Literary Criticism: Theory
In this course, we will explore some of the paradigms used to describe the relationships between the elements of text and context that have been recurring concerns during the long history of literary criticism, especially elements such as author, reader, text, culture, and objective reality. We will also address some trajectories in the history of critical theory (for instance, the movement to and away from realism and the development of and subsequent challenges to the author's authority). By the end of the course, you should be able to identify the terms of a theoretical paradigm, describe it, identify its limitations, and apply it, as well as compare it to or combine it with other theoretical models by identifying key points of difference and agreement.

Required Texts:

Notes Towards a Level Playing Field:
These rules will be strictly followed in order to ensure that we can all make equally-informed decisions. 1) Saturday and Sunday are counted in all "per day" calculations. 2) Extensions will not be granted, or discussed, on or after the due date and must be arranged in advance. 3) Extensions for a period of five days or less will be granted for one essay; a simple request will suffice, and no explanations, justifications, or documentation will be required to arrange that extension. 4) Longer or additional extensions may require documentation (e.g., a note from a doctor) that establishes a need for the extension and students should be prepared to provide it. 5) Penalties of 2% per day for the first five days of lateness and 4% per day thereafter will be deducted from essay grades unless you provide documentation for a cause that justifies the paper's lateness and explains why an appropriate extension was not secured in advance. 6) Compelling documentation would be required before I could consider accepting an essay after others have been returned. (NB: If your essay is going to be more than five days late or will not be submitted by the extension due date, you should let me know when you expect to submit it; if you do not, then I cannot warn you if that submission date falls after the date on which I will return the other essays.) 7) There will be no rewrites.

Essays should be well-written, well-argued and well-documented; you should strive to select, develop, substantiate, organize and communicate your ideas and insights persuasively in ways that are appropriate to formal academic writing. You should make and keep a copy of work that you submit, especially if you do not give it directly to me. A staple in the upper lefthand corner is the preferred binding; page numbers, 1" margins on all four sides, double-spacing, and the MLA style of documentation are required.

You must ensure that all primary and secondary sources, whether quoted, paraphrased, or otherwise influential, are properly documented according to the MLA system (see MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers by Joseph Gibaldi). All students should carefully read the section on plagiarism (§1.7) in the MLA Handbook as well as the university policy on academic offenses (see the Undergraduate Calendar). I reserve the right to interview a student on her/his essay's contents before assigning the grade. I recognize the distinction between sloppy documentation and the inclusion of material with an intention to defraud, but such sloppiness is still very serious and will be treated as such. Documentation not only operates as a gesture of respect for the work of others and an indication that you understand where your ideas begin and end, but also situates course work in the context of the notion of intellectual property upon which many of the university's evaluative assumptions and practices are based and is therefore essential to the fair treatment of the class as a whole.

If you have any questions or concerns about the above—or anything else (from readings,
essays and terminology to the illegibility of my handwriting)--please drop by my office to discuss the matter with me. My office hours are posted on my office door, and I would be happy to arrange another time if those hours are not feasible for you. If there are extensive difficulties with the office hours that I have selected, I will consider changing them.

**Course Requirements:**

Essay #1: 1,000 words due January 24th (15%)
Essay #2: 1,500 words due February 26th (25%)
Essay #3: 2,000 words due March 20th (35%)
Test: in class, February 5th (25%)

NB: The term, "passage," is used throughout to refer to the complete excerpt given in one of Selden's chapters. Two excerpts from Aristotle's *Poetics* (Part II, ch. 4, a, and Part III, ch. 2, a), for example, are thus understood to be two passages. The terms, "assigned" and "unassigned," refer to whether or not a text or passage is included in the tentative lecture schedule below.

**Essay #1 (1,000 words):** Choose one of the unassigned passages in Part I and compare its theoretical formulations to two of the assigned passages from the same chapter as the unassigned passage. Emphasize the issues that are central to that chapter, and strive to organize a clear, comparative argument that addresses the differences and similarities between the three authors' positions.

**Essay #2 (1,500 words):** Select an assigned passage from Part II (any chapter) or Part III (ch. 1 or ch. 3) and apply its theory to one of the unassigned plays by Wilde.

**Essay #3 (2,000 words):** Select two or three passages from Part IV, combine them to formulate a coherent theoretical construct and then apply that construct to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to develop an argument about Wilde's novel. In essay format, use both your theoretical sources and Wilde's text to substantiate the points of your argument as well as address the following issues: what you have taken from each theorist and why those ideas are particularly useful in an analysis of the aspects of Wilde's novel that you are discussing; the theoretical coherence of your own construct; the utility of your theoretical construct as a means of effectively addressing certain aspects of the novel. You may refer to criticism of Wilde's novel and further material by the theorists that you have selected, but keep in mind that your theoretical construct and its usefulness in the development and articulation of your argument about the novel are key here; use such secondary sources judiciously, and be careful not to let them divert your argument from those key goals.

**Test:** The test will cover all material read and discussed up to and including Week 5.

**Tentative Reading and Lecture Schedule**

Please read the assigned passages and texts before the week's classes begin, and bring both Wilde and Selden to every lecture. Also read the prefatory material for each chapter in Selden before the week in which that chapter will be discussed.

**Week 1 (Wednesday only):** Introduction

**Week 2:** Part I, ch. 1, a, e, h; ch. 2, a, d, g; Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"

**Week 3:** Part I, ch. 3, a, c, e; ch. 4, a, d, f, g, h

**Week 4:** Part II, ch. 1, ch. 2; Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*; **Essay #1 due**

**Week 5:** Part II, ch. 4; Part III, ch. 1

**Week 6:** Part III, ch. 3, ch. 4; Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; test

**Week 7:** Part III, ch. 6, ch. 7

**Week 8:** Part IV, ch. 1, ch. 2; **Essay #2 due**

**Week 9:** Part IV, ch. 2, ch. 3

**Week 10:** Part IV, ch. 4; Part V, ch. 1: Wilde, *Salome*

**Week 11:** Part V, ch. 2; **Essay #3 due**

**Week 12:** Part V, ch. 3; review