

ENG 3371: Contemporary Irish Literature

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Texts

Sebastian Barry, *A Long, Long Way*
Roddy Doyle, *Oh Play That Thing*
Edna O'Brien, *The Country Girls*
Seamus Deane, *Reading in the Dark*
Nuala O'Faolain, *Are You Somebody?*
Partick McCabe, *Breakfast on Pluto*
John Banville, *The Book of Evidence*
Emma Donahue, *Hood*
Colm Tóibín, *The Blackwater Lightship*

Statement of Purpose

This course will introduce you to a broad range of contemporary Irish literary texts. These texts engage in new ways with the legacy of Ireland's troubled history; they reflect on the socially and culturally conservative decades following WW II, on the impact of the emancipatory movements of the 1970s against a backdrop of political violence, on crimes of greed and corruption in the 1980s, and on the social and cultural transformations that came with Ireland's emergence as the "Celtic Tiger" in the 1990s. We will focus primarily on works published in the last two and half decades when such momentous changes as the de-criminalization of homosexuality and the "Good Friday" Peace Accords allowed Irish authors to explore stories of lives at the margin of history and society. These are stories that have been forgotten or would have been forbidden in previous eras—stories of shameful family secrets, of gay men negotiating the violent milieu of the IRA, of failed Irish émigrés, and of the sexual exploitation of girls and women. We will examine how these texts grapple with the relationship between Catholicism and Irish nationality, class and religious divisions, women's rights and sexual politics, and the role of shame in Irish society.

The course will focus on two basic skills: careful, close reading of a literary text (or an aspect of that text), and critical writing exploring literature analytically, in relationship to its social and historical context. Course time will be spent discussing the assigned texts. I will supplement our class discussions with short lectures on Irish history and the Irish literary tradition .

Assignments and Grading

This class involves both informal and formal modes of writing. Informal writing will take the form of weekly reading notes and discussion questions. Students will also produce a short (3-4 pp.) close reading of a particular motif, literary technique, or other aspect of a text, and a longer critical essay that should incorporate published literary criticism. For the longer assignment I will

require a proposal, an annotated autobiography, a 4-5 pp. draft, and a revised 8-10 pp. essay on some aspect of identity in one or more works of contemporary Irish fiction.

Reading Notes and Class Participation

Your informal writing will take the form of weekly submissions that should include your reading notes and at least two discussion questions. This will allow you to formulate contributions to in-class discussions of the readings. In-class discussion/participation and reading notes (including discussion questions) will account for 25% of the final grade.

The Short Essay

The short essay focuses on the central skill of literary criticism – the ability to read a piece of writing carefully, and to show how its elements work together to create certain effects, certain meanings, to create connections or disturbing dissonances, to create a sense of harmony or turmoil, to argue for a certain reading of particular historical events, or of particular human experiences. The short essay will determine 20% of your final grade.

The Formal Essay

The formal essay represents a central goal of this course; a lot of your in-class and out of class course work will be directed toward its production. I am requiring you to turn in both a formal proposal and a first draft. The proposal should describe what elements of which text or texts you wish to discuss, the perspective you will bring to your reading, and either a specific question you mean to answer in your draft, or a thesis that you plan to support. It must include an annotated bibliography describing at least three scholarly sources that you plan to use in writing the formal essay.

The proposal and annotated bibliography will determine 10% of your final grade. The draft you submit will determine 15% of your final grade. The final essay will determine 30% of your final grade.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. I will take roll with every class meeting. Students may permissibly miss up to four class meetings without penalty.

I reserve the right to drop any student who misses four or more classes within the first four weeks; I start counting absences on the second class meeting.

If a student misses five or six class meetings, his or her final grade will be reduced by one half grade per absence. Students missing more than six class meetings will receive an F for the course.

The Final Grade Breakdown:

Class Participation:25%

Short Essay: 20%

Proposal:10%

Draft: 15%

Final Essay: 30%

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of someone else's ideas, construction, organization, words or phrases in one's writing. It does not matter if the material came from a published scholar, your roommate, or the Encyclopedia Britannica. Material obtained on the web **MUST** be cited correctly just like any other outside source; if ideas or words that originated with someone else are included in your work without acknowledgement, that is plagiarism. Avoid it by acknowledging the source of all ideas, words or organization in your writing that did not originate with you. In my classes, students submitting work with phrases or ideas that are not theirs without acknowledging their debt with quotation marks and correct bibliographic citation **WILL** receive an F for the assignment and may (depending on the severity of the offense) receive an F for the course. The University of Houston offers first-time plagiarism offenders the opportunity to sign a document that waives their right to a departmental hearing if they acknowledge that they plagiarized and accept the penalty applied by the instructor. Second-time offenders may not sign such a waiver; their offense will be considered in a formal university hearing and they may be put on probation, suspended, or expelled.

Plagiarism is against the rules of all learning communities because it short circuits learning. Learners can only develop if they actually struggle at their own level. Misrepresenting your skills ultimately cheats you, since by doing it you prevent your professors and peers from offering feedback to you as you are, thus cheating yourself of the feedback and guidance you need.