Research Assignment: Literary Criticism

The second research assignment will be more focused and more directed than the first. We have read three substantial "literary" texts this semester (although there are, of course, literary elements to a number of the pieces we’ve read thus far—the line is a blurry one). The three texts that I would like you to consider for this assignment are Aimé Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s *House of Glass*. Unlike the first assignment, which asked for a primary document, this assignment asks for a “secondary” source; that is, a document written about one of the novels or the poem that we have read. Your assignment will be to find and analyze a “literary critical” article about one of these three texts. The article should be written by a literary scholar and published in an academic journal. It should be an analytical argument of some sort (i.e. not a book review). And, again, it should be roughly 10 to 20 pages in length. Moreover, it should address one or more of the core issues we have discussed thus far, such as colonialism, decolonization, and/or postcolonialism, the nation or national culture, a conception of the so-called “Third World,” or some other major theme of this class.

Research:
Library research will, once again, be a requirement of this assignment. Mark Daley has written up an extremely useful research tutorial for this assignment that will help direct you towards the appropriate research tools (linked to our course website under “Resources”). Although many journal essays are now available on-line through the University subscriptions, I am asking you once again to go to the library and locate the physical journal. While this is obviously not necessary for gathering the information, I believe that college students ought to be familiar with using the periodical section of the library. Unlike the first assignment, which asked for a primary document, this assignment asks for a “secondary” source; that is, a document written about one of the novels or the poem that we have read. You will hand in a photocopy along with your analysis like we did last time.

Written Response:
Once you have located the document, you will need to write up a short (500 –750 words, or 2-3 double-spaced typed pages) description and analysis of your research. Roughly half of this response should be a concise, accurate, fair summary of the article’s primary argument. Summarizing complex claims is not easy. Be sure that you represent the author’s claims accurately, and that you extract the most essential aspects of her argument. Briefly citing textual evidence from the article may be helpful here. The second half of your paper should be an analytical response to the article, in which you assess, critique, or make claims about the broader significance and/or implications of the selected text. Here, again, taking up specifics from the text will be important. As with the first assignment, I am asking you to make an argument about the essay you select. Your analysis should have a thesis. You should stake out a position in relation to the essay and develop/support that position with textual evidence (both from the essay, and possibly from the primary literary text as well). Given this aspect of the assignment, it will be important for you to choose your essay carefully. For instance, you will probably not want to choose an essay that you do not have the background to understand. Nor will
you want to choose a piece with which you are in complete agreement or disagreement. I suggest that you look for an essay that is complex and sophisticated; an essay, then, that prompts you to think about new complexities in the text, but that also makes an argument that you can critique or develop in some manner.

**Logistics:**
Due at the beginning of class on **October 28**
Turn in a photocopy of your primary document(s) and a hard copy of your written response. Once the documents are scanned, I will ask you to post an electronic version of your response to the course website.