

INTRODUCTION TO



CRITICAL THEORY

Instructor: Alexa Alice Joubin

How does literature function in civil society? This course introduces students to theories of race, gender and sexuality that are **most relevant to our contemporary** political and cultural life. We will ask new questions through a carefully curated selection of key writing—from influential classics to more current works. Students will gain fluency in the conceptual frameworks associated with **structuralism, ecocriticism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, post-colonialism, and feminism**, with an emphasis on critical race, gender, sexuality, queer, and disability studies.

More importantly, students will learn to apply theoretical tools to *films*. Taking an **intersectional** approach, we will examine modern theoretical perspectives, a body of knowledge that continues to evolve in new directions.

Specifically, we will explore challenging theoretical questions through a key figure in literary history, William Shakespeare, and his place in visual, filmic, and popular culture, on which students will practice their new critical knowledge. We will discover how Shakespeare helps us rethink notions of race and gender, among other issues of identity. Contrasting modes of interpretation generate new ways of understanding of early modern and postmodern cultures.

Since the theoretical texts are challenging enough, we anchor our

study in one single author to **make the number of variants more manageable**. For good reasons, Shakespearean films have been used as test cases in continuing philosophical debates over the nature of the humanistic enterprise. This seminar examines important theoretical developments in relation to critical theory and modern culture (**films**).

No previous experience with film studies or Shakespeare is expected. This WID (writing-in-the-discipline) course fulfills the critical theory/cultural studies requirement for the English major.

SPECIAL FEATURES

- Contract grading system (details below)
- Theories and films by people of color, women, disability / LGTBQ-identified writers
- *Shakespeare in Love* (bio-fiction), *Romeo and Juliet* (tragedy), *King Lear* (tragedy), *The Tempest* (romance), *Richard III* (history), *Coriolanus* (Roman), *Twelfth Night* (comedy)

IMPORTANT INFO

- Zoom link
- [Sign up](#) for research presentation
- Fill out this [intake questionnaire](#)
- All readings and films on Perusall.com

Check the syllabus online regularly for updates.