. Before he took up residence in the Chelsea hotel, Hans sold the loft in Tribeca for 1 million dollars with another 2 million in a joint banking account, and since the market "was making me nervous," another 200,000 in various accounts. Unlike commentators on his narrative, Hans does not attribute his desire to work with Chuck to any planetarily progressive motives. Hans met Chuck after Rachel left him. Their meeting coincides with the US invasion of Iraq as well as a series of scandals — Enron, World Com, AIG — (Hans mentions the Jack Grubman and Henry Blogett cases) in the financial sector. Hans's decision to latch onto Chuck is in part informed by his need to understand why Rachel, who never before expressed the desire to take up the cause of the socially oppressed, should have, upon her return to London, taken up work in a non-governmental organization (NGO) protecting the rights of asylum seekers.

Rachel is, like Hans, a member of the transnational financial elite. A corporate litigator who defended CEOs accused of financial fraud before 9/11, Rachel became "radicalized only in the service of her client without the smallest bone to pick about money and its doings." (96) But the events that took place on September 11 triggered political anxieties and paranoid fantasies in Rachel that scholars in settler colonial studies claim originated in Anglo-America's white colonial settler past.<sup>20</sup>

Hans's association with Chuck began shortly before the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan when the Homeland Security Act regressed the population to a minority condition of dependency upon the state for its biopolitical welfare. But the state thereafter correlated this regression in political standing with the reenactment of a formerly suppressed historical event. After the people were regressed to the condition of a political minority, the state produced a series of lurid spectacles which returned the population to the historical moment in which colonial settlers had deployed the illicit use of force against native populations. As witnesses to the state's colonization of Afghanistan and Iraq, the US spectatorial publics were returned to the prehistoric time of the colonial settlers who had formerly spoliated Indian homelands. By way of "Operation Infinite Justice" and "Operation Iraqi Freedom" the Homeland Security State restaged the colonial settlers' conquest of indigenous peoples and the acquisition of their homelands. Both spectacles invited their audiences to take scopical pleasure in the return of the traumatic memory of the unprovoked aggression that the colonial settlers had previously exerted against native populations.<sup>21</sup>

Chuck figures as the means through whom Hans gets in touch with the iteration of the person Rachel says she now wants to be. The turning point in Hans's relationship with Chuck took place at the moment he discovered the linkage between Rachel's paranoid behavior and the collective political mania that Chuck Ramkissoon aspired to exploit in the wake of 9/11. When Hans heard Chuck's story about the public's reaction to the New York Humane Society's transport to Pier 40 of hundreds of household pets abandoned or lost after 9/11 — Chuck considers it a wonderful venture, but not because of what the American public did for the creatures. Chuck was impressed instead with how many Americans needed to identify with the image of themselves as good shepherds dedicated to caring for the welfare of creatures rendered helpless by the 9/11 attacks. Hans observed that "[t]he catastrophe had instilled in many — *though not in me* — a state of elation." (77) It is at this moment that Hans associates the manic change in Rachel's political disposition as a symptom of this pathology: "I'd suspected that, beneath all the tears and the misery, Rachel's leaving had basically been a function of euphoria." (78) Rachel wanted to replace all of the confusion that resulted from the destruction of the Twin Towers with an ethical and political standpoint that would liberate her from the logics of retribution that motivated her colonial-settler fears. Hans experienced the disappearance of his *need* to play cricket in the wake of this revelation.

As we have seen, Chuck serves as the psycho-social vehicle through whom Hans works through the death of his mother and the break-up of his marriage.<sup>22</sup> After Hans converts Chuck into a stand-in for these experiential losses, Chuck Ramkissoon disappears into an ungrievable memory. Chuck's deferred death becomes the precondition for the securitization and valorization of the life of another population — Hans van den Broek, his wife Rachel and their son Jacob — that triumphs in its shadows.

The key to understanding the difference between Hans and the readers who eagerly identify with the values Chuck attributes to Cricket become discernible in Hans's account of what at first sight would appear the confession of a corrigible lapse in character. The admission takes place at the conclusion of what reads like a litany of remediable shortcomings in his moral development.

I could take a guess at the oil capacity of an American-occupied Iraq. But I found myself unable to contribute to conversations about international law or the feasibility of producing a dirty bomb, or the constitutional rights of imprisoned enemies or the efficiency of duct tape as a window sealant or the merits of vaccinating the American masses against small pox or the weaponizing of deadly bacteria. In this ever-shifting, all enveloping discussion, my orientation was poor. I could not tell where I stood. If pressed to state a position, I would confess that I had not succeeded in arriving at a position...I had no idea, and to be truthful, and to touch on the real difficulty, I had little interest. I didn't really care. In short I was a political-ethical idiot. (100)

When Hans describes himself a moral and political idiot, he also embraces the attitude that enabled him to keep his number four ranking as Double Dutch. If Hans were to present any position on the war in Iraq, other than his prediction of its effect on the rise and fall of world oil prices, he would likely lose his number four ranking. It is Hans's moral and political idiocy that positions him apart from the people Chuck would tether to the fantasy work of neo-colonialism. Hans does not examine the causes of the war for the same reason that he does not search for the causes of Chuck's death.

But if Hans's *Bildungsroman* does not entail the transformation of Hans's moral and political idiocy who or what does he become when he says he could take his marriage to Rachel or leave her? I shall let my attempt at a brief response to this question serve as a conclusion. In *Netherland* the memory work of a financial analyst turns a prototypical post-9/11 neoliberal fantasy (the cricket field imagined within the global enterprise Chuck Cricket Inc. as a post-racial, post-national utopia) into the technology for the accumulation of an emotional and psychic surplus—"I can take her or leave her"—through dispossession. But the figure who performs this taking or leaving is not the same person who felt that he could not lose Rachel without losing himself; it was, as Hans makes clear in the following observation, a third person: "Rachel saw our reunion as a continuation, I felt differently: that she and I had gone our separate ways and subsequently had fallen for third parties to whom, fortuitously, we were already married" (229). Hans first takes up the position of this third person when he bats the American way on Chuck's cricket field. When Hans identifies with this position on Chuck Ramkisson's cricket field, however, he undergoes regression to the subject position of a Dutch settler in Breukelen colony of the new Netherland. In an early moment of intimate male bonding, Chuck tells Hans that putting on the whites of the twenty-first century cricket player is one sure way for a white man to "feel black." Contrary to Chuck's instruction, however, when Hans puts on the whites, he does so as a seventeenth century Dutch settler who turns his batting position into the colonial instrument that facilitates his dis-identification from Chuck. After batting in American style, Hans says that he feels *naturalized* as an American. But the America to which he refers is the colonial America his Dutch ancestors inhabited as settler colonists. Chuck's cricket field performs its most efficacious cultural work by enabling Hans to once again become a Double Dutch American in this unsettled state.

When Hans thereafter put Chuck to the affective labor of working through his separation from Rachel, Hans time-travels to the hinterland of the New Netherland in pre-Modern America

where his Dutch colonial ancestors in Breukelen built tobacco plantations next to the Gowanus creek where Khamraj Ramkissoon's Trinidadian ancestors worked as slaves and indentured servants. Like Chuck, some of those ancestors preceded him in the watery grave of the Gowanus canal.

An interviewer recently asked Joseph O'Neill "Why is there such a need to return to the colonial origins of the nation...to superimpose regressive images of Netherlanders and Indians on the landscape," O'Neill answered: "Hans is Dutch for a reason...Once he is Dutch, then there are consequences of him being Dutch. Nick Carraway is not Dutch. So he just briefly mentions the Dutch right at the very end. But Hans van den Broek is the original colonial eye revisiting New York. And I suppose his whole friendship with Chuck wakes up the Dutch colonial settler from the Netherland of Hans's memory."<sup>23</sup> Hans reawakens these old colonial eyes on a holiday in India to record what he saw when he looked in on a column of poor workers by the side of the road. "They were small and thin and poor and dark-skinned, with thin arms and thin legs. They were men walking in the forest and the darkness." For some reason, Hans tells us, he keeps on seeing these men. "I do not think of Chuck as one of them, even though, with his very dark skin, he could have been one of them. I think of Chuck as the Chuck I saw. But whenever I see these men I always end up seeing Chuck." Hans's career as a cricket player assumes two distinct phases enacted by two different personae. When he recalls his years playing for the exclusive cricket club in his native Holland, he feels under his mother's approving eye. But when he remembers his time on Chuck Ramkissoon's bush league cricket field, he retroactively solicits Rachel's worried gaze. The latter regression transports Hans from the memory of his childhood in metropolitan Holland to the more archaic memory of the Dutch settler colonies of Hendrick Hudson's New Netherland. Hans's oscillation between these noncomparable cricket fields renders visible the third person interconnecting the Dutch colony in the New Netherland to the twenty-first century world capitalist system. Hans recognizes the third person he has become when he opens his colonial eye to the indirect part he played — as a descendant of the Dutch settler-colonists dating back to Henrick Hudson — in Chuck Ramkissoon's death. This colonial eye illuminates the material linkages between the Dutch colonial settlers' accumulation by dispossession in the America of the seventeenth century and the global financial military establishment's accumulation by dispossession in the Iraq of the twenty-first century.

At novel's end, Hans takes Rachel's reaction to the news of Chuck's death as a sign that she had recovered her old self. Rachel does not now construe Chuck a member of the Global South in need of asylum or protection or collaboration. She now considers him a gangster and a terrorist threat to Hans's status as number four in the *Institutional Investors* ranking of oil equities analysts.

The difference between Hans van den Broek's colonial settler's relationship to Chuck Ramkissoon's cricket enterprise and the cultural fantasy work that post-9/11 critics have projected onto this narrative reveals what I find truly uncanny in *Netherlands* re-worlding of the American novel.<sup>24</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Richard Gray “Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis,” *American Literary History* 21 (2009): 134. Pages from this essay are hereafter cited in parentheses in the body of the essay.

<sup>2</sup> This call for the worlding of United States literary works began two decades earlier when numerous American studies scholars published works — *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 3-21; Carolyn Porter, “What We Know That We Don’t Know: Remapping American Literary Studies,” *American Literary History* 6 (1994): 467-526; Gregory S. Jay, “The End of American Literature,” *College English* 53 (1991): 264-281; Jane C. Desmond and Virginia R. Dominguez, “Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism,” *American Quarterly* 48 (1996): 475-490 — that generated a post-national geopolitical imaginary emerging at the critical juncture between American Studies and postcolonial theory, comparative literature, and the study of globalization. The fact that the demand for the worlding of American literature increased exponentially after 9/11 discloses the increased urgency of this pre-existing desire.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Rothberg “A Failure of the Imagination: Diagnosing the Post-9/11 Novel: A Response to Richard Gray,” *American Literary History* 21 (2009): 152-158. Pages from this essay are hereafter cited in parentheses in the body of the essay.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Anker, “Allegories of Falling and the 9/11 Novel,” *American Literary History* 23 (2011): 463-482. Pages from this essay are hereafter cited in parentheses in the body of the essay.

<sup>5</sup> Caren Irr, “Toward the World Novel: Genre Shifts in Twenty-First Century Expatriate Fiction,” *American Literary History* 23 (2011): 660-679. Pages from this essay are hereafter cited in parentheses in the body of the essay.

<sup>6</sup> Irr constructed her account of expatriate fiction in part as a response to Bruce Robbins’s complaint that US novelists had endowed what took place on 9/11 with its “own unique local surround, a restricted time/space that replaces and cancels out any abstract planetary coordinates.” See Bruce Robbins, “The Worlding of the American Novel,” in *The Cambridge History of The American Novel*, ed. Leonard Cassuto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1096.

<sup>7</sup> Numerous essays and essay collections, and monographs have been published on “post-9/11 literature” over the last decade. Notable studies include *Literature After 9/11*, ed. Anne Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn (New York and London: Routledge, 2008); Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Martin Randall, *9/11 and the Literature of Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011); Richard Gray’s *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> James Wood “Beyond a Boundary.” *New Yorker* (May 26, 2008)

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/05/26/beyond-a-boundary>.

<sup>9</sup> Michiko Kutani, “Post 9/11, a New York of Gatsby-Size Dreams and Loss,” *Books of The Times*, May 16, 2008

<https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/16/books/16book.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Katherine V. Snyder elaborates on O’Neill’s re-accentuation of Fitzgerald’s novel in “Gatsby’s Ghost: Post-Traumatic Memory and National Literary Tradition in Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland*,” *Contemporary Literature* 54 (2013): 459-490.

<sup>11</sup> Zadie Smith, “Two Paths for the Novel,” *New York Review of Books* 55 (18), November 20, 2008

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2008/11/20/two-paths-for-the-novel/>. Smith is also quite critical in her assessment of *Netherland*. She takes them to task for seeming so “perfectly done,” at an historical moment when demonstrations of stylistic felicity are incompatible with political right-mindedness: “*Netherland* is only superficially about September 11 or immigrants or cricket as a symbol of good citizenship. Its worries are formal and revolve obsessively around the question of authenticity... It is absolutely a post-catastrophe novel but the catastrophe isn’t terror, it’s Realism.”

<sup>12</sup> In “Cricket’s Field of Dreams: Queer Racial Identifications in Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland*,” *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 55 (2014): 341-357, John Duvall contends that the inter-ethnic, homosocial relationship Hans and Chuck forge in the cricket field moves the post 9/11 novel beyond narratives of traumatized males in mid-life crisis and encourages readers to re-examine the notion of national community from the standpoint of the limits and exclusions this formation produces.

<sup>13</sup> Christian Moraru, *Reading for the Planet: Toward a Geomethodology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 168.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph O’Neill, *Netherland* (New York: Pantheon, 2008), 71, 132. Pages from the novel are hereafter cited in parentheses in the body of the essay.

<sup>15</sup> The geopolitical imaginary of post-national American literature that these critics have projected onto *Netherland* remains dependent on these liberal multicultural beliefs, values and assumptions that also regulate their interpretations of the novel. In harnessing their observations about the post-9/11 novel to liberal multicultural and

cosmopolitan values, these critics simply ignore the tensions neoliberalism creates between market and state and between capital and territory in clear view throughout *Netherland*.

<sup>16</sup> This interpretation of the critics' hyper canonization of *Netherland* as symptomatic of the encompassing fantasy-work of neoliberalism draws on Jodi Dean's account of neoliberalism as an ideological formation that produces imaginary rather than symbolic identities and that deploys multiculturalist, post-nationalist, and anti-racist sloganeering to mask real economic inequalities. See Jodi Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies: Communicative Capitalism and Left Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Wood "Beyond a Boundary."

<sup>18</sup> For an excellent discussion of the positioning of terrorist assemblages within the financial-military apparatus, see Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1-37.

<sup>19</sup> In "Cricket and the World-System, or Continuity, 'Riskless Risk' and Cyclicity in Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* (2016), Claire Westall shows how Hans's trips through the enclaves of his cricket partners uncovers the uneven economic development of Brooklyn's urban geography. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2016.1203102>.

<sup>20</sup> For contextualization of post-9/11 political anxieties within the broader histories of the colonies of white settlement see essays gathered in *Settler Colonial Studies*, 3:1; especially Penelope Edmonds and Jane Carey "A New Beginning for *Settler Colonial Studies*," 2-5.

<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the mode of cultural production see, "From Virgin Land to Ground Zero: The Mythological Foundations of the National Security State" in Donald Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 153-180.

<sup>22</sup> For different interpretations of the part Chuck plays in Hans's psycho-history, see Katherine V. Snyder's "Gastby's Ghost: Post-Traumatic Memory and National Literary Tradition in Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*," *Contemporary Literature* 54 (2013): 459-490, and John N. Duvall's "Cricket's Field of Dreams: Queer Racial Identifications in Joseph O'Neill's *Netherland*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 55 (2014): 341-357.

<sup>23</sup> Nathalie Cochoy and Olivier Gaudin, "An Interview with Joseph O'Neill," *Transatlantica*, <http://transatlantica.revues.org/6393>.

<sup>24</sup> As the extension of American Literature on a global scale, the "worlding" of post-9/11 American literature also gets facilitated through the world market's global reach, which is a literary equivalent to Chuck's Cricket Inc. The worlding of American literature refers to its imbrication in this market via the commercial culture of rapid and pervasive translation. As an exemplary instance of this phenomenon, *Netherland* renders emergent geo-economic conditions of the capitalist world system — accelerated migration, increased interpenetration of global markets, combined and uneven development — increasingly legible to readers. See Donald E. Pease, "Introduction" in *Re-Mapping the Transnational Turn* in *Re-Framing the Transnational Turn in American Studies*, ed. Winfried Fluck, Donald Pease, and John Carlos Rowe (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2011).