



WORLD LITERATURE AND THE MODERN
AND CONTEMPORARY CITY

URBAN SPACE AND LITERARY FORM

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4 UNITS* | TU 2-5 | 494 WURSTER HALL SOUTH TOWER (CAL DESIGN LAB)
CY PLAN 290B • CCN 14454 | COMP LIT 240 • CCN 17383

Literature and urban civilization have long been intimately connected. Our seminar seeks to explore their connection as it relates to the emergence and global spread of the modern and contemporary city. How has the spatial and social organization of the modern city informed the thematic and formal choices writers make? And how, in turn, have the imaginative projections of literary texts shaped our experience of the city, its emancipatory potential and its alienating constraints? How exactly do cities get not merely mapped but also emplotted? What kinds of urban spaces and

city-dwellers become the privileged focus of modern fiction and poetry? How do the density and scale of the urban built environment impinge on the way writers view the world and tell their stories? What genres seem best suited to rendering urban life? Is the city the defining context of modern literature or its implicit if barely human hero? To what extent is the global diffusion of the novel form related to the growth of urbanization?

Our seminar will read texts written over two centuries located in Paris, St. Petersburg, Cairo, Mexico

City and Lahore. Our authors will be Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire, Louis Aragon, Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Andrei Bely, Naguib Mahfouz, Carlos Fuentes, Roberto Bolaño and Mohsin Hamid. We will relate the rise of literary realism and modernism to the aesthetic and cognitive challenges posed by city life. We will retrace the familiar story of Paris as the cradle of urban modernity but also complicate that story as we move beyond the West to Latin America and the Islamic world.

* **Enrollment note:** In the Schedule of Classes, CY PLAN 290B is listed as a 3-unit course. For technical reasons, students who enroll in CY PLAN 290B will register for a separate CY PLAN 298 for 1 unit so that all students are registered for a total of 4 units. The syllabus and assignments will be identical for all students regardless of which department they register in.

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