ENGL 4380/5380: Irish Literature and Culture

Dr. Mary Breen

Content

As this is an intensive reading course we will read out way through many of the major Irish novels and autobiographies of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The emphasis will be on the primary texts and their representation of Irish culture and landscape over the last one hundred years. All of these texts are short, easily accessible and will present no difficulty for the reader. In class I will give a general introduction to each of the novels, their structures and central themes, and also the historical and cultural settings from which they emerge.

Texts: In this seminar we will read the following novels and autobiographies.

The Irish novel 1916-1929

James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1916)

Narratives of Anglo-Irish Life

Elizabeth Bowen, The Last September (1929)

Narratives of Emigration

Samuel Beckett, Murphy (1938)

Life-Narratives – Autobiography and Memoir

Seamus Deane, Reading in the Dark (1996)

(To place these texts in the context of their time and place we will also read extracts from other Irish prose-works, these will be provided in class)

Course Expectations

Students should read all the texts on the course, attend all classes and participate in class discussions. In preparation for the course students are required to read James Joyce’s A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man and to make a two-page summary of the novel which should be submitted to me by email (m.breen@ucc.ie) before June 1st. Students are also required to participate in at least one reading/performance, or write a one-page response to one of the reading nights. They should also participate in the planned excursions.

Course Assessment

Students are required to participate in class discussion, give a class presentation, write a journal, which records their reflections on our visit to Bowen’s Court, the setting of Elizabeth Bowen’s novel the Last September, and write two papers. Undergraduates will write one 1,500-word paper and one 3,000-word paper; graduates will write one 1,800-word paper and one 3,500-word paper and lead discussion.
Grading: The grade breakdown for the course assignments is as follows:

Class participation and attendance: 30%
Class presentation and Journal: 30%
Two Written Assignments: 40%

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. UNO allows one excused absence. Any other absences will affect the final grade by 10%. Three unexcused absences will drop you from the class and result in grade F.

Students are responsible for obtaining their own texts before coming to Cork. (No specific editions of the texts are required) Students should read as many of the texts as they can before the come to Cork. If you have any questions about the course please feel free to contact me at email: m.breen@ucc.ie

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the module students will be able to:

Critically read and analyse the range of texts on the course
Apply a variety of theoretical concepts in the analysis of contemporary Irish fiction
Relate the set texts to one another, and to their wider historical and cultural contexts
Discuss the cultural and historical backgrounds which framed and informed these texts
Deliver fluent written and oral responses to the set texts

In addition, graduate students will be able to effectively discuss the evolution of Irish fiction within the context of world literature and to demonstrate this ability by leading discussion in the classroom

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Proposed Schedule for Reading Assignments

**June 22 – 28** · The Irish Novel 1916-1929
James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

**July 3 – July 5** Narratives of Anglo-Irish Life
Elizabeth Bowen, *The Last September*

**July 10 – July 12** Novels of Immigration
Samuel Beckett, *Murphy*

**July 17 – 20 - Life-Narratives, Autobiography and Memoir**

Seamus Deane, *Reading in the Dark*

Some secondary reading will be provided in class but there is no required secondary reading to be completed before the class begins. Students should concentrate on the primary texts and becoming familiar with them. The primary purpose of the course is to introduce students to a wide variety of Irish prose writing and to the ways in which Irish life and culture are captured and reflected in the course texts.

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