

To what extent are masters of the essay form also artists? What are the hazards for poets writing criticism? What are the hazards for poems that *are* criticism? When an author considers the same theme in different genres, how does genre constrain our own criticisms of the works? As scholars of literature, we are accustomed to writing essays about literature, but should we hold our writing to the standards of art? How do those standards differ from the standards of criticism? This tutorial will ponder the writing of authors known for their contributions in different genres but all of whom confront the questions of criticism in their work.

The class also serves as an introduction to writing longer critical papers; the tutorial culminates in the junior essay, a research paper of 20 to 25 pages. Throughout the semester, smaller assignments leading up to the essay will be due. These include a practice abstract written about one of our readings, an annotated bibliography, a prospectus for the essay, and a draft. Tutorial meetings will provide a forum for discussing these assignments and the developing project of the essay. We will also meet with Odile Harter, the English Department's Research Librarian, to explore the remarkable resources available through Harvard's libraries that may spur and sustain excellent projects.

Assessment will follow the framework below and all assignments, including those not noted on the syllabus, must be completed to receive a passing grade in the course:

- Abstract (1 page): 5%
- Annotated Bibliography (2 pages): 5%
- Short Critical Paper (5-6 pages): 10%
- Prospectus (2 pages): 10%
- Draft (12-15 pages): 20%
- Junior Essay (20-25 pages): 25%
- Participation including Short Conference Talk: 25%

Individual as well as broader considerations of the junior essay are built into the requirements of the tutorial. Meeting with the Departmental Writing Fellow at least once is mandatory as is attendance at the departmental wide Junior Tutorial Workshops.

Finally, participation in a course is what makes it transformative or dull. Please come to each tutorial session ready to make contributions and to listen intently to your colleagues. *Ad astra per aspera.*

Week One

Epigraph: What Should Critics Do?

Horace, *Ars Poetica* (c 19 BCE)

Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, no. 58 [On True and False Wit] (1711); no. 409 [On Taste] (1712); no. 411 [The Pleasures of the Imagination] (1712).

Terrance Hayes, "Ars Poetica for the Ones Like Us" from *How to be Drawn* (2015).

Denise Gigante, Introduction to *The Great Age of the English Essay* (2008).

Week Two

Samuel Johnson: The Choice of Life of a Poet

"The Vanity of Human Wishes" (1749). *The Rambler*, no. 14 [On the Life of an Author vs. his Writing] (1750). *Rasselas* (1759). *The Idler*, no. 84 [On Biography vs. Autobiography] (1759).

We will also read and discuss entries from Johnson's dictionary after agreeing on a short list of terms important for the questions of our tutorial.

Secondary Reading. Leopold Damrosch, *The Uses of Johnson's Criticism* (1976): Chapter III—Style and Criticism; Chapter VI—The Greatness of the *Lives*.

**What defines an argument?
Abstract (1 page) of one of the Damrosch chapters due Week Two**

Week Three

Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Poet as Philosopher as Critic

Prose. Essays 2 and 3 from *Essays on the Principles of Genial Criticism* (1814). *Biographia Literaria I* (1818).

Poetry. "Monody on the Death of Chatterton" (1796). "Christabel" (1816). *Poetical Works* (1828)--Prose in Rhyme: or, Epigrams, Moralities, and Things Without A Name. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1834).

Short critical paper (5-6 pages) due Week Three

Week Four

Appraising the Critic: Coleridge at continuation

Secondary Reading.

The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge (2002): James Engell, Chapter IV—*Biographia Literaria*; Seamus Perry, Chapter VII—The Talker; Angela Esterhammer, Chapter IX—The Critic.

Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism* (2003): Chapter III—Politics in Reserve: Coleridge and Godwin.

How should we evaluate the authority of sources?

Week Five

William Hazlitt: *The Artist Becomes Critic*

“Why the Arts are not Progressive” (1814). “On the Imitation of Nature” (1814). “On Gusto” (1816). “On Imitation” (1816). “On Reading Old Books” (1821). “On Living to One’s-Self” (1821). “On People with One Idea” (1821). “On Going a Journey” (1822). “On Familiar Style” (1822). “On the Prose Style of Poets” (1822). “My First Acquaintance with Poets” (1823). “On Reading New Books” (1827). “On Reason and Imagination” (n.d.).

Secondary Reading. David Bromwich, *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic* (1999): Chapter I—Imagination; Chapter V—From Imitation to Expression.

*What counts as evidence?
Prospectus (2 pages) due Week Five*

Week Six

Matthew Arnold: *Pedagogy and Poetry*

Prose. “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1864). “Sweetness and Light” from *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). “Wordsworth” (1879).

Poetry. “Shakespeare” (1849). “Self-Dependence” (1852). “Self-Deception” (1852). “The Scholar-Gipsy” (1853). “Dover Beach” (1867). “The Progress of Poesy” (1867).

Secondary Reading. Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (1949): Chapter VII—The Spirit of Criticism; Chapter IX—Culture or Anarchy.

*What does not count as evidence and how may it be useful in a critical paper?
Annotated bibliography (2 pages) due Week Six*

Week Seven

Oscar Wilde: *Is Art Separate from Life?*

Fiction. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).

Dialogue as Essay. “The Critic as Artist” (1891).

Secondary Reading.

Lawrence Danson, *Wilde’s intentions: the artist in his criticism* (1997): Chapter VI—The Critic as Artist. Michael Gillespie, *Oscar Wilde and the poetics of ambiguity* (1996): Chapter II—Cultural and Aesthetic Responses in Wilde’s Essays Approaching the Picture of Dorian Gray.

How do transitions work? Identify three from this week’s secondary reading and analyze them.

Week Eight

Virginia Woolf: *The Common Reader*

Fiction. “Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street” (1922).

Essays. “Addison” (1925). “Modern Fiction” (1925). “The Modern Essay” (1925). “A Room of One’s Own” (1929). “William Hazlitt” (1932). “How Should One Read a Book?” (1932).

Secondary Reading. *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2000): Hermione Lee, Chapter V—Virginia Woolf’s essays; Maria Dibattista, Chapter VII—Virginia Woolf and the language of authorship.

How do transitions work (continued)? Identify two transitions from this week’s Woolf essays and another two from the essays about Woolf and analyze all.

Week Nine

Ralph Ellison Writes Music

From *Living with Music* (comp. 2001):

Fiction. “This Music Demanded Action”. “Trueblood’s Song”. “Peter Wheatstraw, the Devil’s Son-in-Law”. “Keep to the Rhythm”.

Essays. “Living with Music”. “Ralph Ellison’s Territorial Vantage”. “On Bird, Bird-Watching, and Jazz”. “Flamenco”. “Blues People”.

Secondary Reading. Horace Porter, *Jazz Country: Ralph Ellison in America* (2001): Chapter II—Jazz Icons. David Yaffe, *Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing* (2009): Chapter II—Listening to Ellison.

How have you evaluated the authority of sources for your essay?

Week Ten

Maggie Nelson: Once Again, is Art Separate from Life?

Memoir. *The Argonauts* (2015).

Secondary Reading. Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, translated Richard Howard (1978). Molly Fisher, “The Beauty and the Limitations of Being Normal” (2015). Kathryn Bernard, “Not Knowing” (2015).

Junior essay draft (12-15 pages) due Week Ten

Weeks Eleven and Twelve

Open Workshops to Discuss Junior Essay Progress and Consider Parting Questions

What are different methods to invite a reader into an essay?

How conclusive are conclusions?

Discuss these questions in reference to your current draft, your ideal one, and a secondary reading from the course that you found excellent.

Finally, what is an essay and what can it do now? Ponder this while you read David Foster Wallace’s Introduction to Best American Essays 2007, “Deciderization 2007—a Special Report.”

Required Junior Tutorial Conference and Junior Essay Due

*Dates to be announced for the Conference and essay submission deadline
Submit the essay in person to the English Department and via email to Porter White.*

Note on the Honor Code

Becoming a responsible scholar demands that you read secondary literature carefully and discuss nascent ideas with intellectually precise people both within and outside the academy. Acknowledging the influence that others have on your own thought is critical to encouraging an open exchange of ideas. Cite clearly and when in doubt, please get in touch.