

COLT 302

Introduction to Literary Theory

Professor Natania Meeker

Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:30 AM to 10:50 AM



What is literary theory? What can it do for us and with us? What new worlds does it envision? What futures does it open up?

This course will introduce you to the diverse, long-running, and enlivening conversations that together might be said to constitute literary theory. We will study a variety of methods for understanding and engaging with literature—including feminist and queer theory, poststructuralist theory, critical race theory, Marxist and materialist criticism, and posthumanist (and humanist!) theory—but we will also work together to think about what it is that literary theory makes possible on its own terms. What aspects of the world does it bring into focus (or obscure)? How does theory animate literary texts even as it is animated by them? Where does it take us and where has it been?

By the end of this class, you will have learned how to read literature and other media through specific theoretical lenses in order to discover new and exciting aspects to even “old” and familiar works. You will also become versed in some of the many ways in which literary theory attempts not just to describe literature but to transform the way in which we see the world, opening up sometimes unsettling vistas and even forging new modes of experience. Some of the authors we will read together include: Walter Benjamin, Judith Butler, Patricia Hill Collins, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Frantz Fanon, Sigmund Freud, Donna Haraway, Plato, Edward Said and many others.

Students from all disciplines and areas of specialization welcome!