

ENGL 460:
Classic Literary Criticism
Fall 2022

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This course surveys foundational works of literary criticism from antiquity to the 20th century. Authors discussed include some of the most influential writers in the western tradition: Plato and Aristotle; Augustine and Dante; Johnson and Pope; Hume and Kant; Nietzsche and Freud; Saussure and Woolf; Barthes and Derrida; Rich and Morrison. As this list suggests, the discussion of literature has attracted poets and philosophers alike for millennia and our task will be twofold: to sharpen our sense of the issues that have engaged these writers and continue to engage us today; and to consider why the *idea* of literature, its nature and purpose, has been for so many different writers such a deep and abiding concern. In this view, the canon of literary criticism offers more than a catalogue of critical methodologies; it offers a remarkably various and powerful vision of the importance, and profound humanity, of the literary enterprise.



Rembrandt van Rijn, Aristotle with a Bust of Homer (1653)

Proposed Assignments:

Short essay on a selected critic and literary text (25%)
Research essay proposal/outline (10%)
Research paper (40%)
Final Exam (25%)

Proposed Texts: (Readings will be determined, in part, by the interests of the class; the list, below, is provisional and meant to be suggestive.)

Plato, *Phaedrus* (selections)
Aristotle, *Poetics* (selections)
Augustine, *Confessions* (selections)
Dante, *Letter to Can Grande*
Johnson, “Preface to Shakespeare”
Kant, “On the Sublime”
Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (selections)
Freud, “The Dream Work,” from *Interpretation of Dreams*
Woolf, “Shakespeare’s Sister”
Jakobson, “Metaphor and Metonymy”
Barthes, “The Death of the Author”
Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence”
Morrison, “Unspeakable Things Unspoken”
Derrida, “Plato’s Pharmacy”