

Modern Irish Literature Syllabus

Course Listing : CAS EN 392

Lecturer: Dr Adel Cheong (acheong@bu.edu)

Office: Boston University - DCU Office By Request

Credits: 4BU Credits + 3 Hub Units

Class Times: TBC

Venues: TBC

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)

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ Students will demonstrate the reasoning skills and vocabulary necessary to interpret a work of art (literature, music, visual arts, etc.).
- ❖ 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 (One Unit)

- ❖ 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, Selected Poems
- ❖ James Joyce, *Dubliners*
- ❖ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*
- ❖ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*
- ❖ Seamus Heaney, selected poems
- ❖ Selection of Queer Poetry
- ❖ Claire Keegan, *Small Things Like These* (to be procured yourself)
- ❖ Doireann Ní Ghríofa, *A Ghost in the Throat* (to be procured yourself)

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)
- ❖ Dorgan, Theo (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)
- ❖ Kiberd, Declan. '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)
- ❖ Maddern, Paul. *Queering the Green: Post-2000 Queer Irish Poetry* (Lifeboat Press, 2021)

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 (10% each for a total of 20%)

Respond in circa 800 words.

Examples:

1. Listen to two different readings of W. B. Yeats's poem, 'Easter, 1916' and draw a comparison on what each reading brings to light. You should be able to reflect on poetic features such as rhythm, rhyme, diction, and tone. Links to the readings:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLt_OuzW9n0

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uV-jORTH0Xk>

2. Taking up the role of art critic, write a review on the play we have watched, which we have just seen on our field trip. Your review should include a discussion of a theme of your own choice in relation to at least one feature of the performance, such as stage design, scenery/props, costume, lighting, or sound.

Pay close attention to the register and tone of your language for this review. You can refer to your own experience as part of the audience but it should still read like a review that would appear in, for example, *The New Yorker* or an online magazine.

For the first assignment, students will have to pay attention to poetic qualities such as diction, rhythm and tone and to demonstrate their understanding of how these features impact our understanding of a poem, especially when it is performed. The aural quality of words and how they are enunciated and expressed are things to look out for, as compared to close reading a

poem on the page. Students will have to identify some of its themes and formal elements such as the kind of literary techniques that are deployed in the selected texts.

Likewise, the second assignment focuses on performance, only this time on the stage. Students should be alert to the difference between reading a play and watching it staged. Staging decisions such as lighting, costume design, stage sets, and sound each contribute to the significance of the play and the themes and ideas that it explores. By writing a review, students will have to learn how to write in a different register as compared to expository writing. For these assignments, students should be able to show a good understanding of the text and ideas or theories discussed in the classroom, and since these assignments are shorter in length, students must effectively and concisely articulate their response.

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 begin with an introduction that outlines an argument, must contain a well-argued analysis, and must approach a conclusion. Essays must include at least two secondary sources (from books, ebooks, reputable journals etc). List of unacceptable resources will be uploaded on Blackboard for students to peruse. Essays should incorporate close reading, apply a suitable theoretical framework, and exhibit thorough research that is communicated through clear and effective expression to attain high grades.

The required length is 2,200 words (+/- 10%). Excessively long quotations should be avoided and all quotations clearly designated by quotation marks and duly acknowledged. All papers must be typed at 1.5-line spacing with a bibliography attached. For citation, MLA is preferred and citation style should be consistent throughout. Proper and full referencing is essential and will be graded.

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 three questions excluding the specific topic/author on which they wrote their essay. Questions are designed to test the students' understanding of the primary texts and the key ideas and themes covered over the semester. Students should draw broader links between the primary text and Ireland's cultural history as well as engage with the literary traditions and theories appropriate to the text.

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 from 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 Boston 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, poetry or selection of short stories 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
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Week 2	W.B. Yeats - A Literature of Our Own
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The week will cover an introduction to literary studies, to critical concepts and terms and to Ireland's cultural and literary scene in the late 19th century. Students will learn about how Yeats's poetry reflects a growing sense of nationalism cultivated through the arts and how it captures the anxieties of the early twentieth century, particularly after the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century and First World War. Here we will also discuss the concepts of modernity and modernism and how this literary movement is tied to certain cultural and technological shifts as well as advances in the field of science. Selected poetry of W.B. Yeats. (supplied)

Week 3	Field Trip: MoLI – Museum of Literature Ireland
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There will be some small group activities planned around exploring the museum and gaining a better understanding of what is modern Irish literature. It is recommended to read James Joyce's *Dubliners* before the field trip as MoLI has a substantial exhibit on Joyce's life and his contributions to Irish literature.

Week 4	James Joyce, <i>Dubliners</i>
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This week we examine Joyce's extraordinary short story collection, particularly 'The Sisters', 'Araby', 'A Painful Case', and 'The Dead'. Students will be introduced to certain literary techniques such as 'free indirect speech' and

'stream of consciousness'. We will discuss the form of the short story and how Joyce's experimentation with language and form was already evident in *Dubliners*. With *Dubliners*, we will examine how the collection contributes to establishing a national literature as it captures and reflects the topography of a city and its people. How do we understand these short stories – are they the celebration of a certain place at a certain time or is it more critical of a place that is perhaps perceived as one that is beset by paralysis?

Week 5 **Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot***

An introduction to drama and how to read plays (which is different from reading fiction or poetry). This week focuses on the exploration of Irish modernist (and incipient postmodern) literature as we discuss the concept of 'Theatre of the Absurd', which was coined by Martin Esslin. Here we explore how Beckett's play challenges conventional ways of meaning-making and its existential themes such as the failure of (in)action. As Beckett's famous lines in *The Unnameable* goes, "you must go on. I can't go on. I'll go on". Students will look into the Beckettian sentiment of "ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better" (*Worstward Ho*) as we discuss the legacies of Joyce, Beckett, and Flann O'Brien, and their influence on generations of Irish writers.

Week 6 **Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September***

This week we look at how "the Big House novel was the most popular and enduring subgenre within the Irish novel" (Calahan). *The Last September* captures not simply a certain time in Ireland's political history, the novel itself instances an juncture in the history of the Irish novel as it reflects how "space and place in Irish fiction play an integral role in both the creation and rediscovery of identity, on both a personal and a national level" (Norris). Students will also examine other themes such as feminism and postcolonialism.

Week 7 **Field trip to the theatre**

Week 8 Mid-Semester break

Week 9 **Claire Keegan, *Small Things Like These***

This week we discuss the painful history of Magdalene Laundries (Mother and Baby homes) in Ireland, particularly its representation in *Small Things Like These*. Key ideas such as history (or histories) and the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland and its impact, especially on women, will be critically discussed. By paying attention to the lived experiences and histories of women, students will engage with the imperative that the voices of those who have been historically marginalised and silenced be acknowledged and heard. Other key concepts such as patriarchy and power will be engaged with as students examine the historical circumstances in which abuse and repression were enacted and endured.

Week 10 **Field Trip: Book of Kells and Seamus Heaney Exhibition**

Week 11 **Seamus Heaney** (poems supplied)

Guest Lecturer: Dr Ellen Howley

“images and symbols adequate to our predicament”

We will explore the work of Ireland’s fourth Nobel laureate, Seamus Heaney. Students will examine how “Heaney’s poetry is driven by the Romantic search for a culture organically rooted in an authentic landscape” (Kennedy-Andrews) by paying attention to the representation of space, place, and history and how it intersects with myth-making. As Daniel Tobin says, “Heaney engages such issues as identity and indeterminacy within the context of his quest for self-definition”. As such, the focus will be on the theme of identity, on both a personal and national level, and its related ideas such as history and the sacred.

Week 12 **Doireann Ní Ghríofa, *A Ghost in the Throat***

Guest Lecturer: Héctor Muiños Olivas

This week students will exploring the idea of what is a female text. “This is a female text” is a refrain that runs throughout *A Ghost in the Throat*, which brings together the voices of two female poets across centuries. Our focus will be on feminism and intersectionality. Extracts will be provided on some of the theories on gender and sexuality that we will draw on for our discussion on the ways in which the female voice and the body are represented in this work of autofiction, which blends memoir, essay, poetry, and fiction. We will also continue looking at the themes of language and translation, which underpin the book. There will also be a guest lecture by Héctor Muinos Olivas, who will speak about the text from a creative writing perspective.

Week 13 **Queer Irish Poetry** (poems supplied)

Guest Lecturer: Dr Jack Quin

This week students will learn about contemporary queer Irish poetry. This recent development of Irish literature speaks to cultural shifts such as the secularisation of Ireland, and the need for queer identities to be represented in literature. This lecture will focus heavily on issues such as alterity, marginalisation, and discrimination in the context of poetry and how poetic forms lend themselves to such representations. The selection of poetry looked at for this lecture will include the work of Colette Bryce, Seán Hewitt, William Keohane, and Mícheál McCann.

Week 14 This seminar will consist of a revision session for the upcoming examination.