Smita A. Rahman

[smitarahman@depauw.edu](mailto:smitarahman@depauw.edu)

104 Asbury Hall

765-658-4830

skype: smita.a.rahman

Office hrs: TR 4-5PM

**POLS 390B: “Power, Honor, and Tragedy in *Game of Thrones*”**

Course Description:

This course will explore the power, honor and tragedy in the hit HBO television show, “Game of Thrones” (based on the fantasy novel series by George R.R. Martin entitled, ‘A Song of Ice and Fire’). *“*Game of Thrones” is one of those television shows that is so sprawling and textured, that has so many dense and interwoven narrative threads that it poses a real challenge to try to write and think about. Set in the fantasy lands of Westeros and Essos, the show (and the books on which it is based) introduce the viewer to a brutal medieval landscape, where traditional forms of political power, such as monarchy, are quickly dismantled and politics becomes a gritty and complex struggle for power between multiple actors. Even as it highlights the complexity of war and the difficulty of maintaining and shifting balances of power, the show grounds this gritty realism in a world of epic fantasy, where the true threat comes from beyond the Wall, in the icy north, where ancient and magical creatures are on the move, threatening the entire tableau on which humans play their game of thrones. As such, it also introduces the importance of walls and borders, which has important implications for contemporary political discourses around immigration in the United States and also globally (think of the Wall that Israel constructed in recent years in the contested Palestinian territories). In doing so, the show consistently plays with and against the traditional narrative tropes of honor and heroism, undermining the traditional hero narrative and the audience’s expectations of revenge and justice. The show steeps its audience in the recognition of tragedy as the foundational reality of political life and advances a complex account of political subjectivity in its main characters, who are conditioned by regimes and practices of paper and who eschew simple notions of political agency. The range and scope of this show and the complexity of the issues that it illustrates will be unpacked in depth in this course to provide insight into the foundational concepts of power, honor and tragedy in political theory and to explore the many intersections between politics and culture.

Course Materials:

There is only one required text for purchase for this course—the four seasons of the the HBO television series “Game of Thrones” (Season 4 will be released on February 15). You may purchase DVDs /Blu-rays for the show, download episodes on ITunes, or stream episodes on HBOGo if you have a paid HBO subscription. Please ensure you have regular access to the episodes in one of these forms as you will be required to watch episodes as the weekly viewing for the class, in addition to the episodes I will screen in class. All the theory readings for the course will be posted on the Moodle page for the course. Please check the Moodle page weekly as additional readings may be posted to reflect the dynamic nature of our seminar discussions.

Additional resources that are useful for the class that are recommended, but not required, are the novels by George R.R. Martin, “A Song of Ice and Fire” (A collection of five books). You do not have to read the novels and no prior knowledge of them is required, but you may find yourself wanting to delve more deeply into the source material at some stage and they are a useful, albeit dense and sprawling resource. Additional websites, including the wiki for the Game of Thrones show, and the forums , blogs, and subreddits for the show and the books are worth taking a look at to get additional detail on the show, but fair warning, several of these are rabbit holes to go down! They are useful for getting additional information on a particular plot point or filling in the backstory but they can also be distracting and dizzyingly full of byzantine information. Several links to these sources are posted on the Moodle site for the course.

Course Assignments:

The core of this course is class participation. As a once week seminar, it is built around active and engaged conversation in class. You are expected to come to class ready to critically analyze both the visual and written texts and debate them in depth with your fellow students. In addition to class discussion, you will be required to write a 1-2 paragraph weekly response to the assigned material. These will be graded on a scale from 1-5 pts. There are two papers for this class, of 8-10 pages each. The first is due the week before spring break and the second is due during finals week.

Grades for the course will be computed as follows:

Class participation and attendance: 20%

Weekly assignments: 10%

Midterm Paper 35%

Final Paper 35%

Course Policies:

* Violations of DePauw University’s Academic Integrity Policy will be taken very seriously and punished accordingly. All violations will be reported officially and the student will fail the assignment for which they are charged with the violation.

The complete Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: <http://www.depauw.edu/univ/handbooks/dpuhandbooks.asp?ID=101&parentid=100>

* Laptops are NOT permitted in class unless you have a documented reason for using them.
* Any student who feels she or he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability or learning challenge is strongly encouraged to contact Pamela Roberts, Director of Student Disability Services and ADA Compliance for further information on how to receive accommodations and support.  It is the responsibility of the student to share the letter of accommodation with faculty and staff members. Accommodations will not be implemented until the faculty or staff member has received the official letter. Accommodations are not retroactive.   It is the responsibility of the student to discuss implementation of accommodations with each faculty and staff member receiving the letter.

Office Hours and Accessibility:

My office hours are on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4-5PM. Feel free to drop by to talk about the class, discuss future interests or simply to continue a conversation. Send me an email to set up an appointment if you need to meet to on a day when I do not offer office hours. I am also available to meet via Skype (my Skype address is smita.a.rahman) and also available to talk on the phone if we cannot meet in person. I strongly prefer to have conversations in person so while I am happy to respond to texts and talk you on the phone or skype, please try to come by office hours first.

**SCHEDULE OF READING AND VIEWING:**

**Week 1, Jan 26**

Introduction to course

Screening:

Season 1 Episode 1 "Winter is Coming"

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 2, February 2**

In Class Screening:

Season 1, Episode 2: "The Kingsroad"

Required reading for class:

Anne Norton, "95 Theses on Politics, Culture, and Methods" (excerpt)

Samuel Chambers, "The Queer Politics of Television" (excerpt)

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 3, February 9**

In class Screening:

Season 1, Episode 5: "The Wolf and the Lion"

Required reading and viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 1, Episodes 3 and 4

Aristotle, "Nichomachean Ethics" (excerpt)

Hegel, "Philosophy of Right" (excerpt, #s 100, 132, 140, 211, 253, 255)

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 4, February 16**

In Class Screening:

Season 1, Episode 9

"Baelor"

Required reading and viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 1, Episode 6-8

Hegel, "Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art" (excerpt #2)

Nietzsche, "Human, All too Human" (Excerpt)

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 5, February 23**

In Class Screening:

Season 1, Episode 10: "Blood and Fire"

Required reading:

Game of Thrones, Season 1, Episode 8

Judith Butler, "Psychic Life of Power" (Excerpt)

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer**Week 6, March 2**

In Class Screening

Season 2, Episode 3

Required reading and viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 1, Episode 10, and Season 2, Episodes 1 and 2

Machiavelli, *The Prince*

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 7, March 9**

In Class Screening

Season 2, Episode 6: "The Old Gods and the New"

Required Reading and Viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 2, Episodes 4 and 5

Machiavelli, *The Prince*(finish)

Brown,*Walled States, Waning Sovereignty (excerpt)*

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 8, March 16**

In Class Screening

Season 2, Episode 10: "Valar Morghulis"

**MIDTERM PAPERS DUE IN CLASS**

Required viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 2, Episodes 7, 8, and 9

**March 23—No Class—Spring Break**

**Week 9, March 30**

In Class Screening

Season 3, Episode 5, "Kissed by Fire"

Required Readings and Viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 3, Episodes 1-4

"Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy" (from *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece)*

"The Iliad" (Book One)

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 10, April 6**

In Class Screening

Season 3, Episode 9, "The Rains of Castamere"

Required Reading and Viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 4, Episodes 6-8

Aristotle, "Poetics" (excerpt)

"Intimations of the Will in Greek Tragedy" (from *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece)*

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 11, April 13**

In Class Screening

Season 4, Episode 4: "Oathkeeper"

Required Reading/Viewing:

Season 3, Episode 10, Season 4, Episode 1-3

Iris Marion Young, "The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State"

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 12, April 20**

In Class Screening

Season 4, Episode 6: "The Laws of Gods and Men"

Required Reading and Viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 4, Episode 5

Plato, "The Apology"

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 13, April 27**

In Class Screening

Season 4, Episode 8, "The Mountain and the Viper"

Required Reading and Viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 4, Episode 7

Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics"

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

https://moodle.depauw.edu/theme/image.php?theme=depauw&component=core&image=spacer

**Week 14, May 4**

In Class Screening:

Season 4, Episode 10: "The Children"

Required Reading and Viewing:

Game of Thrones, Season 4, Episode 9

Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures"