

English 385  
Fall 2002  
Off. Hrs: M, W, & TH 11-12

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### **Modern Irish Literature: Colonial and Postcolonial**

Ireland was Europe's first Colony. Well before the raiding of the Americas, or the establishment of the African slave trade, the English Crown laid claim to Ireland and established permanent settlers there. The long-standing and violent intercourse between these two nearby peoples has to stand as a caution to anyone reading Irish literature. Literature is an art form, like sculpture or painting or music; it forms part of the expressive repertoire of a people, one channel through which an individual might react to the world around him or her. To begin understanding the expressive act -- a poem or a carving or a song -- is to begin seeing the world of the artist, in her or his place and time. This is a difficult process, one that is sometimes made even more obscure because of the associations we have with words like "art" and "literature." By some accounts, "literature" should transcend its location, rising above the grimy circumstances of its making. According to this view, "great literature" is completely separate from the everyday "writing" of journalism, politics, and popular entertainment. In this class, we will explore the opposite premise: that great art is great precisely because of its location, because of the brilliance of the artist's response to the world.

But while it is a mistake to pluck a work of literature out of its historical context, it is also a great error to oversimplify the meanings of that historical context. In the Irish case, the danger has been a particularly severe one, tempting readers to understand all of Irish culture as a noble and exalted attempt by a colonized people to throw off the yoke of English tyranny. The truth that Irish writers offer us is often something much more complicated and disturbing. If you pay attention to these truths, in their most complicated and disturbing form, they will raise fundamental and crucial questions about your own life in your own time and place.

#### **Texts**

Edgeworth: *Castle Rackrent*

Yeats: *Selected Poems*

Synge: *The Aran Islands*

Synge: *Plays*

A Course Pack, available at the bookstore.

Joyce: *Dubliners*

Eagleton, et al.: *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Lit*

Boland: *In a Time of Violence*

#### **Writing**

Two short papers of roughly 5 pages, plus one paper of 10-15 pages. The short pieces will be close readings, where you're asked to present a coherent interpretation of a text, or part of a text. The longer paper will require you to draw on some outside historical reading in order to develop a way of interpreting one of the texts we have considered this semester, and to put your reading of the text into dialogue with the reading proposed by at least one critical article. I will suggest possible topics for the two short pieces, and provide you with guidelines and expectations for the longer essay.

**Presentations:**

During the regular course of the semester, you will make two presentations, one historical and one critical. The purpose of these presentations will be to enrich and expand our discussions. I do require careful preparation, but I don't expect formal lectures or airtight arguments. Your goal rather should be to suggest possibilities, raise questions, and perhaps to respond to ideas already on the table. At the end of the semester, you will make a presentation on your research findings. Guidelines for these presentations are below.

**History presentations:** Early in the semester, I will provide a list of historical events, figures, or trends that are especially relevant to the authors we're going to consider. I'll ask each of you to choose one of these topics, conduct some basic research, and make a presentation of 5-10 minutes. Your goal should be to lay out basic facts -- what happened, to whom, why, etc. -- and also to make some attempt to explain or interpret the significance of the event or figure, for Irish culture at the time, and for the reading we have done. I would like each of you to **prepare a simple, concise handout** for the rest of us sketching basic information and ideas. Arrange with me for photocopying.

**Criticism presentations:** I'll also ask you to choose one reading to do some critical research on. What I would like you to do is search for articles on the text you have chosen, and find one you're especially interested in. In class you will present a brief summary of the article, explaining the particular approach it takes and the interpretation it proposes. I will provide some research guidelines and, if you like, some help with library and online resources.

**Research Presentation:** here you will present the results of the outside reading and research you have done for your longer paper. These sessions will give you a chance to present a kind of spoken first draft of your ideas for the paper. The presentation should be a formal one, coherent and clearly organized. But the point will be for you to summarize your work and present your ideas in a way that the rest of us can respond to: offering suggestions, raising questions, and supporting your interpretations.

**Discussion:**

A seminar is an intellectual community. It thrives on the fact that its members all share the same basic skills and interests (in this case the interpretation of literary texts), while applying these skills and interests in different ways. It is the cultivation of these differences that makes a seminar thrive. Indeed, if there were no possibility for differing reactions to this material we'll be working on, if there were in fact just one proper way to understand these writers, then I could just deliver a series of lectures. Of course this is not the case. But this reality of things demands some consistent work. I expect everyone in the class to contribute each day.

**Grades:**

Essay I (5 pages)	20%
Essay II (5 pages)	25%
Essay III (10 pages)	40 %
Presentations, 5% each	15%

**Absences and Late Arrivals:**

You may miss up to 3 classes without excuse or penalty. More than three absences will be grounds for failing the course. If you are repeatedly late or unprepared for class, you can be counted as absent.

## Schedule of Readings

R=Course Reader

NCL= *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*

### Introductions

#### The Irish and the Question of Race

9/3 Roediger (R), Curtis (handout)

#### Literature and the Act of Union, 1800

9/5 Edgeworth: Preface and Part One

9/10 Finish Edgeworth

### The Era of the Famine, 1845-52: Poetry and Prose

9/12 Wordsworth (handouts)

9/17 Davis (R), Fanon (R)

9/19 Nicholson (R), Optional: Mitchell (On Reserve)

9/24 Mayhew (R), McGloughlin (R)

9/26 Davis, Devere & Wilde poems (handout), start Mangan (R)

10/1 Finish Mangan (R)

10/3 Arnold (R)

Friday, October 5: Paper I due by noon, at my office

### Celtic Revival and Irish Modernism: 1890-1939

10/8 Yeats: "Stolen Child," "Down by the Sally Gardens," "Hosting of the Sidhe," "The Song of Wandering Aengus,"

10/10 Synge: *Aran Islands* Parts I and II

10/15 Synge: *Aran Islands* Parts III and IV, Pearse (R), Deane

10/17 Synge: *Western World*

10/22 **No Class - Fall Break**

10/24 Joyce: stories on pp 21-55, and 65-102, especially "A Little Cloud"

10/29 Joyce: "Grace," "The Dead"

10/31 Yeats: "September 1913," "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," "The Collar-Bone of a Hare," "The Fisherman," "Easter, 1916"

11/5 Yeats: "Sailing to Byzantium," "The Statues," "Circus Animals' Desertion," Said (NCL)

### The Contemporary Period

11/7 Gibbons (R), Gardiner (R), Eagleton (NCL),  
Friday, November 3: Paper II due by noon at my office

The Contemporary Period, cont.

11/12 O'Connor (R)  
Wednesday, November 8: Screening of Jordan's *The Crying Game*, TBA  
11/14 Discuss Jordan

11/19 Boland  
11/21 Boland

11/26 McGuckian (handouts)  
11/28 **No Class - Thanksgiving Break**

12/3 Continue McGuckian, or TBA  
12/5 Presentations on Final Projects

12/10 Presentations on Final Projects

Research Papers Due Monday, December 16 by Noon

## PRESENTATION TOPICS

History		Criticism	
The Act of Union, 1800	9/3	Edgeworth	9/10
Penal Laws and the Catholic "Emancipation" of 1829	9/12	Davis	9/17
O'Connell and the Repeal Movement	9/12	Mangan	10/1
The Young Ireland Movement	9/17	Arnold	10/3
Potato Famine I: Pre-Famine Patterns of Land Use; Events 1845-47	9/19	Synge ( <i>A. Islands</i> )	10/10
		Synge ( <i>W. World</i> )	10/17
		Joyce	10/24 10/29
Potato Famine II: British Response; Economic and Social Impact 1847-50	9/24	Yeats	10/8 10/31
Post-Famine Society: Marriage, Faith, Emigration	9/26	O'Connor	11/12
The Land War, 1879-82	10/3	Jordan	11/14
Charles Stewart Parnell	10/8	Boland	11/19 11/21
1916 Uprising	10/15	McGuckian	11/26
Revolution, 1919-21, and the Partition of Northern Ireland	10/31		
The Irish Free State and World War II	11/5		
"The Troubles": Northern Ireland in the Late 1960s	11/12		
The Current Peace Process	11/21		