

27th FILLM International Congress

New Delhi, India (15-17 March 2017)

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Abstract

The Politics and Poetics of Postcolonial Critique

In this lecture I propose to share my interest in new moves in the postcolonial field to direct attention to the structural and technical ‘how’ rather than the themed ‘what’ of representation; to the process of reading and reception rather than the ‘objects of difference’ that are represented in texts. It is through a reinvigoration of postcolonial poetics, I believe, that the binary of the familiar and the exotic literature raised in the conference abstract can be addressed; and that we might shift our concerns away from the topic-based discussions that have dominated the field to date. This approach recognizes, radically for the field, that postcolonial writing has, on its own terms, like all writing, the power to shock, resist, overturn, subvert, and kick back against the various exoticizing limitations of the postcolonial or decolonial condition.

In my lecture I will focus particular on the status of the literary in a field that has, from the beginning, been shaped by an eclectic mix of theories stemming from various directions in cultural studies, diaspora studies, anthropology, etc. These have then been read through paradigms developed by literary and linguistic criticism (for example, mimicry, hybridity, polyphony). Whilst on the one hand the moment of theory is said to be over (Gikandi, in *Theory after ‘Theory’*), on the other, postcolonial issues concerning inequality and migration continue to demand urgent attention. In response to this apparent crisis, I would want to ask whether now more than ever we should not look to those verbal and structural dynamics through which our critical understanding of the postcolonial may be shaped and sharpened.