General Course Description
This course introduces students to the key writers in modern Irish literature. Beginning with the work of W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory at the end of the nineteenth century it will explore the development of Ireland’s national literature as the country moved towards independence. The subsequent century was a period of profound change in politics, society and culture in Ireland and literature was at the heart of these developments, often playing a crucial role in shaping events and outcomes as well as reflecting reactions to the country’s politics and social mores.

Literature too was changing as new movements emerged and as new forms of expression developed. The literature we will explore will include exemplary models of the innovative forms that emerged throughout the century. Our reading will include a range of literary genres; poetry, prose and drama. Students will also be introduced to a variety of forms of interpretation and analysis that will enrich our understanding of the writing we explore.

Many Irish writers have achieved world-wide acclaim. Examining their works within the historical context in which they were written gives us greater insight and allows us to see each as part of a developing cultural and political process where nationalism, religion, gender and sexuality were all significant issues.
Course Objectives

On completion of the course students will be equipped with a broad understanding of Ireland’s often difficult transformation from a neglected part of the British Empire to a successful European state, all the while producing world-class writers of enormous talent and innovation. Students will be well versed in their contribution to national and to world literature.

This course will also provide a good grounding in literary analysis, introducing a range of critical tools and approaches as well as a critical vocabulary that will lead to informed and well argued critical appraisals of literary works.

Course Outcomes

- Students will have a good understanding of the development of modern Irish literature in English.
- Students will be able to identify the major themes of Irish writing in the last 150 years.
- Students will learn how Irish literary culture was both promoted and repressed by the new Irish state.
- Students will be able to evaluate how individual writers reacted to political and historical changes throughout this time and will be able to critically assess the relationship between individual writers in an Irish context.
- Students will be aware of how form and content are intimately linked in the major works we study.
Course Outline

WEEK 2 (lecture 1)  INTRODUCTION:
An introduction to critical terms, theories and approaches and also to Ireland in the late 19th century

WEEK 3  Field Trip: The Abbey Theatre. Backstage Tour (4:00 -5:30PM) and performance of Observe The Sons Of Ulster Marching Towards The Somme, by Frank McGuinness, 8:00PM

WEEK 4  LADY AUGUSTA GREGORY & W.B. YEATS: Cathleen ní Houlihan and selected poems (provided)
Nationalism, cultural movements at the turn of the century

WEEK 5  J.M SYNGE: The Playboy of The Western World
Ireland’s dreams and realities

WEEK 6  JAMES JOYCE: Dubliners
Despair, depression and deliverance

WEEK 7  SAMUEL BECKETT – Guest lecturer

WEEK 8  Mid Term Break

WEEK 9  PATRICK KAVANAGH: Guest lecturer. The Great Hunger

WEEK 10  EDNA O’BRIEN: The Country Girls
Innocence and Experience

WEEK 11  JOHN McGAHERN: Amongst Women
Myth and Motherland: the nationalist legacy

WEEK 12  MODERN IRISH WOMEN’S POETRY (extracts provided)
The Return of the Repressed

WEEK 13  REVISION & ESSAY DEADLINE (2000 -3000 words)

WEEK 14  EXAMINATION

All of the above mentioned texts must be read as well as the material supplied.
GRADING CRITERIA

Attendance and participation (30%)

Tuition will be through formal lectures, discussions and in class exercises. Students are expected to have read the designated text for each week in advance of each session.

Full class participation will include raising questions, discussing aspects of each text/context and associated topics and responding verbally or in short, written class assignments to the material we are exploring each week.

Essay (30%)

The essay should be 2,000 - 3,000 words long and is due week 13.

Essays should directly respond to the question posed or the topic set. Relevance is extremely important.

You can use the following list as a check-list before submission:

All essays must be typed and double spaced.

All quotes must be clearly designated by ‘quotation marks’ and duly acknowledged.

Full references for all sources must be provided either in end-notes or foot-notes.

A full bibliography must be provided.

Examination (40%)

In this examination you will be required to answer two questions from a selection on the paper. You are not to select the same topic on which you have written your essay assignment.

There will be 12 questions, 8 dealing directly with the individual authors or groups/pairs of authors as we’ve covered them and 4 questions of a more general nature.
Secondary Reading

Barry, Peter, Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)


Murphy, Andrew, Seamus Heaney, (London: Macmillan, 1987)

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