730:362: Philosophy of Literature

The course will deal with such questions as the definition of literature, the ontology of literary works, the nature of fiction, the emotional reaction of the audience to fiction, the problem of interpretation, the problem of literary value, and the experience of silent reading as opposed to the experience of literature as performance. The teaching goal of the course is, of course, to master the material as outlined below. But it is hoped as well that the philosophical analysis of literature with which the course concerns itself will have the lasting effect of stimulating students to both appreciate and think about the great literary works of the canon in their future lives outside of the academy.


Below is a tentative schedule for the course:

Week 1: organization and readings from Plato and Aristotle.

Weeks 2 and 3: the definition of literature.

Weeks 4 and 5: the nature of fiction.

Weeks 6 and 7: emotion in fiction.

Weeks 8 and 9: the problem of literary interpretation.

Weeks 10 and 11: literary value.

Weeks 12 and 13: the ontology of the literary work.

Weeks 14 and 15: the experience of reading.

There will be a mid-term and a final examination in the course. And there will be a short term paper if the instructor deems it appropriate.