RESEARCH PAPERS

For these papers, you will need to perform some independent research on your topic, and incorporate the findings into a coherent argument. Your aim should not be to consult dozens of sources and to pile lots of footnotes into your paper, but to acquaint yourself with scholarly landscape around your topic, identify a few of the most influential books or articles, and take thoughtful account of those texts – making clear what the existing literature looks like and who the key contributors are – while presenting your own distinct view.

OPTION I One option for the assignment would be to offer a reading of one of the novels or films for the course that challenges or complicates, or powerfully elaborates, some influential (economic, historical, anthropological, theoretical) argument about globalization. Your research would have a double focus: on the background and criticism of the novel or film, and on the general thesis or argument about the logic of globalization. If you decide to take this approach, feel free to work with texts from later in the semester: Q&A, Slumdog Millionaire, Disgrace, Dogeaters, Sozaboy, God of Small Things.

Here are a few examples of where this approach might head:

Samuel Huntington argues that violent clashes between civilizations will dominate our future because “cultural characteristics and differences are less mutable and hence less easily compromised and resolved than political and economic ones.” Is there a novel that seems especially well suited to support or to dispute this broad thesis – either through its narrative and its language, or through its reception and global distribution? What other historians or theorists of cultural (im)mutability would be relevant here? What are your own views on the mutability or negotiability of cultural differences, or on the relationship between such differences and violent conflict?

Anthony Giddens (in his lectures assigned for the final week of term) describes globalization not just in terms of economic, political, and technological transformations, but in terms of a transformation of the family, toward more openly “communicative” and “democratic” forms. Which novel on our syllabus seems to you most importantly and productively engaged with questions about family in the context of globalizaton? Does this literary work offer a different understanding, perhaps a less optimistic one, of how familial dynamics are being altered by the increasing contact and interpenetration of societies?

Fredric Jameson famously argued that in the age of multinational capitalism, the Third World novel inevitably took the form of a “national allegory,” the story of the personal fates of its characters being readable as a version of the story of the aspirations and frustrations of the emergent postcolonial nation itself. What have other critics said about Jameson’s argument? Is there a novel on our syllabus that you could use to test his thesis? Is Sozaboy a national allegory? Is The Kite Runner? Are all the books on our syllabus national allegories?

In Modernity at Large, Arjun Appadurai stresses the complex “indigenizations” that take place as a cultural form spreads from the centers of global power out to peripheral societies. He rejects, for example, the idea that Filipinos’ penchant for American pop music (“like a vast Asian Motown chorus”) can be understood simply in terms of an “Americanization” of the Philippines. For Appadurai, narratives of Americanization or “cultural imperialism” miss the vital “ironies and resistances,” the “play of indigenous trajectories of desire and fear” that characterize the emerging system of global cultural flows. Which literary work that we are reading tends to throw a more pessimistic light on the attempt to indigenize culture? Can you show how in that text a
particular cultural form resists even the most strenuous efforts of indigenization, imposing itself in an essentially imperial way – or show how the text in some other way marks the limits of Appadurai’s model?

It’s not necessary to pit novelist against scholar/theorist here. But you should try to avoid the kind of essay that starts with a thesis about globalization drawn from Giddens, Huntington, Appadurai, or someone else, and then simply illustrates this thesis with examples drawn from a novel or film. Try if not actually to refute the thesis at least to complicate it significantly or to elaborate it in a new direction. Make sure, that is, that the discussion of the novel adds something new. Be sure to develop your argument from specific passages in the text, using the actual language of the book rather than relying on paraphrase or plot summary. In particular, try to identify the key terms or phrases, the words that really matter in the text, and work these quoted phrases into your own discussion. And be sure to place your reading of the novel in the context of other critical work on it and of other responses to the particular thesis about globalization you are challenging.

**Other Options** Other options for the paper might take topics less literary-critical, more focused on the economic or institutional aspects of literature in the global age:

-- Literature and censorship. Is there more censorship of literature (fiction) today than in the past or less? Is it taking new forms, or are its geographic epicenters shifting? What difference has the rise of supersize booksellers (Amazon, B&N, Borders) made? Are the new media (digital books, kindle, mp3 audiobooks, etc) playing a role in this?

-- World Fictions and Hollywood. What kinds of novels about globalization and transnationalism, about migration and vagabondage and cultural dislocation, about new nationalisms and ethnic conflicts, have been most often or most successfully adapted for the cinema? Does the translation from novel to film involve a reconception of the “world”? Does the medium of film, or its larger-scale economics, impose a different basic plot about globalization and humanity than that which its literary sources tend to tell? Focus on two or three examples.

-- Has literature become more subject to the rhythms or temporalities of “fashion”? Do we see in the literary world the same kind of speeded-up cycles of production and consumption that we find in other zones of the globalizing consumer culture, where what’s Hot today will be Not tomorrow and there’s always a frenzied scouting for the Next Big Thing? Do literary styles or genres rise and fall faster than ever before? If so, how are these literary fashion cycles managed, regulated, exploited?

These are the kinds of very general topic that you might come up with as a starting point for your research. You then need to begin narrowing your topic to something that can be discussed thoughtfully in an essay of just 4000 words or so. For example, the topic of literary fashion might lead you to the recent vogue for “chick lit,” usually said to begin with the publication of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* in 1996. You might then chase down some preliminary research questions: has chick lit been a global fashion trend? Is the chick lit boom largely over and done with in the metropole, but still on the rise in the periphery? Are *Bridget Jones* type novels now emerging in South and East Asia, in Africa, in Central Europe? Or was “global” chick lit never anything but English-language novels about spoiled middle-class white twentysomethings, translated into foreign languages? What have other literary scholars done with this topic? Etc.

Gradually, you will home in on a topic that is more focused and manageable given our time and length constraints. At that point, you should try to express your topic in the form of a question; the answer to this question will be your thesis. Example: *Bridget Jones’s Diary* has been described as a “global phenomenon,” but what has been its real global impact? In what way, if any, has the original chick-lit novel ‘changed the world’? Your answer to this question might end up something like: The real
global importance of *Bridget Jones* is not to be measured by the sheer scale of that particular franchise but by the emerging regional variants of chick lit, which are now one of the most important modes for building affective connections among women across lines of national, cultural, and ethnic difference. You might then refine this further by choosing one particular novel, say Kata Metelitsa’s *Diary of Luisa Lozhkina*, and showing how it connects the struggles and traumas of single womanhood in post-Soviet society with those elsewhere.

Whatever your topic, make use of the local human resources: me (email or office hours), and the staff at Van Pelt Reference.

**Thesis and bibliography due Friday March 4, 8AM.** I need to see a provisional thesis paragraph and list of at least eight sources before spring break. Your list of sources should include a couple of sentences after each item explaining how it will be useful to your discussion. **Submit as Word doc attachment via email with subject line: 395 Biblio.** To avoid bouncing your email, it is best to send from your upenn address.

**Complete draft of paper due by 8AM on Monday March 28.** Be sure to: include title page with your name and other pertinent info; number all pages; properly format your notes and/or your list of Works Cited. **Submit as Word doc attachment via email with subject line: 395 Research Paper Draft.**

**Final version of paper due by 5PM on Friday, April 29.** Be sure to: include title page with your name and other pertinent info; number all pages; properly format your notes and/or your list of Works Cited. **Submit as Word doc attachment via email with subject line: 395 Research Paper Final.**

If you are an open-source advocate and detest Microsoft Word, you may submit your work in rtf format.