
Christian Moraru. *Reading for the Planet: Toward a Geomethodology*. U of Michigan P, 2015. Pp. 256. US\$75 (hardcover); US\$39.95 (paperback).

Reading for the Planet's prologue is titled “A Well-Tempered Manifesto,” a paradoxical heading that hints at the balancing act author Christian Moraru sets out for himself: “walking the fine line between high-stakes claims and theoretical sobriety” (12). The text advances a “planetary reading model” that promises to arrive at a sense of “critical stewardship” (*Reading* 10). While the first part of the book introduces a range of new terms and engages a host of planetary critics, including Emily Apter, Wai Chee Dimock, Susan Stanford Friedman, Paul Gilroy, Ursula Heise, Masao Miyoshi, Jahan Ramazani, Min Hyung Song, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the second part performs the geomethodology enabled by these terms and critics.

The main contention of Moraru’s study is that planetarity—a school of thought that emphasizes the ecological and ethical aspects of global interconnectedness that globalization theory (with its focus on the economic, tech-

nological, and political) neglects—has given rise to a planetary imaginary. This aesthetic is best exemplified by a somewhat diverse canon of twenty-first-century fiction whose formal and thematic features include telescoping between macro and micro scales and a preponderance of networked or webbed imagery. Drawing on earlier postmodern and postcolonial literary experiments, this planetary aesthetic is distinguished by its transterritorial intertextuality, its intermediality, and the emergence of world genres such as the planetary poem or world novel. Moraru's method lies in decoding or "decompress[ing]" the planetary inscriptions in the literary texts he brings together (*Reading* 12). From his archive of planetary writers, Moraru offers extended readings of the fictional works of Mircea Cărtărescu (Romanian), Dai Sijie (Chinese-French), Zadie Smith (Black British), Orhan Pamuk (Turkish), Sorj Chalandon (French), and Joseph O'Neill (Turkish-Irish-American). While this selection of writers suggests the limits of national and regional literary paradigms, the list is also indicative of the "Euroatlantic" outlook of Moraru's text, which, despite its claims to a planetary scope, remains embedded in cosmopolitan frameworks (*Reading* 6).

Reading for the Planet is a challenging and dense introduction to the field of planetary criticism. The questions the book takes up are of a piece with the ones first explored by scholars in the field of literary globalization studies, which since its emergence at the beginning of the twenty-first century has critiqued mainstream narratives of globalization for their totalizing worldviews. Moraru upholds a Levinasian ethics of difference throughout his text and uses planetary thinking as a means of reconceiving global interconnectedness in a non-homogenizing fashion. The shuttling between the distant and near that his geomethodology requires models this ability to think about difference and connectedness simultaneously. He helpfully distinguishes between the "rationalized system" of globalization and the "*relationalized*" one of planetarism (*Reading* 52; emphasis in original). The implications of this difference are planetarism's rejection of totality, closure, and spatial hierarchy.

Reading for the Planet expands on the geomethodology that Moraru first introduced in *The Planetary Turn: Relationality and Geoaesthetics in the Twenty-First Century* (2015), the collection he coedited with Amy Elias. Geomethodology is a model for reading texts written in the post-Cold War era. Moraru insists that it is "not an eco-critical inquiry" (*Reading* 8). He explains: "The kind of ecology that concerns my foray into the planetary . . . is *cultural*, more exactly, *geocultural*" (8; emphasis in original). Yet his disavowal of the environment and reinforcement of the nature/culture binary militates against Moraru's goal of showing how a planetary structure of feeling defines contemporary literary production since it is precisely the decentering of the

human that distinguishes planetarity from cosmopolitanism. Moraru's reliance on a vision of culture that is separate from the life of the environment betrays a Western bias that indigenous artists and scholars of decoloniality, such as Walter D. Mignolo, have problematized and rejected.

In *Cosmodernism: American Narrative, Late Globalization, and the New Cultural Imaginary* (2011), Moraru more tentatively suggests the emergence of a new cultural paradigm following the fall of the Berlin Wall and highlights the "concept and practices of 'relationality' in narrative, theory, and other areas of post-1989 [US] American culture" (3). The planetary imaginary Moraru illuminates in his latest study is the culmination of this post-Cold War orientation toward interconnectedness, now global in scope. Yet many of Moraru's examples are drawn from Eastern and Central European writers, which suggests that the geomethodology elaborated in his text may best apply to post-Communist and other political cultures emerging from perceived economic and cultural isolation.

Unlike Spivak's concept of planetarity, which invokes indigenous relationships to the earth as an alternative model of stewardship (Spivak 335–50), Moraru relishes a planetary sublime, which he concedes may be a form of post-Romanticism (Moraru, *Reading* 145). Unlike the Romantic sublime that turns the gaze into the abyss back on itself, the planetary sublime takes an ethical detour, recognizing that self and other are connected, if not the selfsame. Yet the planetary sublime originates in the subject gazing upon the planet, whereas Spivak's formulation invokes a pre-capitalist relationship to the planet in which the planet precedes and endows the subject with responsibility. Like Spivak, Moraru wants to avoid the economism (a belief in the primacy of economic factors) of globalization discourse. However, without an explicit critique of neoliberalism as the ideology and practice of late globalization that promotes relentless entrepreneurial individualism at the cost of social bonds and collectivities, planetarism's relational aesthetics is made unnecessarily fuzzy, arriving at "a spectacle of the planetary All" (*Reading* 114). In lieu of the "ethnicist-racialist allegory" of postcolonial studies and the "financial allegory" of global studies, planetary reading is "transterritorial and post-allegorical" (99). Yet such a denial of the geopolitical forces that continue to structure Moraru's geocultural ecology undermines the intimacy and interrelatedness his planetary model seeks across peoples, places, and practices (99).

As a discussion of critics and writers currently engaged in planetary thought, Moraru's text is a refreshing reappraisal of the challenges first posed in Miyoshi's 2001 article "Turn to the Planet: Literature, Diversity, and Totality." And his identification and analysis of "macro-micro telescopic

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rites” (Moraru, *Reading* 125) across a range of fictional works is often dazzling to behold. However, as a geomethodology that readers might emulate to advance their own planetary criticism, the readings Moraru offers are too detached from material planetarity—that is, the urgencies of the entanglement of ecology, identity, and economy—to serve as models for planetary stewardship. *Reading for the Planet* marks a critical moment in which we have moved beyond national and regional literary paradigms but have not yet landed on a comparatist methodology adequate to the planet’s call.

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Works Cited

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