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Contemporary Irish Literature:

Portrait of a People

UNH Course Code: ENG364

Subject Areas: English Language & Literature, Cultural Studies

Level: 300

Prerequisites: Two semesters of English composition and a high level of proficiency in spoken and written English

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Credits: 3

Course Description

The value that storytelling has played and continues to play in Irish life cannot be underestimated. Perhaps more than any other English speaking nation, the Irish have an affinity with and aptitude for narrative that places story at the core of their collective consciousness. Ireland has long been a country of stories, from mythical tales of ancient warrior tribes and their epic quests and battles to contemporary narratives of ordinary people living in extraordinary circumstances. The rugged physical landscape and meandering city streets have inspired beautiful, beguiling poetry, while the nation's complex and chequered sociopolitical history has evoked an artistic response from writers whose scope is second only to their mastery of craft. That said, many of Ireland's most well known and accomplished writers have produced their best work while in self-imposed exile. This peculiar dichotomy is one of the reasons why a close engagement with Irish literature perpetuates one of the fundamental characteristics of true art: more questions are asked than answered. Onsite lectures along with exhibitions and museum study excursions will make cultural Dublin a fundamental resource for learning.

To this end, this course examines the works of some of the major Irish authors writing in English from the end of the 19th century up to the present day. You will be introduced to major topics and theoretical approaches relevant to your writing and will be guided in the critical reading of primary sources. In addition, you will practice how to interpret literary texts from different genres throughout the course. Similarly, the text will help illuminate major areas of Irish culture and how they have changed over the last century. Every session is situated in its historical context and cross-referenced to the author or the literary trend that the text exemplifies.

Beyond developing reading comprehension, you will actively engage with the text and understand the context in which it was written, think critically about its themes and greater message, and analyze the connections to the cultural reality accompanying your study abroad experience. The course also emphasizes the development of analytical and comprehension strategies. You will learn terminology and academic language in order to discuss content, structure, theme, character development and figurative language. Throughout the course, you will further your skills in the reading of original texts.

Learning Objectives

Knowledge Skills (Literary & Historical)

- To explain and interpret how different cultural and literary trends throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century have shaped modern Irish reality.
- To recognize and apply conceptual tools and literary and academic vocabulary in order to produce highly quality papers and text analysis.
- To illustrate an awareness of the role emigration has played in the configuration of Irish identity.
- To illustrate how post colonialism contributes to an understanding of Irish literature and culture.

Critical Thinking Skills (Oral & Written)

- To develop critical thinking as a reading device to understand political, social and historical factors contained in the literary text.
- To effectively identify, evaluate, respond to and utilize pertinent secondary sources.
- To analyze literary text for deeper meaning and recognize literary resources employed to convey that meaning.

Attitudinal Skills (Affective & Behavioral)

- To value literary representation as a means to understanding a new culture.
- To gain intercultural competence.
- To further develop inter and intra personal skills.
- To be confident & mindful when exploring & engaging new cognitive & physical spaces to gain a better sense-of-self and identity.

Instructional Format

Class will meet twice a week for an hour and a half in a seminar format. You are required to come to class ready to discuss the literary texts. Similarly, in order to understand the cultural, historical, and ideological aspects of Irish reality described in the text, you will come to class ready to comment on a specific reading guide or open questions given to you during the previous session. During class, readings, music and screening of pertinent documentary and film pieces will help you to better understand the text and its context. Guided walking tours, exhibition and museum visits will make cultural Dublin a fundamental resource to you.

Its compact layout makes the city ideal for impromptu expeditions to locations of note such as libraries, bookshops, literary cafes and pubs. Your active participation is critical as the class will be taught as a seminar and will be based on debates, group work and presentations. **If you require any special accommodations, please contact your instructor.**

Form of Assessment

Various elements will be taken into account when determining your final grade. For the record, these are listed and weighted below. The content, criteria and specific requirements for each assessment category will be explained in greater detail in class. In addition, student work and behavior in this course must fully conform to the regulations of the [CEA Academic Integrity Policy](#) to which you are subject. Finally, all formal written work you carry out in this course (research papers, projects, studies, etc.) must be submitted in electronic format. Your instructor may also require that you hand in a hard copy of such work.

Class Participation	10%
Reading Guide	15%
Midterm Paper	20%
Presentation	15%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%

Class Participation (10%): The grade will be calculated to reflect your participation in class discussions, your capacity to introduce ideas and thoughts dealing with the texts, your ability to interpret different uses of literary language and to express your analysis in intellectual, constructive argumentation. When determining your class participation grade, traditional criteria such as material preparation, completed reading before class, and collaborative group work are also evaluated. But it is the active, meaningful and informed verbal and written contribution that you make that is most important to your overall participation grade. Additionally, it is important to demonstrate a positive and supportive attitude to the instructor and your classmates, and give full attention to class activities (i.e., cell-phones off, laptop for notes only, etc.).

Questions that will assist you in measuring the effectiveness of your class participation:

1. Is the comment relevant to the discussion? **(Relevance)**
2. Is the comment backed up with data gathered in this class? **(Evidence)**
3. Is the comment clear, complete, and concise? **(Form)**
4. Is the comment original and insightful? **(Originality)**
5. Does it broaden the discussion with all its implications? **(Implications)**

Guidelines to Assess Class Participation	Numerical Grade Range
You make significant and original contributions that spark discussion, offering both critical and analytical comments clearly based on readings and research and displaying a working knowledge of theoretical issues.	9.00-10.00
You make major contributions that spark discussion based on readings and research, demonstrating insight as well as knowledge of theoretical issues.	8.00-8.99
You make voluntary and useful contributions, which are usually based upon some reflection and familiarity with required readings.	7.00-7.99
You make voluntary but infrequent comments that generally reiterate the basic points of the required readings.	6.00-6.99
You make isolated contributions to class discussion, display disruptive behavior during class, and/or take a passive approach to overall class interaction.	0-5.99

Reading Guide (15%): You will come to class ready to debate particular questions and topic areas of note given to you on previous sessions. As the course progresses, you will be responsible for leading reading guides during the class to activate class participation and debate.

Midterm Paper (20%): You will complete a research paper focused on one of the topics studied in class during the semester that you will have to analyze in depth. It must be at least six (6) pages long and include reference to secondary sources and a bibliography of the sources used.

Presentation (20%): You will prepare a self-determined research project which will be presented orally to the class, and critically discussed with the class and the instructor. The subject of the presentation is a critical exploration of an issue raised in this course that has been explored in greater depth. You will be encouraged to incorporate visual media such as photographs. Final presentations should be between 15 and 20 minutes in length.

Midterm Exam (20%): The exam consists of a text analysis exercise and two short essay questions in which you analyze the effect of history on current Irish culture.

Final Exam (20%): The exam consists of a text analysis exercise and two short essay questions in which you analyze the effect of history on current Irish culture

CEA Grading Scale				
Letter Grade	Numerical Grade Low Range	Numerical Grade High Range	Percentage Range	Quality Points
A+	9.70	10.00	97.0 - 100%	4.00
A	9.40	9.69	94.0 - 96.9%	4.00
A-	9.00	9.39	90.0 - 93.9%	3.70
B+	8.70	8.99	87.0 - 89.9%	3.30
B	8.40	8.69	84.0 - 86.9%	3.00
B-	8.00	8.39	80.0 - 83.9%	2.70
C+	7.70	7.99	77.0 - 79.9%	2.30
C	7.00	7.69	70.0 - 76.9%	2.00
D	6.00	6.99	60.0 - 69.9%	1.00
F	0.00	5.99	0 - 59.9%	0.00
W	Withdrawal			0.00
INC	Incomplete			0.00

CEA Attendance Policy

Every student is expected to attend all scheduled class sessions on time and be thoroughly prepared for the day's class activities. In compliance with NEASC and UNH accreditation requirements, CEA instructors compile regular attendance records for every course and take these records into account when evaluating student participation and performance.

- In each three-credit 15-week course, a maximum of the equivalent of two weeks of accumulated absences due to sickness, personal emergency, inevitable transport delay and other related impediments will be tolerated.
- Your final course grade will drop one full letter grade (e.g. A- to B-) for each additional class missed beyond this two week period, regardless of the reason for your absence.
- You will automatically fail a course if your absences exceed the equivalent of three weeks of class.

Furthermore, to comply with immigration and financial regulations, you must maintain full-time student status and attend at least 12 hours of class every week. Consequently, the Dean and Program Director will dismiss from all CEA courses, programs, activities and housing any student who fails to maintain full-time status.

Required Textbooks

Friel, Brian. *Translations*, London: Faber & Faber, 1981, 72pp.
Keane, John B. *The Field*, Cork: The Mercier Press, 1991, 81pp.
Murphy, Tom. *A Whistle in the Dark*, London: Methuen, 1989, 108pp.
McCabe, Patrick. *The Butcher Boy*, London: Picador, 1992, 224pp.
McPherson, Conor. *The Weir*, London: Nick Hern Books, 2001, 50pp.
O'Casey, Sean. *Three Dublin Plays*, London: Faber & Faber, 1998, 272pp.

The required course textbooks listed above are available for purchase at the local bookstore. You must have constant access to these texts for reading, highlighting and marginal note-taking. It is required that you have a personal copy of each.

Additional sources may be required for certain class sessions in electronic format (pdf, digital, etc.) consistent with applicable copyright legislation. Direct access to additional resources and databanks are available to you through the online library of the University of New Haven.

Recommended Readings

Brown, Terence. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-2002*. London: Harper Perennial, 2004.
Crotty, Patrick, ed. *Modern Irish Poetry*, Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1999.
Deane, Seamus. *A Short History of Irish Literature*. London: Hutchinson & Co. (Publishers) Ltd, 1986.
Fallon, Peter & Mahon, Derek, eds. *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, London: Penguin, 1991.
Harrington, John P., ed. *Modern Irish Drama*, New York: Norton Critical Editions, 1991.
Joyce, James. *Dubliners*, London: Penguin Classics, 2000.
Joyce, James. *Ulysses*, London: Penguin Classics, 2000.
Keegan, Claire. *Walk the Blue Fields*. London: Faber and Faber, 2007.
Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland: Literature of the Modern Nation*. London: Vintage Press, 1996.
Kiberd, Declan. *The Irish Writer and the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
Kiberd Declan. *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Living*. London: Faber and Faber, 2009.
McGahern, John. *Creature of the Earth: New & Selected Stories*. London: Faber & Faber, 2006.
O'Connor, Frank. *The Lonely Voice: a Study of the Short Story*. New Jersey: Melville House, 2004.
Smyth, Ailbhe ed. *The Irish Women's Studies Reader*. Dublin: Attic Press, 1993.
Toibin, Colm. *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction*. London: Penguin Books, 2000.
Trevor, William. *The Hill Bachelors*. London: Penguin Books, 2000.
Trevor, William, ed. *The Oxford Book of Irish Short Stories*. London: OU Press, 1989.
Walsh, Caroline, ed. *Arrows in Flight: Short Stories from a New Ireland*. Great Britain: Scribner Town House Publishers, 2002.
Welch, Robert. *Changing States: Transformations in Modern Irish Writing*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
Yeats, WB. *The Collected Poems of WB Yeats*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 2000.

Online Reference & Research Tools

<http://www.nli.ie/yeats/>

Online guide to the award winning WB Yeats exhibit at the National Library of Ireland. A visit to this resource is scheduled as part of the course.

<http://www.museum.ie/en/exhibition/kingship-and-sacrifice.aspx>

Online introduction to the bog bodies archaeological exhibit at the National Museum of Ireland. This resource will be of value when studying selected poetry of Seamus Heaney.

<http://www.jamesjoyce.ie/>

Online guide to the James Joyce Centre, Dublin City.

<http://www.writerscentre.ie/>

Online guide to Irish Writers Centre, Dublin City.

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SeamusHeaneyCentreforPoetry/>: Online guide to the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queens University Belfast.

<http://www.tcd.ie/OWC/>

Online guide to the Oscar Wilde Centre for Irish Writing at Trinity College Dublin.

<http://www.fightingwords.ie/>

Innovative creative writing centre ran by Dublin writer Roddy Doyle.

<http://www.writersmuseum.com/>

Online guide to Dublin Writers Museum.

Required Supplies/Fees

You will have to buy five plays and one novel listed in the required readings.

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Contemporary Irish Literature

Course Content

Session	Topic	Activity	Student Assignment
1	<p>Course Introduction</p> <p>Why They Write, Why We Read:</p>	<p>Syllabus Overview</p> <p>Student Debate: Why do we read?</p>	<p>Ensure textbook purchases</p>
2	<p>Spoken Word: The Irish Oral Tradition</p> <p>Consideration of the significance of story and storytelling in the context of Ireland's social and cultural history</p>	<p>Lecture and Discussion: Response to selected short piece from Irish mythology and a selection of storytelling songs</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Story: <i>Fionn in Search of his Youth</i>. (Trevor, 1989, pp. 2-4) • Music: <i>The Jolly Beggar</i> by Planxty
3	<p>Introduction to Postcolonial literary theory</p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion: Reading Anglo-Irish writing through a postcolonial lens</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Beginning Theory</i> by Peter Barry. pp 192-202
4	<p>Translations in Context: The English Presence, The Irish Famine</p> <p>How Friel conveys a sense of time and place in his masterpiece, <i>Translations</i></p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion: A consideration of the social and historical context of Friel's <i>Translations</i></p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Translations</i> by Brian Friel (Harrington, 1991, pp. 319-374)
5	<p>Communication Breakdown? Language & Identity in Irish Writing</p> <p>The issue of the 'language question' in Friel's <i>Translations</i> represents a local engagement with a universal concern. Montague's lament affirms Friel's concerns</p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion: A close reading of and response to Friel's <i>Translations</i> & selected poem by John Montague</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Translations</i> by Brian Friel (Harrington, 1991, pp.319-374) • <i>A Grafted Tongue</i> John Montague (Fallon & Mahon, 1991, pp.44-45)
6	<p>The Political & the Personal in the Poetry of WB Yeats</p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selected poetry by WB Yeats (Yeats, 2000, pp. 14, 31, 86, 107, 111, 123, 152)

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7	<p>The Life & Works of WB Yeats</p> <p>Visit to the award winning exhibition at the National Library of Ireland which will compliment selected readings and enhance student engagement with Yeats the man and Yeats the poet</p>	<p>Onsite Instruction:</p> <p>Study Excursion to the National Library of Ireland</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selected poetry by WB Yeats (Yeats, 2000, pp. 14, 31, 86, 107, 111, 123, 152)
8	<p>Dramatic Timing:</p> <p><i>The Plough and the Stars</i></p> <p>The opening night resulted in a public outcry and violence in the theatre: how O'Casey touched a nerve in post-rising Ireland</p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion:</p> <p>The historical context of and public reaction to the play</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Plough and the Stars</i> by Sean O'Casey. (O'Casey, 1998, pp. 3-247)
9	<p>Writing 'The Rising':</p> <p>Sean O'Casey response to the 1916 Easter Rising</p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion:</p> <p>Study of the key themes of <i>The Plough and the Stars</i></p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Plough and the Stars</i> by Sean O'Casey. (O'Casey, 1998, pp. vii-xiii)
10	<p>Politics & the Irish Short Story</p> <p>O'Connor's deceptively simple writing represents not only a master class in short story writing but also a reflection on politics, violence and existentialism</p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion:</p> <p>O'Connor's artistic response to the Irish War of Independence</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Guests of the Nation</i> by Frank O'Connor. (Trevor, ed., 1989, pp. 342-353)
11	<p>This Land is Our Land:</p> <p>Representations of the Rural in Irish drama</p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Field</i> by John B. Keane (Keane, 1991, pp. 4-80)
12	<p>Tagdh, Bird, and the Bull:</p> <p>Characterisation in Keane's <i>The Field</i></p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion:</p> <p>Incorporating pertinent scenes from the 1991 film adaptation of the play by Jim Sheridan</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Field</i> by John B. Keane (Keane, 1991, pp. 4-80)

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13	<p>A Life in the Country: Mary Lavin's <i>Sarah</i> Lavin's depiction of inhumanity and injustice represents an example of her pioneering voice in Irish literature</p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion: Lavin's depiction of a marginalized woman in rural Ireland</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sarah</i> by Mary Lavin (Trevor, ed., 1989, pp. 392-400)
14	<p>The Hills Wait for Them: William Trevor's Isolated Irishmen & Their Lonely Epiphanies</p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion: Trevor's reflection on duty and obligation</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Hill Bachelors</i> William Trevor. pp. 224-245 <p>Midterm paper due</p>
15	<p>Midterm Exam</p>	<p>Midterm Exam</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review all readings and class materials <p>Review for Mid-term Exam</p>
16	<p>No Time Like the Long Ago: James Joyce's <i>Dubliners</i></p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion: Joyce's depiction of the defeated in Ireland's capital city</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dubliners</i> by James Joyce. pp. vii-xlvi, 21-34, 175-225
17	<p>The Truth of Life As He Saw It: Joyce's Achievement in <i>Dubliners</i></p>	<p>Onsite Study Excursion: Joycean Dublin</p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Dubliners</i> by James Joyce. pp. vii-xlvi, 21-34, 175-225
18	<p>A Humane Vision: James Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i></p>	<p>Lecture & Discussion: Engagement with selected extracts from <i>Ulysses</i></p>	<p>Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ulysses</i> by James Joyce. pp. ix-lxxxviii

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19	The Living Page: <i>Ulysses</i> & Dublin City	Onsite Study Excursion: 'In the footsteps of Leopold Bloom'	Reading: • <i>Ulysses</i> by James Joyce. pp. 65-84
20	Literature & the Irish Diaspora: Tom Murphy's <i>A Whistle in the Dark</i>	Lecture & Discussion: A consideration of the social and historical context of Murphy's <i>A Whistle in the Dark</i>	Reading: • <i>A Whistle in the Dark</i> by Tom Murphy. pp. 3-96
21	Literature & the Irish Diaspora: The 'Strange Dichotomy'	Lecture & Discussion: Tom Murphy's dark, violent depiction of a fractured Irish family living in Coventry, England	Reading: • <i>A Whistle in the Dark</i> by Tom Murphy. pp. 3-96 • <i>Talking About Tom Murphy</i> by Nicolas Greene (ed.) pp. 91-112
22	Irish Poetry & 'The Troubles': Semaus Heaney	Lecture & Discussion: Seamus Heaney's poetic response to the ethno-political conflict in Northern Ireland Screening of BBC Documentary	Reading: • Selected poems by Seamus Heaney (Fallon & Mahon, 1991, pp. 142-146, 152- 153, 158-161) • <i>The Day The Troubles Began</i> BBC Documentary, 2008
23	Irish Poetry & 'The Troubles': Ciaran Carson	Lecture & Discussion: Ciaran Carson poetic response to the ethno-political conflict in Northern Ireland	Reading: • Selected poems by Ciaran Carson (Fallon & Mahon, 1991, pp. 316-321, 325- 327)
24	A Wry and Unflinching Eye: <i>The Country Funeral</i> by John McGahern	Lecture & Discussion: Often sceptical, always humane, John McGahern's critique of contemporary Ireland ranks among the finest of Irish writing	Reading: • <i>The Country Funeral</i> by John McGahern (McGahern, 2006, pp. 369-408)

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25	Tears of Sadness, Tears of Joy: <i>The Butcher Boy</i> by Patrick McCabe	Lecture & Discussion: McCabe's troubled, violent protagonist leads us through a moral minefield as we turn each page	Reading: • <i>The Butcher Boy</i> by Patrick McCabe pp. 1-215
26	Public House, Private Lives: <i>The Weir</i> by Conor McPherson	Lecture & Discussion: McPherson interweaves the lives of strangers in a rural setting, revealing their vulnerability in the process	Reading: • <i>The Weir</i> by Conor McPherson pp. 3-53
27	Poetic Response to Contemporary Ireland: Eavan Boland & Paula Meehan	Lecture & Discussion: Eavan Boland's poetic response to life in contemporary Ireland	Reading: • Selected poems by Eavan Boland (Crotty, 1999, pp. 272-279) • Selected poems by Paula Meehan (Crotty, 1999, pp. 398-402)
28	<i>Night of the Quicken Trees:</i> Claire Keegan	Lecture & Discussion: Keegan's accomplishment and its significance	Reading: • <i>Night of the Quicken Trees</i> by Claire Keegan (Walsh, ed., 2002, pp. 129-163)
29	Conclusions: What Have We Learned?	Student Presentations	Reading: • Review all readings and class materials Review for Final Exam Final Papers Due
30	Final Exam	Final Exam	Reading: • Review all readings and class materials Review for Final Exam