

EN 8533
Seminar in English Literature
Dr. Johnson: the Poetry, the Tales, the Letters, and the Man
Professor: Rich Raymond
Spring Semester 2009, Thursdays, 3:30-6:00



Joshua Reynolds's portrait of Johnson

Dear Students:

In our fifteen weeks together, we will strive to know Samuel Johnson "as he really was" by reading his greatest poems and his philosophical narrative *Rasselas*, as well as selections from his criticism, his moral essays, his critical biographies, and his letters. We will also catch several glimpses of "Dr. Johnson" through the eyes of his friend and biographer, James Boswell, and through those of his greatest twentieth-century biographer, Walter Jackson Bate.

As we read and discuss Johnson's works together, I will also ask you to

- Present an oral report on an article or book chapter focused on *Rasselas* or on one of Johnson's other major works
- Prepare a critical, documented essay on *Rasselas* or on another work by Johnson
- Keep a reader-response journal with reflections on daily readings
- Write a mid-term essay on *The Rambler*, selections from Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, and other readings
- Write a final examination focused on *Rasselas*, "The Vanity of Human Wishes," "London," the "Preface to Shakespeare," and selections from *The Lives of the Poets*

"We grow more happy as our minds take a wider range."

Johnson, *Rasselas*

"And he will be seen as he really was; for I profess to write, not his panegyrick, which must be all praise, but his Life; which great and good as he was, must not be supposed to be entirely perfect."

Boswell, *Life of Johnson*