



The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century

Adam Kirsch

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What will 21st century fiction look like?

Acclaimed literary critic Adam Kirsch examines some of our most beloved writers, including Haruki Murakami, Elena Ferrante, Roberto Bolano, and Margaret Atwood, to better understand literature in the age of globalization.

The global novel, he finds, is not so much a genre as a way of imagining the world, one that allows the novel to address both urgent contemporary concerns -- climate change, genetic engineering, and immigration -- along with timeless themes, such as morality, society, and human relationships. Whether its stories take place on the scale of the species or the small town, the global novel situates its characters against the widest background of the imagination. The way we live now demands nothing less than the global perspective our best novelists have to offer.

The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century Details

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From Reader Review The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century for online ebook

Marjolein says

2.5 Stars

Full review to come!

Zeynep says

Great intro, meh chapters; but the real question is: why does this book not have a conclusion?

Kirsty says

I did find what Kirsch has set out to do very interesting indeed, but his is also a limited approach. He has selected only eight authors with which to discuss the idea of the 'global novel', and these do not cover enough of the world to make his arguments fully believable. There are no writers from Australasia here, for instance, and I believe that had he included more writers, his arguments could have been fuller and more well-realised.

As it is, whilst his essays are certainly readable, they feel incredibly short. I was baffled that somebody would attempt to write about such a large topic in such a restricted space (135 pages is all that *The Global Novel* runs to), and I have to say that I don't feel the exercise was a wholly successful one. There are some interesting ideas here, and the whole has been well written and pieced together, but so much has been omitted that I cannot give it higher than a three-star rating.

Raluca Ferrari says

Adam Kirsch is a young American poet and literary critic. He published 3 books of poetry and literary reviews of famous poets such as T.S.Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Dylan Thomas. I want to thank NetGalley for giving me the opportunity to read such an extraordinary non-fiction book.

In this collection of essays, the author analyzes the meaning, or meanings of the term "World literature" in the 21st century. It is a term invented by the German writer Goethe and used to describe the international reception of some literary works in Europe and worldwide.

Nowadays, we can no longer refer to national literature but rather world literature. By analyzing this, the author relates it to the meaning of translation, and translated works into English and not only. Reading international literature in our own language means reading across borders and also having strong literary values. Often we see writers that sharpen their work according to the demand of the global market.

In this respect, the author focuses on 6 different authors that write in English or have been translated into English and have worldwide recognition: Orhan Pamuk's "Snow", Haruki Murakami's "1Q84", Roberto Bolano's "2666", Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's "Americanah", Mohsin Hamid's "The Reluctant Fundamentalist", Margaret Atwood's "Oryx and Crake", Michel Houllebecq's "The Possibility of an Island"

and Elena Ferrante's "Neapolitan Novels".

I focused on the chapters on Pamuk, Chimamanda and Ferrante, as favorite authors and also because I've already read the novels presented in this book. Each author focuses on different themes. Pamuk, for example, in his novel "Snow" tackles the problem of the Turkish attacks and crimes committed against the Armenians. He also focuses on the problem of identity experienced our main character Ka, who is torn between the Western World and the Islam religion.

For my second author, we have the immigration experience described by Chimamanda in her novel "Americanah". She describes America as place to grow and learn but never a permanent home.

And finally my 3rd author Elena Ferrante and her Neapolitan Novels. Ferrante tackles the problem of growing up and personal identity. In her opinion, an important factor in shaping an individual destiny is the place where you're born. It is the story of emergence or failure to emerge, from the past to the future.

There would be so many great things to say about this book, but I'll stop here. I do not want to spoil your curiosity. It is a great non-fiction read if you're interested in the importance of translation, international literature and the importance of it.

Irmak Ertuna-howison says

This is a good introduction to the foundational debate on "world literature". His analyses of several popular novels are very concise & clear. But if you want to read a more complicated analysis of what world literature might be I highly recommend Franco Moretti's writing.

Heather Scott Partington says

Critics of world literature, Kirsch writes, see translation into English and the homogenization of style as obliterating nuance. In this explication of the global novel as a genre, Kirsch rejects that argument, examining works by eight exemplary authors...

Read more at [The New York Times Book Review](#).

Steve says

One of the shorter entries in the Columbia Global Reports series. Good intro, answering critics of the Right and Left on the Global Novel. But then goes on to discuss 8 recent novels, and most of his text is plot synopsis (as some Goodread "reviewers" have pointed out here, don't read this if you are looking forward to reading any of the titles he covers - total spoiler alert!). Some good points made, and got me interested in a couple of the titles covered - but more like "Lit Crit Lite". Good for a lower level UG class intro course. That said, his intro was worth the price of the kindle book for me. Reminder - 2 Stars is not damning - it means "It Was OK".

Akshat says

Good literary expositions - just that it gives most of the plot points of the novels it discusses.

Eustacia Tan says

I requested this book as soon as I read the title. It sounded interesting, and I'm always keen on seeing what people think about novels. The Global Novel is a discussion on the subject of world literature. It starts pretty abruptly, plunging the reader straight into a discussion on the criticisms against the subject of world literature.

"The question of whether world literature can exist - in particular, whether the novel, the preeminent modern genre of exploration and explanation, can be "global" - is another way of asking whether a meaningfully global consciousness can exist."

In other words, the stakes are high. After the introductory chapter, the author goes on to discuss:

Snow, by Orhan Pamuk

1Q84 by Haruki Murakami and 2666 by Roberto Bolaño

Americanah by Chimanda Ngozi Adichie and The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid

Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood and The Possibility of an Island by Michel Houellebecq

Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels.

I didn't quite get the sense of an overarching argument, but it was an interesting discussion. I haven't read many of the books (and I don't really feel like reading any of them other than Ferrante and Murakami after reading this), but I was able to follow the discussion along. Perhaps I didn't get as much depth as I would if I had read the books, but it did make me think. In fact, this line by Mizumura made me think:

"Bilinguals [will] start taking their own country's literature less seriously than literature written in English - especially the classics of English literature, which are evolving into the universal cannon."

It did give me pause because I read primarily in English, even though I'm technically trilingual. I don't read in Chinese (not unless it's Chinese comics, and even that is rare and limited to my childhood) and now I'm wondering how much I've missed by neglecting one language.

This is probably aimed mainly at students of literature, but anyone curious about the world of literature might be interested in this.

Disclaimer: I got a free copy of this book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for a free and honest review.

This review was first posted at Inside the mind of a Bibliophile

Lissa says

3.5 stars. In Adam Kirsch's introduction, he evaluates some of the recent criticism that proposes that the most

famous international writers have become too commercial to be considered world literature. He addresses this question by examining eight works of fiction by authors from several different countries, including; Orhan Pamuk, Haruki Murakami, Roberto Bolano, Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, Mohsin Hamid, Margaret Atwood, Michel Houellebecq and Elena Ferrante. These essays demonstrate the different way a novel can have international appeal and translatability. The 135 page book is a strange format for such a large topic and I found it strange that there was no concluding chapter to wrap up his findings, but I did enjoy reading about these books and their global reach. One word of warning, if you plan on reading any of these books in the future, you may want to hold off on this as there is quite a bit of plot points described in each essay. I received this from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Toyin A says

This book delves into the world of literature to identify why some books are labelled “International” or “Global”. He discusses this from the point of view of an American who knows certain authors like from India, Nigeria and Japan but do they really understand the cultures behind the books?

I don’t think the book was intended to be a dissertation about the dilution of literature to suit a global audience. He just points it out without going in depth.

He starts with this train of thought but does not go into too much detail, leaving the reader to think independently of how this dilution affects perception of culture.

Adam discusses 8 novels:

1. Snow, by Orhan Pamuk
2. 1Q84 by Haruki Murakami
3. 2666 by Roberto Bolaño
4. Americanah by Chimanda Ngozi Adichie
5. The Reluctant Fundamentalist by Mohsin Hamid
6. Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood
7. The Possibility of an Island by Michel Houellebecq
8. Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels.

Favourite Quotes: "Bilinguals [will] start taking their own country's literature less seriously than literature written in English - especially the classics of English literature, which are evolving into the universal cannon."

But whether their story encompasses the cosmos, a continent, or a city block, these novelists see individual fates in an international perspective.

Mandy says

A rather lightweight and limited approach to what is a fascinating and complex subject. To talk about the “global novel” and then choose just eight authors is bewildering to say the least. As an introduction to the subject it perhaps has its merits (although I’m not quite sure what they might be) but as a serious exploration

of what it means to write for a global readership it offers nothing new – especially to readers who are already immersed in world literature. The author seems to be trying to make a thesis out of very little and I couldn't perceive an overarching argument. There's nothing original or particularly insightful here and basically the book is just too short to offer a cogent and well-thought out examination of what constitutes the global novel.

Dan Friedman says

Adam Kirsch's *The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century* provides a barely one hundred page overview of current critical thought on "global novels"—such as Emily Apter, Tim Parks, Minae Mizumura, and Pascale Casanova—and descriptive chapters on Orhan Pamuk's *Snow*; Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels; Haruki Murakami's *1Q84* compared to Roberto Bolaño's *2666*; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* compared to Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*; and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* compared to Michel Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island*.

Kirsch starts by assuming that "*the global novel is not a unitary genre. . . What unites all these various approaches is the insistence on the global dimensions not just of contemporary experience, but of contemporary imagination. If we understand ourselves as citizens of the world, then the novel must come to grips with this cosmopolitanism. . .*" Kirsch's conclusion is decidedly optimistic: ". . . the global novel may be, not the homogenizing and coercive force it has often been called, but the herald and agent of a dawning collective conscience. Everyone must strive to hasten its approach.".

The Global Novel is quick and easy to read: its brevity works to its advantage and to its disadvantage. To its advantage, the brevity of *The Global Novel* and Kirsch's straightforward prose engages and retains the reader's attention. To its disadvantage, the brevity of *The Global Novel* left this reader frustrated, feeling that Kirsch did not sufficiently explore, evaluate, and respond to critical opinions posed by Apter, Parks, Mizumura, and Casanova. While Kirsch provides an interesting and helpful counterpoint to, for example, Tim Parks' discussion of "*the dull new global novel*" in his *Where I'm Reading From: The Changing World of Books*, Kirsch's readers would benefit from more thorough responses to Parks' arguments about the deleterious impacts of international literary prizes, authors' perceptions of international audiences, and the "commercial convenience" of "the universalist approach."

Kevin Gross says

An interesting survey of the emerging genre, authors that include Bolano, Murakami, Ferrante. Would have been improved by more attention to the core topic and less to the individual authors and their selected works. Kirsch raises many interesting questions, points for that, alas with not enough attention to what might be answers.

Deborah says

Spoiler Alert: Don't read this book if you plan to, but have not yet, read the books it discusses: *Snow*; *1Q84*; *2666*; *Americanah*; *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*; *Oryx and Crake*; *The Possibility of an Island*; or Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels. Kirsch gives away major plot points.

