

Modern Irish Literature Syllabus

Course Listing : CAS EN 392

Lecturer Information

Lecturer: Dr Eibhlín Evans (elbinlinevans@hotmail.com)

Office: Boston University - DCU Office By Request

Credits: 4BU Credits + 3 Hub Units

Class Times

TBC

Venues

TBC

General Information

Course Overview

For such a small island Ireland punches well above its weight on the global literary stage and Irish writers are feted the world over. The twentieth century saw four Irish Nobel Laureates awarded. (Yeats, Shaw, Beckett, Heaney). Dublin holds a UNESCO City of Literature permanent designation. Our literary culture is diverse, inclusive and admired internationally.

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 trace the developments in Ireland's literary culture through the often turbulent twentieth century, right up to recent times. Literature was at the heart of Irish culture throughout these times and remains at the centre of Irish cultural life and identity today. We will chart the initially positive influence of cultural nationalist movements, through to more resistant

moments as the changes and challenges of the twentieth century were registered in Irish society.

Throughout this period Literature itself 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 and original voices that emerged in Ireland. Our reading will include a range of literary genres; poetry, prose, drama, memoir and short stories.

Students will also be introduced to a variety of forms of interpretation and analysis that will enrich our understanding of the writing we explore. Examining each work within the literary and the historical context in which it was written gives us greater insight and allows us to see each work as part of a developing literary, social and political process where nationalism, religion, gender and sexuality were all significant issues.

(HUB) Learning Outcomes

Aesthetic Exploration (One Unit)

1. Students will demonstrate knowledge and appreciation of notable works in literature and/or the arts, including the cultural contexts in which those works were created, and be able to identify their ongoing significance and relevance.
2. Students will demonstrate the reasoning skills and vocabulary necessary to interpret a work of art (literature, music, visual arts, etc.).
3. Students will produce evaluative, analytical, or creative works that demonstrate an understanding of the characteristics – such as genres, modes, styles and cultural history – of at least one literary or artistic medium.

Global Citizenship and Intercultural Learning (Two Units)

1. Students will demonstrate detailed understanding of at least two cultural contexts through foreign language or culture study at BU, participation in a language or culture living-learning community at BU, or study-abroad. This will involve reflection

on the challenges and pleasures students discover in orienting themselves in new and unfamiliar cultures.

To meet the Hub areas listed above, on completion of this course students will:

- ❖ have a good understanding of the development of modern Irish literature in English and in Hiberno-English including the cultural contexts in which these works were created. (Aesthetic Exploration)
- ❖ be able to identify the significance and relevance of key works in Irish Literature, both at home and abroad and by the end of the course will be practiced in evaluating and interpreting works of Irish literature. (Aesthetic Exploration)
- ❖ be able to identify the major themes of Irish writing in the last 150 years and to understand how these themes were influenced by historical and political challenges (Aesthetic Exploration)
- ❖ be able to identify and to discuss different literary genres and to identify characteristics within these in relation to Irish writing (Aesthetic Exploration)
- ❖ be alert to the central role played by cultural nationalism in shaping Irish writing (Aesthetic Exploration and Global Citizenship)
- ❖ be able to consider how Ireland struggled with the challenges of post-colonialism and how this influenced the state's relationship to writing and to writers, how Irish literary culture was both promoted and repressed by the new Irish state. (Aesthetic Exploration)

- ❖ be able to understand how censorship impeded and inspired Irish writers (Aesthetic Exploration)
- ❖ 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. (Aesthetic Exploration)
- ❖ be alert to the significant symbols within Irish culture and their adaptation and evolution in Irish writing over time. (Aesthetic Exploration)
- ❖ be proficient in literary analysis and able to apply a range of critical tools and approaches, and be able to employ a critical vocabulary in informed and well-argued appraisals of literary works. (Aesthetic Exploration)
- ❖ will be informed of and encouraged to make comparisons with American culture and society and that of Ireland at each contemporary juncture in our studies. Students' attention will also be drawn to those cultural differences that currently prevail. (Global Citizenship)
- ❖ will consider the comparative isolationist drive and the insularity of Ireland against the inclusive, cosmopolitan and forward-looking America of industrial and scientific success; the multi-cultural *milieu* of the US and the mono-cultural ambitions of Ireland's cultural nationalism as these forces shaped our respective societies throughout the twentieth century. (Global Citizenship)
- ❖ 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 apprised of Ireland's distinctive literary culture and its influence on American and British writing. (Global Citizenship)

- ❖ be able to compare Irish society's changing attitudes to Irish writing over the decades as we move through the twentieth century and to discuss the local and global factors (the sexual revolution, feminism, racial issues, freedom of speech etc;) influencing these changes. (Global Citizenship)
- ❖ be able to evaluate and compare the reception individual writers' works received on initial publication in Ireland and why that reception differed from that same work's reception elsewhere, especially in the US. (Global Citizenship)
- ❖ be able to discuss the importance of the role of writing in Irish society, its transformation from a revolutionary tool to an arena of respected international renown and influence. (Global Citizenship)

Instructional Format

Class time (3 hours) will alternate between lectures, seminar discussions, and group activities/field trips. When possible, Irish writers will visit for discussion and talks.

Course Bibliography

Each week we will focus on a different author/group of writers. Where the set text is a novel, memoir and or play, books are supplied to students. When studying Irish poetry, and one short play (W.B. Yeats, *Caitlín Ni Houlihán*) photocopied booklets, compiled by the course leader, are given to students.

We will also read the following, in order of study:

W.B. Yeats & Lady Augusta Gregory, *Caitlín Ni Houlihán*

W.B. Yeats, Selected Poems

J.M. Synge, *The Playboy of The Western World*

James Joyce, *Dubliners*

Edna O'Brien, *The Country Girls*

Seamus Heaney, Selected Poems

Selected Poems by Irish Women of 80's and '90's.

Donal Ryan, *The Spinning Heart*

Kevin Powers, *Bad Day in Blackrock*

(This list is subject to alteration)

Supplementary Texts

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

Boland, Eavan, *Object Lessons: The Life of The Woman and The Poet in Our Time*, (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1995)

Brown, Terence, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-1985* (London: Fontana Press, 1985)

Brown, Terence, *The Life of W. B. Yeats* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1999)

Corcoran, Neil. *After Yeats and Joyce: Reading Modern Irish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997)

Theo Dorgan, (ed.) *Irish Poetry Since Kavanagh* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996)

Eagleton, Terry, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983)

Foster, R.F., *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 2002)

Kiberd, Declan, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of The Modern Nation*. (London: Vintage, 1996)

Declan Kiberd, 'Irish Literature and Irish History', in R. F. Foster (ed.) *The Oxford History of Ireland* (Oxford University press, 2001), pp 230-81.

Kiberd, Declan, *Irish Classics* (London: Granta, 2000)

Foster, R.F., *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972* (London: Penguin, 2002)

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

Course Material

Each week we will focus on a different author/group of writers. Where the set text is a novel, memoir or play, these books are supplied to students. In terms of poetry, photocopied booklets compiled by the course leader are given to students.

Supplementary photocopied handouts are prepared and distributed in relevant weeks to cover key topics, for example, What is Literature?, Cultural Nationalism etc;

Assignments and Grading

Assessment for the course consists of class attendance and participation (10%), short writing assignments (20%), essay (40%) and a terminal essay-style examination (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 and if a short written assignment is required to submit this.

Class Participation and Attendance (10%)

Full class participation will include raising questions, discussing aspects of each text/context and associated topics and actively engaging with group exploration of the material we are examining each week.

Short Writing Assignments (20%)

In these assignments students will make intercultural comparisons between Irish and American culture. Over the four assignments students will chart their observations of cultural differences they identify, moving from initial reactions to more analytical and informed assessments at the end of the program. We will focus on the role of literature in both cultures as well as issues of race, diversity, equality and identity.

Essay (40%)

Essay titles will be supplied well in advance of the essay deadline. These will be in the form of a question or invitation to discussion. A wide range of topics will be offered. Some titles will require a general exploration of an area while others will relate directly to a single author, poet or group of poets.

Students should directly respond to the question posed or the topic set. Relevance is extremely important. Essays must be discursive, must contain a well-argued analysis and must approach a conclusion. Proper and full referencing is essential and will be graded. Theoretical insight, wide research and reading alongside clear and direct expression will contribute to high grades.

Final Exam (30%)

All exam questions will be based on areas/works covered in the program of lectures and discussions. There will be an extensive choice. Students must answer two questions excluding the specific topic/author on which they wrote their essay. Questions are designed to test the students' appreciation of the importance of different literary interventions at different times in Ireland's cultural history and to emphasise the significance of particular forms and tropes in that writing as creative socio/political interventions.

Plagiarism

It is every student's responsibility to read the Boston University statement on plagiarism, Which is available in the Academic Conduct Code. Students are advised that the penalty against students on a Boston University program for cheating on examinations or for plagiarism may be ". . . expulsion form the program or the University or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Committee on Student Academic Conduct, subject to approval by the Dean."

Attendance Statement

While on a Boson University Study Abroad Program, students continue their academic progress earning BU credits towards their undergraduate degree while abroad. Students

who enrol in a BU Study Abroad program do so with the understanding that these are academic programs with scheduled class meetings, internship placements and program-wide activities and excursions. Attendance is expected and required. Personal travel and visits from family and friends will not be considered excused absences while on a BU Study Abroad program. Students are expected to adhere to the local attendance policies as stated above under *Class Participation and Attendance*.

Electronic Devices

Students are permitted to use laptops during this course for notetaking purpose, for relevant online searches and for accessing instructional materials. Cell phones must be silent and out of sight.

N.B. Students must retain an electronic copy of all work submitted for assessment.

Course Schedule

For almost every week of the course a novel, play, memoir or collection of poetry will be assigned. This material must be read prior to classes. This is vital for contributing to class discussion and participation (10% of the grade). Students will be directed to appropriate chapters/sections of the supplementary reading where appropriate. Handouts will be given when appropriate.

Detailed Schedule

Class	Author, Text, Lecture Title, Focus
Week 1	Introduction: An introduction to literary studies, to critical concepts and terms and to Ireland's cultural and literary scene in the late 19 th century. W.B. Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory, <i>Cathleen Ní Houlihán</i>. A Literature of Our Own An introduction to cultural nationalism in Ireland. Selected early poetry of W.B. Yeats. (supplied)

- Week 2** **W.B. Yeats - later poetry**
 “A terrible beauty is born”.
 Lecture and Field Trip to the W.B. Yeats Exhibition at the National Library of Ireland.
- Week 3** **J.M. Synge, *The Playboy of The Western World***
 Ireland’s Dreams and Realities
 Exploration of the play as an interrogation of the danger of constructing identities.
- Week 4** **James Joyce, *Dubliners***
 A celebration or a castigation of a city and its people?
 We examine Joyce’s extraordinary short story collection, his portrait of his native city to decide.
- Week 5** **Edna O’Brien, *The Country Girls*.**
 Ireland’s movement from Innocence to Experience
 We explore the novel’s initial reception in Ireland and its alleged “slur on the sanctity of Irish womanhood”.
- Week 6** Mid-Semester break
- Week 7** **Seamus Heaney (poems supplied)**
“images and symbols adequate to our predicament”
 Exploration of the work of Ireland’s fourth Nobel laureate, Seamus Heaney.
- Week 8** Field Trip to Seamus Heaney Exhibition and other literary sites in Dublin city.
- Week 9** **Selected Irish Women Poets of 80’s and 90’s (supplied)**
 Waking Up/Making Up

We explore a range of poetry from a very self-conscious counter-culture in Irish writing from these decades, that of new Irish women poets. Second wave feminism in Ireland at this time is also explored.

- Week 10** **Donal Ryan, *The Spinning Heart***
The legacy of The Celtic Tiger examined
- Week 11** **Kevin Powers, *Bad Day In Blackrock***
Brave New World?
- Week 12** Revision Session
- Week 14** Examination

