Literary Criticism: Practice
The material to be covered by this course is largely skills-oriented and technical, so class discussion, rather than lectures, will fill a considerable portion of in-class time. The purpose of this course is to learn some of the terminology and tools necessary for close reading and the formal analysis of texts, especially verse. These skills will be essential for your current and later studies in the department. 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. By the end of the course, students should be able to define key terms (listed below), 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 in accordance with the conventions of literary criticism. Please note: Abrams’ Glossary, Barnet and Bedau’s Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing, and Gibaldi’s MLA Handbook are all resource texts that English majors will find useful throughout their studies in this department as well as this course and they were primarily selected to serve that purpose; the Glossary and MLA Handbook in particular are nearly as essential to English studies as a dictionary.

Key Terms:
Key terms involve poetic devices, linguistic, figurative, and rhetorical devices, and narrative elements. Poetic devices include musical devices (alliteration, assonance, consonance, onomatopoeia), types of rhyme (end, internal, perfect, imperfect, masculine, feminine), some conventional verse forms (ballad, Italian and English sonnets, blank verse, heroic couplet, free verse, shaped verse, and nonce patterns), and the basics of meter, that is, types of feet (especially iambic, anapestic, trochaic, and dactylic) and the proper terminology for describing the length of a line of verse (especially trimeter, tetrameter, pentameter, and hexameter). 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.

Required Texts:

Course Requirements:
Assignment #1: 1,500 words due October 8th (25%)
In-class essay on October 29th (15%)
Assignment #2: 1,500 words due November 12th (30%)
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 six 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 three 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 or allowing a make-up for the in-class essay. (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 (see MLA Handbook and the list of required texts—all texts are listed in MLA format). 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.

**Tentative Reading and Lecture Schedule**

Please read the assigned passages before the week's classes begin. *Romantic Women Poets (RWP)* should be brought to all classes after Week 2, but *Critical Thinking (CTRW)* and *Course Notes (CN)* need only be brought to those classes that deal with readings from those texts. Bringing the other books to class is optional.

**Week 1:** Introduction and the principles of documentation; Ch. 6 of *CTRW* (except "Interviewing Peers and Local Authorities" and "APA Format" in "Documentation" [187-91]); Abrams, "Connotation and Denotation" and "Paradox"; "It Worries Me to Know" (CN)

**Kinds of Diction and Figurative Language**

Weeks 2 and 3: Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense" (CN); Landon, "The Factory" and "Three Extracts from the Diary of a Week" (RWP 145, 147); Abrams, "Allusion"; O'Brien, "Ode to Milton" (RWP 64); Coleridge, "Kubla Khan" (CN); Robinson, "To the Poet Coleridge" (RWP 89)

Weeks 3 and 4: Abrams, "Figurative Language," "Hyperbole," "Irony"; Plato, "Myth of the Cave" (CTRW); Baillie, from "Thunder" and from "Wind" (RWP 67-68); Hunter, "November, 1784" (RWP 43); Yearsley, "To Mr *****" (RWP 60); Williams, "An Address to Poetry" (RWP 47)

**Rhyme, Meter, and Musical Devices**

Week 5: Abrams, "Alliteration," "Assonance," "Consonance," "Onomatopoeia," "Meter," and "Rhyme"; Robinson, "January, 1795" (RWP 81); Browne, "The Poetess" (RWP 151); Smith, "Studies by the Sea" and "The Swallow" (RWP 38-39); Assignment #1 due (October 8th)

Week 6: Hoole, "Cumberland Rocks" (RWP 114); Tighe, from Canto I of *Psyche* (RWP 110); Radcliffe, all selections (RWP 93-97)

**Verse Forms and Narrative Elements**
Weeks 7 and 8: Abrams, "Stanza," "Sonnet," "Heroic Couplet," and "Blank Verse"; all sonnets by Seward and Smith (RWP 1-7, 30-35); Barbauld, "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven" (RWP 21-23); Robinson, "The Progress of Melancholy" (RWP 82); Baillie, "Address to a Steamvessel" (RWP 72); In-class essay (October 29th)

Week 9: Abrams, "Concrete Poetry," "Ballad," "Narrative," "Setting" and "Point of View"; Herbert, "The Altar" (CN); Barrett, "The Romantick of Margaret" (RWP 185); Chopin, "The Story of an Hour" (CTRW)

Week 10: Shulman, "Love is a Fallacy" (CTRW); Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (CN); Assignment #2 due (November 12th)

**Class Cancelled on November 14th**

Review
Week 11: Swift, "A Modest Proposal" (CTRW); Housman, "Loveliest of Trees" (CTRW); Barbauld, "Inscription for an Ice-House" and "Washing-Day" (RWP 18-19)
Week 12: Smith, "Beachy Head" (RWP 40); "The Rime of the Auncient Waggonere" (CN)

Assignments

NB: Your precise use of proper terms is an essential element of these assignments: you are strongly advised to consult Abrams' Glossary and the list of "Key Terms" (see above) regularly while you are writing Assignments #1 and #2 and while you are studying for the in-class essay. Please feel free to consult with me if the meaning of any of the relevant terms is unclear to you.

Assignment #1 (1,500 words, 25%): Discuss the deployment of diction and tropes in one of the following poems: Barrett's "The Tempest," Yearsley's "Dedicated to Louis XV" or Smith's The Emigrants (all selections from Book I and II in RWP). Your remarks should be comprehensive as well as analytical: you should strive to address most of the tropes as well as examine a number of instances in which denotation and connotation are significant, but should do so within an analytical framework in which you make an argument about the deployment of referential and figurative language in the poem. Possible bases for analysis include relationships between the tropes as well as between the tropes and diction, the implications of variations or the absence of variation in the kinds of tropes used, and the rhetorical effectiveness of the figures.

In-class essay (15%): You will be given a selection of verse and asked to analyze it in terms of rhyme, meter, and musical devices, and then to convey (with the proper terminology) that analysis in an argument about the appropriateness (or inappropriateness) of the formal elements to the content of the verse.

Assignment #2 (c. 1,500 words, 30%): Write two poems with a total of 30-40 lines and append a commentary that analyzes the verse. You should note any narratological components (speaker, setting, point of view), verse form, meter, and rhyme scheme and their relation to the content, as well as any other points you consider of formal interest; you should also note, and explain, any departures you choose to make from the regular patterns or conventions. Each poem must be at least 10 lines long and use different formal structures (that is, verse form, rhyme scheme, meter). For instance, a 24-line ballad in tetrameter and a 10-line piece of blank verse are a permissible pair, but an Italian sonnet and a nonce pattern that is structurally similar to an English sonnet with an extra couplet will be considered a duplication of form. Please consult with me if you are not sure whether your choices meet this requirement. As the numerical and taxonomical terms of this assignment suggest, creativity and artistic quality are not criteria, though all of the verse must, of course, be original: the objective here is to demonstrate your understanding of poetic structure, in verse and analytical prose, and I will not be making any aesthetic judgments.