

English 614
“Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory”
Sangita Gopal
Office Hours: 10-1 pm, Thursdays

The goal of this course is straightforward. We will sample here – following a rudimentary chronology – some of the movements in thought that have shaped the study of literary and other cultural works. These movements have all been involved to a lesser or greater degree with some basic questions: What is a literary or cultural work? How does the specific medium in which it appears and the form that it takes become worthy of study? How is it to be studied? What is its relation to the world? What are its effects? How does it affect us? Of what use is theory and its study?

In short, this course is “meta” – it is meant to provide you with some thinking *about* literary and other cultural works that might then assist your study *of* it.

So at all times our goal will be to look out for how each movement that we study defines and understands the ontology, epistemology, ethics and politics of the literary and cultural artefact. Often the readings will seem to have little or no relation to a literary work, film or TV show but will seem like sociology, polemic, philosophy, political theory. Our task is to understand how such thought transforms our conception of the aesthetic domain and influences the methods through which we explore and invest in it.

Texts

PDFs and links to readings that I will post on Canvas (in 2-3 week chunks). If you need to know sooner what we are reading further down the road, get in touch with me. I follow this method since I like the flexibility of tailoring the readings to the pace and interests of the seminar.

Assignments

Presentations: These will go from Weeks 4-9 (2, sometimes 3 presenters, each class period). The goal of each presenter is to take a reading for that week and apply it to the study of a literary or cultural text of their choosing. **The learning goal here is to test out how theories are used to frame readings rather than a presentation of that theory itself.** The presentations will be 20 minutes each including 5 minutes or so for questions and discussion. It may include AV materials and handouts. I need a typed version of this presentation to provide feedback on the day that you are due to present for my recording purposes.

Abstract and Bibliography: An abstract and an annotated bibliography of your final project is due in Week 7. The bibliography should include 10 items including primary and secondary texts. The first 4 pages of your final paper (see below) are due Week 9. I will conference with each of you in person to give you feedback on this draft. There will be a sign-up sheet available.

Final Paper: We will do a mini conference in Week 10 when you will do a 15-minute presentation (6 pages, less if you have clips) of your final paper. The final paper (12 pages) will be due by Tuesday of Week 11. **This will require us to meet an hour early on Tuesday of Week 10.**

Grading:

Presentation: 20%

Final Paper: 80%

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: “New Criticism” and Close-reading

Week 2: “Marxist Cultural Theory”

Week 3: “The Linguistic Turn”

This class will be taught by Professor Bish Sen

Week 4: “Psychoanalysis”

Week 5: “From Subject to Subjection: Discourse, Power and Becoming”

Week 6: “From Subjection to Subject: Gender Theories and Beyond”

Week 7: From Subjection to Subject: Critical Race Studies and Postcolonial Theory”

Weeks 8: “The Post-human Turn 1”

Week 9: “The Posthuman Turn 2”

Week 10: Conference Presentations