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. Please note that I have not arranged this course as a survey of authors nor have I chosen a textbook that does so. Our focus will be on taking a step back from literary texts and considering the paradigms that inform literature and literary study in order to explore possible ways of clarifying of critical readings through theoretical reflection. It is hoped that Selden's anthology will provide a theoretical index through which you can trace theoretical approaches and essays useful in other courses in this department.

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 (if you can't speak to me about an extension in class or my office hours, please phone and leave a message on my voice mail or e-mail me--those are the most reliable ways of reaching me promptly). 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. 8) Papers not handed directly to me must be dated by one of the staff in the department and placed in my mailbox.

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 throughout (including the Works Cited and offset quotations), 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 style (see MLA Handbook) with page or line references as well as complete bibliographical information—the only permissible exceptions are outlined in the MLA Handbook (N.B.: textbooks, essays with one source, and editor's notes are not on the list of exceptions). 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 lectures to the illegibility of my handwriting)—please drop by my office to discuss the matter with me, during my office hours or by appointment.

**Course Requirements:**

Essay #1: 1,000 words due January 23rd (15%)
Essay #2: 1,500 words due February 27th (25%)
Essay #3: 2,000 words due March 20th (40%)
Test: in class, February 11th (20%)

N.B.: You are responsible for knowing the contents of this syllabus and following all of the requirements that it describes.

**Assignments**

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 selected 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 theoretical 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 any play by Wilde.

**Essay #3 (2,000 words):** Select two or three passages from Part IV and/or Part V, combine them to formulate a coherent theoretical construct and then apply that construct to one short story and two poems by Wilde not discussed in class, developing a theoretically-focussed argument about those texts. In essay format, use both your theoretical sources and Wilde’s texts 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 texts 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 these texts. You may refer to criticism of Wilde’s work, Wilde’s own theoretical essays, 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 your primary literary texts 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 theoretical material read and discussed up to and including Week 5 (that is, the readings from the Selden anthology and Wilde’s essays, "The Decay of Lying" and "The Critic as Artist," but not the poetry and short story by Wilde).

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. This schedule is tentative because of the importance of class discussion; if the class wants to spend more time discussing certain issues, we can do so.

Week 1: Introduction; Wilde, "The Ballad of Reading Gaol"; Part I, ch. 1, a, e

Week 2: Part I, ch. 1, h; ch. 2, a, d, g; ch. 3, a, c, e; Wilde, "Lord Arthur Saville’s Crime"

Week 3: Part I, ch. 4, a, d-h; Wilde, "The Decay of Lying"; Essay #1 due

Week 4: Part II, ch. 1, ch. 2; Wilde, "The Sphinx" and "The Critic as Artist"

Week 5: Part II, ch. 4; Part III, ch. 1; Wilde, "The Harlot’s House," "Symphony in Yellow," "La Dame Jaune," and "Remorse"

Week 6: Part III, ch. 3, ch. 4; test

Week 7: no classes

Week 8: Part III, ch. 6, ch. 7; Wilde, "The Portrait of Mr. W. H."; Essay #2 due

Week 9: Part IV, ch. 1, ch. 2

Week 10: Part IV, ch. 2 (cont.), ch. 3; Wilde, De Profundis

Week 11: Part IV, ch. 4; Part V, ch. 1; Essay #3 due

Week 12: Part V, ch. 2; Wilde, Salomé

Week 13: Part V, ch. 3; review