21L.703 Annotated Bibliography and Preparation for your Final Essay: Guidelines

This project is intended to introduce you to research work in literary studies and help you develop your ideas for your major essay and final presentation. The bibliography should be considered an important stage on the way to your 15-page, thesis-driven analytic essay/project.

When applying for research time or money within academia, or when seeking grants funding for professional work, one usually needs a brief project proposal or description, supplemented by a pertinent bibliography. **The annotated bibliography is essentially an alphabetical list of references (primary and secondary), in each case followed by a paragraph summarizing the text in a way that suggests its relevance for your research paper.**

The scholarly form of the annotated bibliography can be a very useful reference tool (and one to which UROPs or graduate students often contribute as research assistants). Being adept at giving a concise, accurate synopsis of a complex argument—the basic work involved in creating the bibliography—is also a more generally useful ability.

How do you begin to write an analytic, research-informed essay?
Humanities research includes knowing how to look for and find primary and secondary readings relevant to your area of interest; narrowing your interests into a manageable essay topic; and beginning the process of developing your own argument in dialogue with the primary and secondary sources you have identified. The first step in this case is to identify a play or a particular question that will be part of your essay, and pondering.

Ideally, you would have a broad area of comparative interest (say, the role of poetry, or invention, in two plays; or a structural or performative parallel between two films; or the political relationship between one spin-off and a source text) as well as a sense of which texts you want to explore more deeply. The broad topic and the texts serve as starting points; they mark out roughly the terrain of your final paper. Alternatively, you might be the sort of person who works best from particulars—beginning with a scene, comment, or character that captures your imagination or frustrates you. For example, you might find yourself wondering why the South American and African characters are introduced in the second half of *Serious Money*, or what it means for Lady Nijo to be the only non-European character in *Top Girls*? These sorts of questions can lead in all sorts of productive directions: to issues of regional or racial identity; to issues of tone and theatrical genre; to the challenges of making economics or history meaningful on the modern stage, and so forth. Your research would then focus on one or more of these issues. It may also be true that the research or exploration leads you to change gears: you might decide you are interested, say, in how nationality, type characterization, or setting works differently on stage and page, or in one of Stoppard's plays. That's fine too.

You will most likely want to hone your topic through comparison with other related scenes or plays, and in that process your teammates are there to help provide suggestions and a sounding board; I can also provide suggestions among the recommended works for reports/research listed on the syllabus if you want to find a parallel with something we've not read collectively.

How do you find Primary and Secondary sources?
To help you get started, the Humanities Library staff has constructed a special website for this

subject: http://libguides.mit.edu/stoppard. There are many more tools out there, but the ones listed should get you going. For secondary work on literary texts, the first place to search (by play, author, title, keyword, or subject) is the MLA database: this will generate a large number of citations of secondary articles and book on the play or topic. Go through them, looking at the titles, and (if necessary) at the brief description of topics covered by the article, deciding which ones might be relevant, and marking those. For contemporary drama, you may also want to look at the Humanities Index, and pay special attention to journals aimed more at the theatrical side of drama (TDR, Theater Journal, etc.).

If you find an annotated bibliography in your reading—as you may well do—do NOT simply "lift" their entries as your annotations: that is plagiarism. Moreover, it won't suffice in helping you to think through your topic. DO use the summaries to see whether you think the cited work is "on topic" for your research.

Above all, do *not* assume that a Google Search or Wikipedia guarantees truth: crowd-sourcing might be great for democracy, but it is not always a route to accurate or up-to-date knowledge! Many of the most important, respected scholarly books are *not* available in digital form, and much of what is posted online has not been checked by experts for accuracy. YOU are responsible for knowing that the scholarship is reliable and true, so if you aren't an expert yourself, take advantage of the scholarly presses and "peer reviewed" status of major journals.

With that in mind, good places to look online are JSTOR, ITER, and Project Muse. These databases cover selected years for a selected number of journals. The advantage to these is that you get not just the citation but the articles themselves, which are downloadable in pdf format. Nevertheless, do not confine yourself to online resources alone.

Some databases (such as the MLA) will also indicate which works cited are available at MIT. Those that are not can be directly requested through Inter-Library Loan (ILL) from the site itself. IMMEDIATELY ORDER THOSE THAT YOU NEED, even if you are not planning on reading them right away, since the time lag between ordering and receiving is unpredictable. The ones available at MIT, you get yourself.

This leads to the wonders of the actual searchable stacks, "open stacks" being one of the joys of MIT's libraries that may soon recede if unused—so enjoy them now! You will often see related titles in the aisle near the book you are seeking, ones that might enrich your thinking in unanticipated ways. Serendipity as well as deliberate searching can make learning more fun—in flesh and paper, not just sitting still at a computer screen but sitting down or reaching up in the stacks. Better exercise, too.

Once you have begun to locate books or articles, you will find more possible citations in the footnotes and the back of books. Reference librarians can be very helpful if you have trouble locating a source you need.

Then, start reading, taking notes, and thinking as you read. And read and re-read the play(s) you want to write about as well!

What will your Annotated Bibliography for this project look like?

Your task is to identify primary and secondary texts relevant to your project, but also to work as a team. This means that you will have located and read more texts than you actually describe in your bibliography (the ones you don't find pertinent should be mentioned, too, but a full citation is sufficient to take care of them). As you read, decide on which articles, books, or portions of books are likely to be useful for your or a teammate's research paper. Take notes on these as you read (or pass them along to the teammate). And then, after you've read each one, write up a brief summary of its argument or main points in as concise and coherent a manner as you can. Try and keep the description brief---in general, aim for 1/5 page single-spaced (or, ideally, less) per article/chapter. Remember, however, that others should be able, upon reading the summary, to have a clear sense of what the article was about, and have a rough sense of why you chose to summarize it. When summarizing books, focus only on those parts of the whole text that are of relevance to your topic.

With primary texts, in addition to the brief summary of the relevant sections or an overview of the relevant parts, you probably want to excerpt a couple of quotations that you may use in your final paper. (In general, as you read, it is a good idea to maintain a file where you simply enter quotations from secondary and primary texts that you may use in the research essay, with the page number or act/scene number included. This will save you a lot of time in the long run.)

A single document should be submitted by the team, and it should include at least 15 annotated citations. Not all of you will find the same number of useful sources, and some may wish to include more annotations. However, each of you should contribute *three* of the annotations, and those you write should be followed by your initials, in parentheses (DH in my case). You should share your learning with the group so that all of you feel you know about all the works cited on your group bibliography. If you read something that confuses you but seems important, you might want to have another group member read it as well. But each of you should locate and annotate at least three works of scholarship or criticism.

Merge and alphabetize all your entries, and give full citations using the MLA or Chicago Manual of Style. Proofread the document, and make sure your entire group feels included and comfortable with the final product.

Now, get going and have fun!

21L.703 Studies in Drama: Stoppard and Company
Spring 2014