Topics in Television: Writing Television Criticism MCS 351

I will answer every email I get within 24 hours (weekday). If you do not hear from me within one day, you can assume that I did not get your email. You may also contact me via Twitter (@pbooth81).

Course Description:
This course offers an introduction to the aesthetic, rhetorical, and cultural criticism of English-language television. In this course, students will be exposed to different types of television criticism. Students will explore characteristics of television criticism. Through close readings of television criticism as well as writing about television criticism, students will be encouraged to develop a critical voice of their own. Students will engage with different styles of criticism through readings, analysis, peer-reviews, and writing their own criticisms. Class includes a screening time. Projects include written work, digital profiles, and engagement with contemporary theories of television and media.

Course Rationale:
Television remains the most popular medium in the average home. More people watch television than go online, than read books or magazines, or go to the movies. The television is often the centerpiece of the home, and the focus of family conversation. Furthermore, given the rapid and widespread adoption of Internet capable devices and broadband-speed connections across the United States and Europe, writing about television has never been more accessible than it is today. More people can—and do—write critically about television, both in a scholarly setting and in a popular press setting. But what makes a good critic? How to differentiate the quality opinions from the less-thoughtful? What’s the difference between a review and a criticism when it comes to writing about television?

This intersession class seeks to explore this topic in-depth through an investigation of contemporary and historical television criticism, both at a popular and at a scholarly level. Furthermore, students will engage with their own writing of television criticism through reviews of both specific shows as well as their own favorites. Hopefully, at the end of the three weeks, students will come away with a better understanding of the role of criticism in their own lives, become more thoughtful and engaged critics, and read criticism with a more critical eye.

Course Goals:
This course has three main goals. The first is to gain a better understanding of key concepts in television criticism. The second is to gain the ability to analyze the production, distribution, and consumption of television texts in today’s media-rich environment. The third is to critique the methods of television criticism.

Course Objectives:
At the end of this course, students will be able to:
1) Identify different types of television criticism
2) Critique television through different lenses
3) Demonstrate an understanding of the theory behind television criticism

Class Readings
Required to Buy: (DePaul Loop bookstore, or online)

Additional readings will be available via D2L. Readings should be done before class on the day that they are due.

Grading and Assignments:

Undergraduate grade is based on 550 points.
Television Criticism 1: 100 points
Television Criticism 2: 100 points
Television Criticism 3: 100 points
Peer Review: 50 points
Reading Reflections: 100 points
Participation: 100 points

Television Criticism 1
In 1000-1200 words, you will write a formal analysis of an episode of television screened in class, due Dec 08 (5:30).

Television Criticism 2
In 1000-1200 words, you will pick one of the following types of criticism and write a critique of an episode of television, due Dec 15 (5:30pm).
- Narrative
- Genre
- Rhetoric

Television Criticism 3
In 1000-1200 words, you will pick one of the following types of criticism and write a critique of the same episode of television you wrote on for TV Crit 2, due Dec 19 (11:59 pm).
- Representation
- Reception
- Postmodernism

Peer Review (Due Dec 10)
You will read and critique (but not grade) another students' Television Criticism 1 paper. Reviews will be anonymous. Graduate students will review other graduate students; undergraduate students will review other undergraduate students; majors will review similar majors. Your job in peer review is to (a) compliment, (b) critique, (c) complement; that is, you should note where the students’ paper was well-done, where (specifically) it could be improved, and give some tips/hints for future work. When you receive the peer review on your own paper, you may find it helpful to integrate that feedback into your other two television criticism papers. If you choose to, you may rewrite your Television Criticism 1 paper, taking into account the other students’ feedback, for a higher grade. Please note that the peer review should not offer a grade on the Television Criticism 1 paper, and the professor will grade the Television Criticism 1 papers as well.

Reading Responses: (8X12+4)
Each reading response is a 300-500 word paper that answers 2-3 exercises in each chapter in our textbook. Please answer whichever 2-3 questions you find the most relevant. You will be graded on the thoroughness of your answer.

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<th>Monday Dec 01</th>
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<td><strong>TOPIC: INTRODUCTION AND CRITICISM</strong></td>
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<td>Screening: Pilot, “Northwest Passage”</td>
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<td>Theory: Sassone</td>
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<td>Fan Phenomena: Hayes (5–7)</td>
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<td>Assignments Due:</td>
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| Thursday Dec 04 | Class 03   | FORMAL ANALYSIS                            | Textbook: O’Donnell Ch 3
Theory: Montgomery
Example: Mittell
Example: Nussbaum_ART
Fan Phenomena: Hallberg and Hansen (30–39) |                       | Assignment Due:                         | Reading Reflection   |
|            |             | Please note this class will be held in 1140 Daley |                                                                               |                       |                                       |                                          |
| Monday Dec 08 | Class 04   | NARRATIVE ANALYSIS                         | Textbook: O’Donnell Ch 4
Theory: Ott
Example: Murray_ArrestedDev
Fan Phenomena: Bulkeley (66–73) |                       | Assignment Due:                         | Television Criticism 1 |
| Wednesday Dec 10 | Class 05 | GENRE ANALYSIS                             | Textbook: O’Donnell Ch 5
Theory: Lennon
Example: Seitz1, Seitz2 |                       | Assignment Due:                         | Peer Review            |
| Thursday Dec 11 | Class 06   | RHETORICAL/CULTURAL ANALYSIS               | Textbook: O’Donnell Ch 6
Theory: Adler
Example: Nussbaum_BreakingBad
Fan Phenomena: Bayout (20-29) |                       | Assignment Due:                         | Reading Reflection    |
<p>| Monday Dec 15 | Class 07   | REPRESENTATIONAL ANALYSIS                  |                                                                               |                       | Assignment Due:                       | Television 1 Rewrite                    |</p>
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<th>Assignment Due: Reading Reflection</th>
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**Class 08**  
**Wednesday Dec 17**

**TOPIC: RECEPTION ANALYSIS**

Screening: “Episode 7: The Last Evening”

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| Textbook: O'Donnell Ch 10  
Theory: Levin_Sepinwall  
Theories: Levin_TV and Fandom  
Theory: Critic in Online Society | | |

**Class 09**  
**Thursday Dec 18**

**TOPIC: POSTMODERN ANALYSIS**

Screening: “Episode 8: May the Giant Be with You”

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| Textbook: O'Donnell Ch 8  
Theory: Boob Tube Dude  
Example: Ryan_ArrestedDev  
Klein and Mittell | | |

**Final**  
**Friday Dec 19**

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<tr>
<th>Readings Due: None</th>
<th>Optional Reading Due: None</th>
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