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Fall 9-1-2001

ENLT 420.01: History of Criticism and Theory

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Recommended Citation

Knight, Christopher, "ENLT 420.01: History of Criticism and Theory" (2001). *University of Montana Course Syllabi*. 6099.

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Autumn 2001

English 420: History of Criticism and Theory

Texts:

Richter, David H., *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*.
Bedford Books.
Steiner, George. *Real Presences*. University of Chicago Press.
Kermode, Frank. *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*. Harvard
University Press.

Plan:

The aim of the course is to offer an historical survey of some of those key critical and theoretical texts that continue to inform our understanding of literature, in its most critical and interpretative phase. We will begin with selections from Plato (*The Republic*, Book X) and Aristotle (*Poetics*), and move chronologically forward to the present day. The fullness of our discussions and time will dictate the number of texts that we will read, though every effort will be made to insure that the texts are historically representative. The tentative plan is to read the following:

Horace, *The Art of Poetry*
Longinus, *On the Sublime*
Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*
Aphra Behn, *An Epistle to the Reader from The Dutch Lover; Preface to The Lucky Chance*
John Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*
Germaine De Staël, *Essay on Fiction; On Women Writers*
Samuel Johnson, *Preface to Shakespeare, The Rambler, No 4, Rasselas*, ch. 10
David Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste*
Immanuel Kant, from *Critique of Judgment*
William Wordsworth, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*
S. T. Coleridge, from *Biographia Literaria*
John Keats, *Letters*
Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*
Matthew Arnold, from *The Study of Poetry*
Henry James, *The Art of Fiction*
T. S. Eliot, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*

Virginia Woolf, from *A Room of One's Own*
F. R. Leavis, from *The Great Tradition*
William Empson, Epilogue to *Seven Types of Ambiguity*

Among more contemporary theorists, my hope is that we will have time to read selections from Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Paul de Man. Meanwhile, as the course will be focussed around the matter of hermeneutics—the science of interpretation—I would like to end the course with two contemporary full-length texts that meet this subject head on:

Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative*
George Steiner, *Real Presences: Is there anything in what we say?*

Requirements:

Participation in class discussions is expected and attendance is mandatory. You can anticipate numerous quizzes upon the readings, including readings that may be named at a later date. Missed quizzes cannot be made up. Your grade, meanwhile, will be based upon the following: a term paper (25%), to be assigned at the semester's mid-point and to be due late in the semester, a mid-term examination (25%), a final examination (25%), and attendance and participation (quiz grades included; also your participation in a group presentation) (20%). Regarding attendance, you are permitted three absences without penalty; each subsequent absence will result in a subtraction of five points from the twenty points allocated to the participation and attendance portion of your grade (e.g., 20% to 15% for the fourth absence, 15% to 10% for the fifth absence and so forth). Late arrivals are more than frowned upon, and if you need, for some good reason, to leave class early, you are required to notify me ahead of time; otherwise, an early departure will count as an absence from class.