Literary Criticism: Practice

The material to be covered by this course is largely skills-oriented, and so class discussion, rather than lectures, will fill the greater portion of in-class time. The purpose of this course is to acquire, and learn how to use, some of the tools necessary for "close reading" and the formal analysis of texts, primarily poetry and narrative. Using theoretical guides and literary examples, we will a) explore the slipperiness of language and discourse as well as the literary structures through which such slippage is partially contained and managed, and b) develop an understanding of some key terms in the critical vocabulary through which such structures are described. Key terms involve poetic devices, linguistic, figurative, and rhetorical devices, and narrative elements. Poetic devices include the elements of prosody, musical devices (alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia), types of rhyme (end, internal, perfect, imperfect, masculine, feminine), and some conventional verse forms (ballad, Italian and English sonnets, blank verse, heroic couplet, free verse, shaped verse, and nonce patterns). Devices that concern language extend from diction (connotation, denotation, slang) and contradiction (paradox, oxymoron) to more indirect rhetorical vehicles such as allusion and a variety of tropes (symbol, metaphor, allegory, irony, personification, puns). We will also address the basic narratological components of speaker, setting (time, place), and point of view. By the end of the course, students should be able to define these terms, recognize examples in literary texts, and apply them effectively to excavate layers of meaning, explore the implications of formal structures, and communicate the results of that labour.

Required Texts:
Porter, James. Billy Bluff and the Squire (A Satire On Irish Aristocracy) and Other Writings. Ed. Brendan Clifford. Belfast: Athol, 1991. (This text will not be available in the bookstore until October.)

Strongly Recommended Text:

Course Requirements:
Assignment #1: 1,000 words due October 4th (20%)
Assignment #2: c. 1,000 words due October 25th (25%)
Assignment #3: 1,250-1,500 words due November 22nd (25%)
Exam, during examination period (30%)

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 assignment; 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 assignment 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 assignment after others have been returned. (NB: If your assignment 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 assignments.) 7) There will be no rewrites.

Assignments 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. All students should carefully read the section on plagiarism (§1.7) in the MLA Handbook as well as the university policy on academic offenses (printed in the Undergraduate Calendar). You must ensure that all assignment sources, whether quoted, paraphrased, or otherwise influential, are properly documented according to the MLA system. I reserve the right to interview a student on her/his assignment's contents before assigning the grade. I recognize the distinction between sloppy documentation and the theft 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, assignments 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.

Tentative Reading and Lecture Schedule

Please read the assigned passages before the week's classes begin, and bring the texts to class.

Week 1: Introduction; "The Linguistic Basis of Metaphor" (Scholes)
Week 2: "Metaphor as a Basis for Thought," "Metaphorical Concepts," and "Arguing with Metaphor" (Scholes); Ch. 6 & 7, Part III, of Gulliver's Travels (Swift); "It Worries Me to Know" (booklet)
Week 3: "Metaphor in Three Poems" and "Poetic Uses of Metaphor" (Scholes);
booklet
Week 4: booklet; Ass't #1 due (October 4th)
Week 5 (no class on Monday): "Story and Storyteller" (Scholes); Prefatory material (pp. 21-34) and Ch. 1, Part I, of Gulliver's Travels (Swift)
Week 6: "Character and Confrontation" (Scholes); Part II, Gulliver's Travels (Swift)
Week 7: "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift" (Swift); "What's in a Name" and "The Power of Names" (Scholes); Ass't #2 due (October 25th)
Week 8: 30 May, 18 July, and 15 August 1796 instalments of Billy Bluff and Squire Firebrand (Porter); "Tryal Of the Revd. Jas. Porter Of Greyabby" and the account of the trial from Classon Porter's Irish Presbyterian Biographical Sketches (Porter 81-87); The Examiner 14 (Nov. 9, 1710) (Swift)
Week 9: "Intertextuality," "Transforming Texts (1)" and "Transforming Texts (2)" (Scholes); "The Rights of Man" (Porter)
Week 10: 11 November 1796 instalment of Billy Bluff (Porter); "Interpreting Texts" (Scholes); "A Modest Proposal" (Swift)
Week 11: "Completing Texts: The Reader's Work" (Scholes); "Abolishing of Christianity in England" (Swift); Ass't #3 due (November 22nd)
Week 12: "Metaphor and Metonymy: Advertising" (Scholes); Letters to Downshire and 2 September 1796 instalment of Billy Bluff (Porter)
Week 13 (Monday only): review