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## Cricket and the World-System, or Continuity, “Riskless Risk” and Cyclicity in Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland*

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In Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* (2008) cricket is the dominant thematic mechanism, and anchoring allegorical device, through which the novel encodes the capitalist world-system, including the ways in which structural continuity and “riskless risk” are glorified as the neoliberal conditions for a cosmopolitan class of white international workers, in the face of, and directly at the expense of, their racialized, economic and cricketing “Other”. This encoding renders visible the “systemic cycles of accumulation” that characterize the history of capitalism. Yet the novel goes to extreme lengths to hold off, seemingly as perpetual delay, the failure-filled future consequences of its own leaked revelations. Hence, it is only by resituating *Netherland* in a world-systemic frame that critical sense can be made of Hans’s feigned cricketing *bildung* and the novel’s Dutch-English-American journey of cyclical continuity.

**Key words:** Joseph O’Neill; *Netherland*; Cricket; America; New York; the Caribbean; the Dutch Republic; the British Empire; World-System; Risk; Continuity.

In recent years international cricket has made fresh attempts to gain ground in the North American sports market, and in 2015 the shortest and most explicitly commercial of cricket’s formats, Twenty20, was offered to US audiences in a three-match, big-city All Stars series, with teams led by retired mega-stars Sachin Tendulkar and Shane Warne. Notwithstanding such efforts, and the corporate excesses of Twenty20, though, it is still fair to say, as Mike Marqusee does at the start of *Anyone But England* (1994), that on both sides of the Atlantic “the very juxtaposition of ‘American’ and ‘cricket’” seems “oxymoronic” (1-2). As he writes:

Everything that English people take to be “American” – brashness, impatience, informality, innovation, vulgarity, rapacious and unashamed commercialism – is antithetical to what they take to be “cricket”. [...] As for Americans, everything they took, until recently, to be “English” – tradition, politeness, deference, gentle obscurantism – seemed to be epitomized in “cricket”. (1)

Raised in New York, Marqusee uses his own cricketing inculturation in 1970s England to rail against this supposed oxymoron and as a springboard from which to expose the “lies” English cricket “tells itself about itself”, especially in its adherence to the myth of the village green, its denial of cricket’s origins in eighteenth century commerce, and in the way its claim

to “fair play” ignores structural violence (55, original emphasis). In *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (1999), Neil Lazarus uses Marqusee’s stance, and the above quote, to bring American readers to C.L.R. James, the Trinidadian Marxist whose work is recognized, as in this journal issue, as “unthinkable” without cricket (145) and his canonical text *Beyond a Boundary* (1963). Collectively, Lazarus, Marqusee and James establish the tensions between America and cricket, and convey a number of other key matters: cricket’s position within deeply embedded practices of exploitation connected to empire; the challenges offered by postcolonial performances of the game expressed through its aesthetics; the strains and continuities created by cricket’s ties to finance-capital; and the links between cricket, literary-cultural critique and the development of the capitalist world-system. I want to rally these and related Marxian insights to frame a new reading of Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* (2008), a novel we cannot know without knowing the world-system – a system typically bypassed in discussions about cricket, empire and postcoloniality, as well as in debates about global, cosmopolitan and immigrant-inspired literary endeavours (see Lazarus 2011). Indeed, despite recent critical readings of contemporary cricket regularly responding to the role of money and corporatism in the game, rarely does such work move past the claimed move from imperialism to globalization in order to consider cricket’s ties to the long story of capitalism’s systemicity.

*Netherland* is largely the story of the New York sojourn of Dutch-born equities analyst Hans van der Broek whose marriage to Rachel, an English lawyer, begins to fail after 9/11, pushing him from their Tribeca loft into the Chelsea Hotel (\$6000 a month) and, during a period of separation, towards Staten Island Cricket Club, where he is faced with the need to change his batting style in order to succeed on American soil. Through a nether-land of all-male immigrant cricket, Hans becomes embroiled in the small-time racketeering campaign of Chuck Ramkisson, the Indo-Trinidadian umpire and entrepreneur whose “Think fantastic” (77), Gatsby-like dream is to force America to see cricket as “NOT AN IMMIGRANT SPORT” (98) by establishing his own stadium and a global, televisual “cricket business” (55). It is the news of Chuck’s murder that prompts Hans’s retrospective narration and, as Katherine Synder suggests, Hans’s story “depends upon, even requires” Chuck’s death (2013, 473).

Numerous reviews praised *Netherland* for capturing the uncertainty of life after 9/11, detailing the immigrant lives of New York, offering a lyrically melancholic realism, and addressing the oddities of cricket in America’s capital of capital (largely drawn from the author’s own experiences). Due to its cricketing content, James Wood described the novel as

“one of the most remarkable postcolonial books” (2008). Michael Rothberg rightly claimed that cricket is more central than the individual migrants depicted (2009, 156). And Jeff Hill tracked how *Netherland* uses cricket as “factual reportage and metaphor”, exhibiting aspects of an “authentic sports novel” (2010, 230). More recent interpretations have continued to see the critical purchase of such cricketing content and have placed it within the novel’s use of the repeated tropes of post-9/11 writing: 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; and trauma based paralysis (see Anker 2011). In their editorial article for the 2011 anniversary issue of *Modern Fiction Studies*, John Duvall and Robert Marzec explain wanting to “move the discussion of 9/11 fiction past [...] trauma studies” (395-6), while maintaining a multicultural, postcolonial framing of global interests, identities and difference within which the trauma narrative continues to function. The paradigm shift actually needed is one that pushes 9/11 texts, including *Netherland*, through a materialist world-literary lens (see WReC 2015). What has been missed, across a range of responses to *Netherland*, – including Elizabeth Anker’s which insightfully recognizes that “the 9/11 novel is troubled not so much by the unresolved trauma of 9/11, as the ideological landscape of capitalism and the many species of speculation that sustain it” (2011, 474), – is how the novel’s cricketing content helps render visible the world-system in spite of the text’s overarching alignment with Hans’s continuity-based perspective. Beyond the obvious links between New York, the protagonist and seventeenth century Dutch settlement, critics have failed to probe Hans’s position as a Dutch cricketer – when Holland, like America, isn’t exactly renowned for its cricketing accomplishments. We should ask more insistently: why does it matter that he is Dutch, that he is a Dutch analyst playing cricket, and that this Dutch analyst plays cricket in New York having moved from, and then back to, London?

Previously I argued that *Netherland* uses cricket as *the* expression of the ways in which Britain’s imperial legacies are reworked in the US-led global ordering of late capital (see Westall 2012). What needs to be added is an explanation of the novel’s use of cricket to help encode the world-system, including the effects of capitalism’s systemic “periodicity” (see Shapiro 2014), and the ways in which structural continuity and “riskless risk” (see Marsh 2013) are glorified as the neoliberal conditions for a cosmopolitan class of white international workers, in the face of, and directly at the expense of, their racialized, economic and cricketing “Other”. Indeed, O’Neill’s text painfully celebrates the having of those that already have, and their position is maintained through an insistence on structural continuity,

conveyed as a kind of cyclical new-old-re-start at a seemingly secure highpoint in middle age, unaffected by “terror” or the supposed transformation achieved during Hans’s cricketing *bildung*. While a case may be made for the relativization of Hans’s perspective in relation to those he encounters, most notably Chuck but also other notably minor and minoritized figures, the novel doesn’t do enough to pull back from, or separate itself from, Hans’s position and perspectival claims to continued security and dominance. Nor does it offer a formal challenge to the strictures of the bourgeois novel. Hence, it is only by resituating *Netherland* within a world-systemic understanding of capitalism and reading the novel against itself, and its allegiance to Hans’s view point/s, that critical sense can be made of Hans’s feigned cricketing *bildung* and the novel’s Dutch-English-American journey of cyclical continuity.

### **Domesticity, continuity-as-security and territorialization**

Taking up Pankaj Mishra’s concern, Richard Gray assesses American post-9/11 writing as trapped in an initial moment of trauma and retreating into a “romance pattern” built on “domestic detail” (2008, 134). Weighing claims that “everything has changed” against the constancy of literary form and content, Gray argues for new fictions of “immigrant encounter” as a means of American “deterritorialisation” (141), in the sense advanced by Deleuze and Guattari, so that the US can revel in Ishmael Reed’s assertion “the world is here” (128). In response, Rothberg reads *Netherland* as conforming to the lack of formal innovation and thematic retreat into the domestic described by Gray but also sees its immigrant encounters as challenging insularity. However, Rothberg sidesteps the contextualizing death of Chuck and minimizes the continuity-based security upon which the novel is premised: Hans speaks of his New York past from the safety of Highbury having survived both 9/11 and 7/7 unharmed and having retained his job at the merchant bank; Rachel remains a legal professional despite shifting from corporate lawyer to human rights advocate; and, after their extra-marital interludes, the van der Broeks emerge as they began – happy, wealthy, and united with their young son, Jake, in London. Rothberg sees an anti-terror “allegory of a deterritorialized America” in the novel, with the multiple immigrant groups testifying to New York being “a space of hybridity” (2009, 156-7). Like Gray, he idealizes immigrant meetings without attending to the structural inequalities defining them, and without noting the absence of immigrant connections with longstanding, white, US citizens. While *Netherland* stands as one of the few 9/11 novels to address race, it does so, as Anker says, “superficially [...] sanitiz[ing] it in reductive ways” (2011, 468), and while it

marks the distinction between Hans and “one of the [cricket] guys working a till at a gas station”, it never dwells on the “awkwardness” (167) of such economic inequities or suggest any linked real world consequences for Hans and those like him. Further, in addition to Gray’s “centripetal” demand for a globalized vision of domestic America, Rothberg calls for a “centrifugal” accompaniment that offers “a fiction of international relations and extraterritorial citizenship” without “a politics of blame” (158). And this dual approach to deterritorialization presents several critical hurdles.

First, Gray and Rothberg position 9/11 as a defining historic juncture when Lazarus, David Harvey, Neil Smith and others have persuasively argued that it is more usefully understood as part of a neoconservative drive premised upon US dominance in the current phase of capitalism (see Lazarus 2006; Harvey 2003; Smith 2003). Second, Gray and Rothberg attempt to deterritorialize American writing just as the US sees itself as under attack, suggesting an anxiety-based protective desire to make invisible (i.e. hide) the “homeland” and evade “blame” (i.e. punishable guilt) for wrongs committed. Third, their critiques, and those of numerous others, maintain a false dichotomy between domestic space and the political. Fourth, the call to deterritorialization is explicitly imperialist and Gray’s use of a line from Deleuze and Guattari makes this clear: “expand your own territory by deterritorialization” (cited in Gray 2008, 141). Finally, and relatedly, as Lazarus states, “‘globalisation’ was never the deterritorialised and geopolitically anonymous creature that neo-liberal ideology projected it as being” (2006, 11). This specifically applies to the US as neither its global impositions nor its unequal internal spatialization can simply be imagined away via claims to “deterritorialization”. For example, early on Rachel claims a deterritorialized view of terror arguing that “you can’t geographise this” (25), but later her discomfort at being “an *economy*” in India suggests that there is a spatio-economic reality within which her unease exists (215, original emphasis), despite there being no direct threat to, or consequence for, her and Hans.

In *Netherland* it is a cricket based territorializing that brings into relief New York’s cityscape. Hans journeys through the racialized spaces of Queens and Brooklyn for cricket. He is informed of immigrant numbers and where Asian children play cricket by Chuck, and he follows food critic Vinay around the eateries of South Asian taxi-drivers, bumping into his first sight of cricket on TV – Pakistan versus New Zealand. Repeatedly, the city is revealed as spacialized along socio-economic and, correspondingly, racialized lines with cricket in the back alleys and private hangouts of foreign-born drivers, or in specific schools, playgrounds and vacant parking lots. This is not American “hybridity” so much as uneven and

territorializing co-existence in which immigrant spaces are “Other”. Even when a site is shared this does not make it a “hybrid” space, as with Walker Park where an all-white softball team of middle aged men is akin to Hans’s cricket team in all but colour (with himself as the only white cricketer) and remain notably separate.

Although the imperial past is largely benign in Hans’s narration, cricket is not, as Anker claims, entirely decoupled from “the cartography of the British Empire” (2011, 468). As with the other cricket pitches in the novel, Walker Park references cricket’s long imperial history. It also marks the re-emergence of the game in America thanks largely to players from ex-colonial nations. Chuck explains that from its foundation in 1872 through to the 1920s Walker Park’s Staten Island CC had been a private club with its own cricket pitch where stars like Donald Bradman and Garry Sobers later played. This past situates the park and club within the cricketing traditions of New England that were a consequence of British incursions, as well as enclosures, and only fell away after the late nineteenth century – though Poughkeepsie still has a “lush hillside” pitch (57). Casting Walker Park against the other pitches he has known, Hans presents it as small, dangerous and impeded, “a very poor place for cricket” by his standards but “an attractive venue” locally (5). His assessment draws Walker Park into a vast signifying system of pitches in which, as Ian Baucom explains in *Out of Place* (1999), each one is a identity-shaping site of memory or *lieu de memoire* in Pierre Nora’s terminology. Drawing on C.L.R. James, Baucom describes how empire caused the destabilizing of cricket’s, and England’s, mythic self-definition because each imperial ground revealed that the cultural dominance of Englishness (specifically the three Cs of Christianity, Classics and Cricket) was predicated on the materiality of British imperialism and could be exposed and challenged by anti- or post-colonial players exerting performative disruptions from within the pedagogical discourses of the game. Each of the pitches Hans portrays function as a *lieu de memoire* and even though there is an allusion to performative disruption in the US – by Hans and the other migrants – this is entirely contained by the patterns of structural continuity being upheld by the novel, formally and at the level of content in a manner that is not limited to Hans’s perspectival narration.

For Hans, each cricketing locale testifies to his present privilege as the continuation of predetermined, first world advancement. Coming from Holland means it is specifically *not* the standard or international profile of cricket that provides Hans with access to the world, but rather the class-coded conservative cosmopolitanism it facilitates, and his corresponding economic security. Hans describes his young experiences of cricket in the Hague, playing with his club HBS, as providing access to the “conservative, slightly stuck-up stratum of

society” where “the players are ghosts of sorts from an Anglophile past” (39). Even without a father, his social access is pre-ordained and his mother silently watches his boyhood games mould him into a “gentleman”. His adult experiences of cricket in England reinforce the conservative vision of the game as he recollects “shorn Surrey greens”, “warm beer” and “ancient wooden pavilions” as well as an explicitly class-bound experience of a “private net at Lords” – all enabled by his city association with the “South Bank” club of London (41). Yet just as cricket pitches help England to “forget precisely what it pretends to be remembering” (Baucom, 1999, 149) – namely, its own financial-imperial past – *Netherland* allows Hans to experience his cricketing past as part of a story of self-development, setting aside or forgetting the structural advantages he gains. The novel reflects on this past and registers its unevenness but does so without a sense of the ramifications of such unevenness. This is shown particularly in the contrast between Hans’s cricketing journey and Chuck’s destabilizing efforts to claim cricketing territory.

Chuck isn’t a cricketer himself because his father refused to let him play after their public recreation ground in Trinidad was transformed into a private club – Lomas CC. In New York, Chuck is attempting not to defeat an old Massa (as father or Britain), but to join a new one by redefining US soil. Having obtained “Floyd Bennett Field” and renamed it “Bald Eagle Field”, Chuck transforms a derelict airstrip of “ice and waste” (76) into a “bright green” cricket field (141). Chuck, Hans and the groundsman cultivate the land, and, as Hill notes, the details of ground preparation, rolling and mowing “would not be out of place in a groundsman’s manual” (2010, 226). A specifically territorializing aesthetic is offered as they attempt to discipline the land into a less uncertain (i.e. more flat) form. Snyder picks up on *Netherland*’s opening insistence on “aftermath” as the “second mowing of grass in the same season” (4) to explain the traces of literary and historical memory present (2013, 459). Here, the repeated mowing is the cutting back of the pasts that, for Hans, “keep growing back” (4) and the preparation for a future that will never be. It is Chuck who embodies these pertinent pasts and the aborted future. Always-already dead, his dream is always-already a failure; he cannot build a permanent structure because he does not have permission and his body is ejected, washing up on the shore of the Hudson. This physical expulsion from the US is complete when his wife, Anne, arranges for his body to be sent back “home” to Trinidad (229) instead of making plans for a cremation and internment in Brooklyn, as Chuck had requested.

In her forceful 2008 review, Zadie Smith was right to emphasize the “anxiety of excess” that determines the style and content of Hans’s story, creating an “authenticity fetish”



wherein a cricket ball becomes “a gigantic meteoric cranberry”, and to emphasize the death and “material reality” of *Remainder*’s use of cricket. But she underestimated *Netherland*’s saturation in the materiality of death, those of 9/11 and that of Chuck, whose ejection from the US allows the novel to expel the body referencing the migratory world networks of colonialism, slavery and indentureship linking India (Madras), the Caribbean (Trinidad) and America (New York). And, the material importance of destruction is played out with even wider ramifications in the text’s other references to “Indians”. For example, “Indian Point”, named for the supposed first meeting between natives and Europeans, is the location of nuclear weapons that Rachel says are part of her reasons for staying away. The name references the earliest colonial violence and the haunting presence of death, as Sydner suggests (2013, 479). But, going further, this site stands for the almost total destruction of native peoples and the potential for the total destruction of humanity (which, like so much violence, is cast as defensive deterrent). In this way, Indian Point references the possibility of erasure mushrooming to engulf us all. Plus, “Indians” appear again at the close of the novel, this time in India, as the “thin and poor and dark-skinned” labourers that make Hans remember Chuck even as he tries to resist conflation (222). Hence, just as it uses Chuck to bind different times and locations together, the novel also pushes out from Native American “Indians”, through indentured Indo-Caribbeans, to South Asian Indians, all the while focusing on US immigrants and hinting at the risk of nuclear armageddon.

### **“Riskless risk” and the fallacy of cricketing transformation**

The cricketing links and business parallels between Hans and Chuck develop through their attitudes towards risk and violence, and their related efforts to transform themselves. With Chuck and other immigrants pegged to physical violence, Hans’s white-collar relation to the brutality of the markets and the oil-face of capitalism is largely obscured. Where the risks Chuck takes result in his death, the risks Hans indulges in seem inconsequential – for him at least – and constitute what Nicky Marsh has termed “riskless risks”. As she explains, risk is supposed to be “a calculated balance of failure against success which necessarily leaves open the possibility of both”, but the financial crisis of 2007-8 exposed how failure could be acknowledged and, simultaneously, ignored or undermined, with its consequences circumvented, underscoring the seemingly “riskless” risks and “failure of failure” maintaining capitalism (2013, 179). We see a pre-crisis manifestation of this in *Netherland* as Hans enjoys inconsequential risks – across various departments of his life – that function, for

him, as continuity creators, making visible the mechanics of neoliberalism, particularly in the finance-bound professions, without alluding to any potential future fall-out.

In the opening cricket sequence and Hans's first match, Staten Island are playing the Kittians, i.e. "guys from St Kitts", whose supporters are vocal, play loud music and cause a "hullabaloo" (10). When Chuck, as umpire, removes a Kittian bowler for dangerous play after Hans has consecutively faced "three bouncers" and a "throat ball" (10), a black figure promptly appears at the wicket with a gun. Hans freezes in "emptiness" (11) but Chuck dissuades the man with his umperial authority. The scene blackens and racializes the threat of violence, counterposing cricketing civility and America – where US immigrant cricket is armed and dangerous. For those aware of the descriptions of West Indies fans and bowlers during the 1970s and 80s it reads as notably close to their racist demonization by the cricketing establishment and media (see Searle 1993), and this is exacerbated by Hans's position as the supposedly innocent white batsman. In addition, Umar, his Pakistan-born batting partner, declares that it is "always the same with these people" (11) in a gesture that stretches out from the players and crowd to black people generally. Hans, though, seems never to be in danger, the action is between Chuck and the gunman, between two Caribbean immigrants, with Hans protected by both Chuck and Umar. And the threat of black manhood ultimately becomes aimless and unable to fire, allowing the unharmed Hans to continue to play with his new team.

Chuck is initially perceived as heroic in the face of such dangers but this evaporates when it becomes obvious to Hans that Chuck's business is risk taking with added menace. Chuck becomes a petty gangster with a verbose sense of self-aggrandizement rather than a larger than life immigrant chancer. Hans vomits on the street when he realizes that Chuck and his Jewish business associate, Mike Abelsky, had "terrorised" and assaulted one of their clients (208). But Chuck had already revealed to Hans his illegal and imported lottery, "weh weh" (164), in which he was the banker and primary beneficiary, and Rachel suggests that Hans's reaction is caused by his potential exposure as Chuck's driver and not his disgust at the violence. When Hans demands an apology for his criminal endangerment, Chuck resists and instead provides a story that casts their difference in lifelong structural terms. Chuck explains how, as a boy in Trinidad, he had wondered across a cannabis plantation and had been chased by its proprietors. He asks Hans if he has ever had to "run for your life" (237), knowing that Hans's life has bypassed any such need for simple survival. Chuck's function as a counterpoint to Hans's does enable the questioning of Hans's worldview, but only in a limited and short-lived fashion, after which Hans's voice and viewpoint continue almost

unchecked, with relatively little interference from the implied narrator. In this light, Chuck's eventual death removes the remnant of risk that may have faced Hans, given his accomplice-like activities, while also pushing aside insights into unevenness and the colouring of financial risk taking.

The obvious parallel between Chuck as the “weh-weh” banker and Hans's banking employment is useful here. Functioning as the embodiment of neoliberal finance and its claim to the objectivity of risk assessment, Hans's anti-risk mentality is pegged to his professional status and reputation. His career has progressed from “Shell Oil”, via “D---- bank” [Deutsche?] to “M----” [Merrill Lynch?], a merchant bank with an “enormous brokerage” where he acts as a successful “equities analyst [...] analysing large cap-oil and gas stock” (23). Rachel's nickname for him is the “great rationalist” (93) and she jokes that he works in “Ergonomics” (23). Her pun reveals the contradictory nature of his role – pointing both to the continuity involved in a kind of “therefore-onomics” and his distance from the sort of human-centred concern an Ergo-nomic economy would require. In his depictions of work Hans shifts between defensive gestures of self-preservation and alignment with the corporate logic, on one hand, and moments of exposure that reveal the farcical and empty nature of his professional milieu on the other. He identifies “corporations [...] as vulnerable, needy creatures entitled to their displays of vigour” (19) but fails to see himself as complicit in any danger this brings, attempting to minimize his own position as “an analyst – a bystander” lacking “entrepreneurial wistfulness” (99). Clearly, though, he is not a mere observational extra. While he may not make investment decisions, his analysis of the present's implications for the future – in short, his predicative risk-assessments – fuel and perpetuate such acts making his self-positioning untenable, especially in light of the banking crisis, oil exhaustion, and the BP and Shell oil spills of 2010 and 2011 respectively. Moreover, Hans attempts to excuse himself as a “political-ethical idiot” in the face of the Iraq War, Rachel's new anti-American politicization, and the high-profile US oil interests in the Middle East by determining that he could not form an opinion because he lacked the information required, means the future “retained the impenetrable character [he] had always attributed to it” (96), despite many of the consequences of financial trading and oil extraction being well known. And while such a disclaiming of responsibility and professional insight seems unbelievable, it is ultimately supported by the text as Rachel takes Hans back without any political recalibration.

When challenged by Chuck, Hans refuses to see himself as “a gambling man” (164) and seems to have little, if any, difficulty in passing off his own \$5000 donation to the cricket

club as money raised from his banking colleagues. Hans repeatedly presents himself as anti-risk, and even describes how a group trip to a casino while seeing clients turned him back toward his family in London. However, his entire cricketing transformation comes because of supposedly increased risk taking. The quiet, conservative, rational professional is the orthodox, careful and steady batsman who learnt his skills on smooth, flat, grass wickets. In America, “orthodox shots” are impossible due to overgrown grass and poor outfields resulting in “bush cricket”, as Chuck calls it (6). Hans claims that “to reinvent [himself] in order to bat the American way, that baseball-like business of slugging and hoisting, involved more than the trivial abandonment of a hard-won style of hitting a ball (47). He bemoans his inability to “make adjustments”, views this lack of change as “uncharacteristic”, and claims that abandoning his textbook technique would be “like snipping a fine white thread running years and years, to [his] mothered self” as if his allegiance the Netherlands (his mother country), his family and white cricketing power would be destroyed (46-47). He even begrudges teammates raised playing on “floodlit Lahore car parks” their successes because they can modify their play without “spiritual upheaval” (46). When, in a moment of epiphanic joy, Hans is at last able to “hit the ball in the air like an American cricketer” (170), it is a glorious ascension, seemingly a radical alteration of personality-based action and achievement. It is not a descent into “cow shots” and “lofted bashes” (46), as the novel maintains something of a patronizing air in having him achieve his skyward ambition on top of, rather than instead of, his textbook strengths. Hans seems to be invested in the idea that he has changed when, in cricketing terms, there is no substitution of style here, he has added to his repertoire of shots and not lost anything held previously. In fact, the extent of any identity change for Hans is a misspelling on his green card.

Arguing that “male desire is queered through cricket” in *Netherland*, Duvall develops an idea of potential risk leading to hetero-continuity (2011, 342). For him the scene of cricketing transformation is a metaphorical consummation of the love between Chuck and Hans – sexualized in the permissive “go deep” shouts offered by Chuck from the side line, in the spectator position previously occupied by Hans’s mother (350). For Duvall, Hans’s recoupling with Rachel is at the expense of another version of homosexual difference that could not be registered, and he links this back to the unspoken “nigger-cock” joke (24), and the ways in which Hans becomes Danielle’s passive spanker in a white on black assault that arising because he remains a “complete gentleman” (109).

Although Hans is allowed to maintain his cricket-derived gentlemanly air and label – at work, in matches, across continents and during sexual encounters – it is Chuck who

vehemently asserts the “lesson in civility” that, he says, cricket has to offer and the responsibility this places on the immigrants to “play the game right” (13) despite being marginalized jokes. “Put on white to feel black” (13), Chuck tells Hans in a moment of high rhetoric that suggests Hans will only be seen as different, and less than equal, if he aligns himself with the black and brown figures in whites, the clothing Hans thought men adopted when they imagined “an environment of justice” (116). Chuck declares America less than civilized because it has not “embraced” cricket and he praises the missionaries who took the Trobriand Islanders cricket as a “crash course in democracy” (203-4). His excessive declamations sound naïve, at best utopian hopes and at worst ridiculous or manipulative efforts to garner support for “Chuck Cricket, INC” (55). Unsurprisingly, there are multiple interpretive avenues for reading Chuck’s insistence upon civility: as the reiteration of an imperial message without irony or critical distance; as the ironic and knowing deployment of a myth set to win hearts and wallets; and, as the exposure of imperial hypocrisy achieved by demanding the standards former masters claimed for themselves. This last possibility opens out into a larger debate worked through in Lazarus’s re-examination of C.L.R. James in which he suggests that advocacy of the “civility of cricket [...] should not be taken for ideological conformism”, despite claims that the sport cannot be decolonized, as made by Orlando Patterson and others (1999, 164). And here, Chuck’s assertions should not be mistaken for soft conformism, because they are exposing and destabilizing thrusts in his attempt to forcibly muscle in on first world money.

Importantly, though, Chuck’s cricketing adventure is not a “new” version of cricket or a transformation of the game. Chuck knows and wants to mobilize: rising numbers of immigrants from the Asian subcontinent; the dominance of India within world cricket and the world economy; and, the media income attached to the possibility of games like India versus Pakistan in New York. He wants to bring America to a new understanding of itself, of what it already is and has, by showing America its cricketing past and present, its landed spaces and those who play on them. Chuck knows his position in relation to capital has not really changed, and this is why he is so risk seeking in his business pursuits. Hans, in contrast, benefits from capital’s continuity, which is why can afford to retain an anti-risk posture. Against claims that cricket has fundamentally changed in recent decades, Lazarus has convincingly argued that the game has not entered a “new” phase, as Ashis Nandy, Kenneth Surin and others argue, because the capitalist world system has not undergone “an epochal transformation” (1999, 172-95). And this seems to be the position the novel takes up and then extends into a fear-induced insistence on capitalism’s paralysis.

### **Hans, the New Netherland and the cyclicity of the world-system**

The name “Netherland”, as Synder posits, signals the Dutch colony that preceded New York, male “nether” regions, an underworld, and the never-lands of perpetual boyhood (2013, 479-80). Something that is “nether” is also something partially hidden and so Synder sees it as the palimpsestic *modus operandi* of *Netherland* (480), given how the “literary legacy of national trauma” (463), via *Gatsby*, is “simultaneously occluded and disclosed” (480). The text, though, provides a rendering of time, history and human movement that is layered, haunting and systemically cyclical – not simply the past “repeat[ed] endlessly” (465) – leaving the *longue durée* of the capitalist world-system “occluded and disclosed”. Anker is right when she argues that 9/11 allegories “contain and manage” their own political implications (2011, 463), and this is the case with *Netherland* which states “its fears” in order to “neutralize them” (Smith 2008). It offers, in immense cosmopolitan detail, the allegorical stakes it wants us to imbibe – of multicultural cricketing inclusivity – and, simultaneously, goes to notable lengths to “manage” and mask the insights about capitalism its “fears” leak. Somehow Wendell Berry’s insistence that 9/11 pressed home the “need to shake off the illusions of late capitalism”, cited by Gray (2009, 131), failed to shape critical responses to *Netherland*. And this is despite Walter Benn Michael’s assertion that the novel “circles around questions of immigration, probing the free trade and the mobility of capital and labour that helped make the world trade centre a target” (cited in Wasserman 2014, 260). Such a gap in the critical material is expressly problematic given that *Netherland* ties itself to the overlapping historic cycles of capitalism and then stalls, or paralyzes, this cyclicity.

In “Capitalist Development in World Historical Perspective”, Giovanni Arrighi and Jason Moore argue that by seeing the “capitalist development” as the total and totalizing “*system* of states”, “four, partly overlapping ‘systemic cycles of accumulation’” can be identified (56, original emphasis). Each is “associated with a widening or deepening of world-scale processes of capital accumulation” and together they “constitute distinct stages of the transformation of the world capitalist system from being a ‘world’ among many ‘worlds’ to becoming the historical social system of the entire world” (ibid). For them, and this discussion, the four “systemic cycles” can be labelled as:

a Genoese-Iberian cycle, stretching from the fifteenth century through the early seventeenth; a Dutch cycle, stretching from the late sixteenth century through the late eighteenth; a British cycle, stretching from the mid-eighteenth century through the

early twentieth century; and a US cycle, stretching from the late nineteenth century through the current phase of financial expansion. (59-60)

The cycles overlap, correspond to something akin to a “long century” and each internally consists of three phases: 1) a period of financial expansion, labelled a “signal crisis”, bringing to a close the previous phase; 2) a period of consolidation and a new regime of accumulation; and 3) a new period of financial expansion, labelled a terminal crisis, that becomes a new phase (65). The overlapping of these cycles, and their movements forward and back, needs to be appreciated, and Stephen Shapiro has unpacked how this dynamic “periodicity” functions and can manifest in literature (2014, 1250-1251). Where cricket is historically associated with the third and fourth cycles – the British and US “long” centuries – O’Neill’s text insists on stretching further back into the Dutch cycle, and even back into the Genoese-Iberian cycle, while also overlapping the cycles and drawing them into the present. These cycles are thematically explicit, and organizational and metaphorical patterns of cyclicity gain in significance as the story progresses, with the novel itself coming to a point of complete return and, simultaneously, closing on a paralysing “zenith”. It is as if *Netherland* knows but can’t articulate the terminal crisis and “end point” facing Euro-US hegemony, and potentially capitalism itself – something that a world-systems interpretive approach can call out (Eatough 2015, 611). In Jamesian terms, texts can only perform such insights formally, that is, at the level of form, and *Netherland* is notably conservative and continuity-bound in its adherence to the formal limits and continuities of the bourgeois realist novel.

Through Chuck *Netherland* references the Iberian connections coming from imperial conquests in Latin America and the Caribbean, and binds these to the British plantation culture of the Caribbean, with brief references to sugar, cocoa and tonka-beans. Chuck registers the imperial histories that coloured Trinidad, specifically explaining the Spanish names of farmland families with “deeds going back to Spanish times”, the mixing of “black and Spanish”, and how “old plantations” are being moved back into the forest (239). *Netherland* draws these layers of the past and their intermingling into present interpersonal relations, particularly with Hans’s new risk-assessing protégé, Cardozo, arriving from New York, with a Portuguese surname, to glory in the faded financial-imperial glory of London and marry his English girlfriend, thereby binding together Portugal, Britain and America under the precedent-setting advice of the Dutch.

Being Dutch means that beyond the clichés about small nation contentedness, popular conservatism, rationality, bicycles, and the weak profile of the Dutch cricket team, Hans

comes to us filtered through the imperial dominance of the Dutch Republic, the financiers of world trade in the seventeenth century. Despite Giovanni da Verrazzano's exploration of New York Bay in 1524, it was the arrival of Henry Hudson, an Englishman navigating for the Dutch East India Company during 1609, that led to New Netherland, stretching down the eastern coast of North America, with New Amsterdam (now Manhattan) – the colonial seat of government that included Fort Amsterdam – remaining in Dutch hands until captured by the English in 1664, and eventually becoming New York City (see Shorto 2004). It is Chuck who reminds Hans of these connections, taking him to the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church graveyard on Flatbush Avenue. Hans sees this past as “a baffling little drama”, and has “no idea” of how “to discharge the obligation of remembrance” (149). For Synder, Chuck's assertion that Hans is one of the “first tribe” of New York, bar the “Red Indians”, undervalues “discontinuities” by “occlud[ing] the historical specificity that differentiates the Dutch colonization [...] from Hans's professional movement [...], while at the same time obscuring the differences in the power and choice between sixteenth century European colonials and the colonized Native Americas” (2013, 477). However, the “historical continuity” (ibid) Synder questions is actually crucial. By describing the Dutch as “first” Chuck implies that New York, and by extension, the US, is the land of capitalism's (im)migrants. That he also manages to erase the native population and their claim to the land as he names them marks the systemic consequence of this Dutch precedence, and the European colonialism within which it sits. In addition, the discomfort of “remembrance” Hans describes comes because too little has changed and he has nothing distinct to recall; the same patterns of finance, mobility and destructive incursion systemically link him to his forefathers.

The novel also ties Hans to Britain's “long century”, by playing upon the code of civility that underpinned cricket's central position within the cultural imperialism of Britain's empire, and by insisting on the continuing importance of finance-bound London. In its binding of Dutch and English characteristics and finance-filled futures, O'Neill's story mirrors Eric Hobsbawm's claim for an “Anglo-Dutch symbiosis” to explain the carry-over of capitalism's development from the Republic of the Netherlands to England-then-Britain across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (1954, 55). With such a financial bind the novel inadvertently calls attention to the transitional phase of each of the cycles it references – and thereby calls into being the systemic crises it thematically avoids. This refusal to name and depict coming crisis is underlined by the place of cricket. For the British Empire cricket might be described as a “cultural fix”, in Harvey's sense (see Shapiro 2014), used long after



the cyclical highpoint of surplus extraction. This “fixity” is redeployed in *Netherland* as part of a refusal to see specific “cycles of accumulation” as having largely fallen away. That is to say, by concentrating on the culture of contemporary “global” cricket and referencing its imperial backstory, O’Neill holds together the predominantly-past British and Dutch cycles, places them within, and in relation to America, and leaks capitalism’s need for “cultural fixes” to extend its cyclical self-management. In this novel, though, this leak is of no consequence. In the pre-crash world of finance risk remains “riskless” and *Netherland* refuses any possibility of future decline, clinging to the multicultural collectivity it claims to be America’s potentiality and insisting on being able to freeze-frame while atop of a cycle.

Being Dutch it is no surprise that the Hans has nostalgic memories of cycling, including carrying his young Dutch girlfriend on the handlebars. While he plays for HBS, his mother covers his newspaper round by bike and meets a new life partner. Hans also remembers how she undertook a challenging New York ride with him that revealed her age and how her aging was reinforced when she became lost whilst wheeling the baby in the stroller. In these examples, the circularity of cycling initially brings a youthful sense of progression for Hans – into town, into manhood, into new phases of life – but as his mother grows older the turning of wheels brings a sense of entrapment in the unfamiliar roadways of New York. The novel closes with a related set of images – of cyclicity that is stalled, or frozen, and denied its consequential fallout, i.e. decline. On a July evening the van der Broek’s meet to ride the London Eye ferris wheel. As they “reach the very top of [their] celestial circuit”, Hans joins Rachel at this “zenith”, this “summit”, thinking that she must “accept her place above it all” (246). At this point, Hans remembers an earlier journey on the Staten Island Ferry and, rejecting speculation, insists on the certainty of his perspective: “I can state that I wasn’t the only one of us to make out and accept an extra-ordinary promise in what we saw – the tall approaching cape, a people risen in light” (247). As he recalls his mother smiling at him, as if he is “risen in light”, Hans is called back to the London view by his son and the family look “for what it is [they’re] supposed to be seeing” (ibid).

Interpreting this scene as an example of the novel’s new post-9/11 “optics”, Sarah Wasserman explains that the ride on the wheel is part of a repeated pattern of upward movement for Hans – as with his skyward cricket shot and his use of Google Earth to visit to a “distorted” London while separated from his son (2014, 264). For Wasserman, *Netherland* “refuses the fixing powers of the backward gaze” and the closing scene is not a “return to a dominant normative position” for Hans because his gaze is “the messy reality of an altered view” suggesting that “[a]scending to such heights [...] does not itself secure power” (264-5).

However, it is the very wealth-based security of the family that is marked by this “rise”. Hans’s position “above” is possible regardless of any claim to knowledge, that is, how well he can describe London below, and he expects Rachel to resist any idea of descent. Critically, this close insists on an elongation of a “zenith” – of their time at the top of a cycle – and this is extended by Hans’s memory of an earlier vantage point in New York. In both images the journey will end – the ferry will dock and the wheel will return them to earth – but Hans, and the novel, resist the consequence of cyclicity. Indeed, there is a double delay here, with Britain and the USA paralysed at an imagined zenith with the family failing to see the future decline already before them. Yet the novel makes clear that cyclical transformation is already a reality, the wheel will turn. And in the global order, according to Faruk Patel, the rich Indian businessman Chuck had drawn into his plans, this turning meant that Chuck was wrong to concentrate on cricket in America because America is “[n]ot relevant” given its economic decline and the rising power of Asia (243).

While Hans cannot see what is in front of him, *Netherland* won’t entertain a genuine fall or cyclical crisis for him, or his cosmopolitan class of financiers. The financial speculation of his industry has no effect, the oil-bound logic of extraction has no climate-related consequences, and Rachel’s political awakening has no effect on her commitment to see life through with Hans. Hans himself appears to be the “white man” saved by immigrant cricket, but the cricketing transformation of hitting into the sky has no lasting effect. Further, there can be no sense of salvation because he hasn’t really fallen. Unlike other 9/11 protagonists, his “riskless” risks carry no personal endangerment, he is not suicidal and he doesn’t commit any grave sins – even his adultery is cancelled out by Rachel’s more substantial affair. He experiences something of a downturn, becoming “unhappy” for the “first time” (2), but this turns out to be a period of downward mobility through which he learns how to “pass” amongst the immigrants of colour. Any sense of a genuine fall is cut off – as with his relationship with Danielle, and the Angel’s failure to jump from the synagogue roof. In fact, instead of falling, Hans’s is bound to forward moving cycles and skyward claims to success as he resists the “come down” of cyclicity, fails to “see” beyond himself and enjoys his place on the marital “pedestal” created by Rachel and their marriage counsellor (161). For Rachel their reunion is a “continuation” and for Hans it is a new beginning that “fortuitously” results in the same outcome as before (222). Hence, the van der Broek’s are allowed to describe new beginnings as continuities, delaying, seemingly in perpetuity, the move past their summit.

## Notes on contributor

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