Literary Criticism: Theory

In this course, our focus will be on considering the paradigms that inform literature and literary study in order to explore possible ways of clarifying critical readings through theoretical reflection; that is, we will focus on concepts and approaches, not a canon of authors. 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. Note: this is a required course because of the importance of theoretical reflection and framing to the cogent analysis of texts; it is hoped that the material and skills that you learn in this course will assist you in upper-level English courses.

Required Texts:
Photocopied booklet (available at the university bookstore).

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 one week will be granted for one essay (that is, Essay #1 or Essay #2); 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) Any other extension 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 and evaluation grades unless you provide documentation for a cause that justifies the work’s lateness and explains why an appropriate extension was not secured in advance. 6) Compelling documentation would be required before I could consider accepting a written assignment after others have been returned or allowing an alternative seminar-presentation date. (NB: If your essay is going to be more than one week 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, or alternative assignments. 8) Papers not handed directly to me must be dated by one of the staff in the department and placed in my mailbox. *Do not place papers under my office door*: such papers may be damaged, lost, or dated days after they were submitted.

Essays should be well-written, well-argued and well-documented; you should strive, in all assignments, to select, develop, substantiate, organize and communicate your ideas and insights persuasively in ways that are appropriate to formal academic writing. It is assumed that you will consult the appropriate reference work if you are not sure, for example, about the meaning of a word, the MLA format for citing a journal article, or the proper placement of a comma, and so you should have, at least, a dictionary, a grammar handbook, the MLA Handbook, and a dictionary of literary terms available for consultation while you are working on your assignments. 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. One page in such a format, with a 12 cpi font, is usually about 250 words. If you are using the word-counter in a wordprocessing program, deduct 15% from its wordcount to get an accurate figure.

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* (note, for instance, that 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, or contact me via e-mail.

**Course Requirements:**
Essay #1 (15%): due February 5th
Essay #2 (35%): due March 17th
Seminar and Evaluations (30%, total):
  i) seminar (10%: 7% from professor and 3% from class evaluations); students must sign up for seminars no later than January 13th
  ii) submitted, written evaluations (20%), due April 2nd
Midterm (20%): in-class, February 12th

N.B.: This syllabus is intended to clarify the requirements for course readings and assignments, outline the regulations we all must follow, and offer some strategies for succeeding in the course. You are therefore responsible for knowing the contents of this syllabus.

**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 Chapter 1 or Chapter 4 of 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 (2,000 words): Select either a) one essay from *The Foucault Reader* and two passages from Part IV and/or Part V, or b) two essays from *The Foucault Reader*, combine them to formulate a coherent theoretical construct and then apply that construct to *The Cenci* or *Comus*, developing a theoretically focussed argument about the drama. In essay format, use both your theoretical sources and literary 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 the literary text 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 literary text. You may refer to criticism of the play, further material by the author of the play, and further material by the theorist(s) 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 text are key here; use such secondary sources judiciously, and be careful not to let them divert your argument from those key goals.
Seminars and Evaluations: The purpose of the evaluations is to help you learn what works well in theoretical discourse by examining analyses by your peers.

Seminars (10%): Each student must present a seminar of 10 minutes in length on one assigned passage from the Selden anthology. Seminars will be evaluated for the clarity with which the theoretical material is explained to the class. Students will receive a grade from the professor (worth 7%) and from the class (worth 3%). The class grade will be based on the average grade given for that seminar in the evaluations (I reserve the right not to include in that calculation any grade that is anomalously high or low).

Evaluations (20%): Students must evaluate, in writing, at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the seminars. On April 2nd, students must submit a suggested numerical grade and a written evaluation (about 50 words) for each seminar; clearly identify the name of the student and topic of the seminar for each evaluation. The evaluations will be evaluated, and graded, for clarity and the quality of the students' judgment of the accuracy and clarity of the seminars.

The Rules: All students must sign up for seminars by January 13th. If you miss your seminar, you will receive a grade of zero unless you can offer compelling documentation (such as a medical note); if you submit evaluations for less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the seminars, a penalty of 5% per missing evaluation will be deducted from your grade. Students must submit evaluations for seminars presented in their section of the course; evaluations for seminars presented in another section of 251B will not be considered or counted towards the $\frac{3}{4}$ minimum. Evaluations will be held in confidence by the professor.

**Tentative Reading and Lecture Schedule**

Please read the assigned passages and texts before the week's classes begin and bring all relevant texts to class. 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; but seminars, regardless, will proceed on the scheduled dates.

- **Week 1:** Introduction; Part I, Chapter 1 "Imaginative Representation" (Plato and Shelley)
  
  **THE "AUTHOR":**
  - **Week 2:** Part II, Chapter 2 (Longinus and Hazlitt); Part III, Chapter 4 (Keats, Eliot, Barthes); "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (booklet)
  - **Week 3:** Foucault, "What is an Author?"

  **LANGUAGE AND THE LITERARY:**
  - **Week 4:** Part I, Chapter 4 (Jonson, Locke, Saussure, Wittgenstein, Austin)
  - **Week 5:** Part II, Chapter 1 (all); Part III, Chapter 3 (all)
  - **Week 6:** Part III, Chapter 2 (all); Part III, Chapter 7 (all)
  - **Week 7:** no classes
  - **Week 8:** Part IV, Chapter 1 (all); Part IV, Chapter 2 (all); *Comus* (booklet)

  **REPRESENTATION AND IDEOLOGY:**
  - **Week 9:** Part I, Chapter 2 (Aristotle, Lukács, Barthes); Part I, Chapter 3 (Dryden, Wordsworth, Blake)
  - **Week 10:** Part V, Chapter 1 (all); Part V, Chapter 2 (all)
  - **Week 11:** Part V, Chapter 3 (all); Foucault, "Panopticism"; *The Cenci* (booklet)
  - **Week 12:** Foucault, "Docile Bodies"; Part III, Chapter 1 (all)
  - **Week 13:** Foucault, "Right of Death and Power over Life"; Part IV, Chapter 4 (all)