DUBLIN PARLIAMENTARY INTERNSHIP - PROGRAMME IN IRISH SOCIETY & POLITICS

LITERATURE

Description
The course examines writers and key representations of Ireland within their contemporary contexts and assesses the chief socio-political motivations and implications underpinning these national portraits.

Two things should be clear by the end of the course. First, Irish literature is an active interpreter and interrogator of socio-political realities and, in turn, an active mobiliser of cultural ideals. For example, poems and plays forged from an indigenous mythology and living folk culture played a role in shaping cultural and political nationalism in the late 1880s. Comically subversive portraits of Irish life provoked riots over national self-representation in the Abbey Theatre in the early 1900s. And, between 1930-50s, bleak stories of disenchantment were instrumental in challenging a conservative social milieu in the newly independent Ireland.

Second, it should be clear that writers accept or reject previous literary conventions and images to accommodate social change. For example, W.B. Yeats’s glorification of blood sacrifice in pre-revolutionary Ireland is challenged by Sean O’Casey who, after the bloodshed of the 1916 Rising, War of Independence and Civil War, questions the role of eloquence and violence in Irish life. Patrick Kavanagh, who articulates the desolation of rural existence in mid-century Ireland, checks W.B. Yeats’s and J.M. Synge’s romanticisation of the primitive and eloquent peasantry at the turn of the century.

Ireland has produced four Nobel Prize winners — W.B. Yeats, G.B. Shaw, Samuel Beckett and Seamus Heaney — in addition to a large number of writers, such as James Joyce, internationally acclaimed for their eloquence and intelligence. While the course focuses on themes relevant to the socio-political angle, such as nationalism, cultural identity, ‘drama as history’ and ‘eloquence and violence’, it is the writers’ gifts of imagination and insight which make the issues memorable in the first instance.

The majority of classes are based on key works by major Irish writers. The course emphasises the close relationship between Irish society and the literary works of the time.

On the completion of the course, students should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the development process of modern Irish Literary Culture and its effects on Irish society.

Course Outline

The Development of Irish Literature in English
Romantic Ireland: Dreams and Responsibilities:  W.B. Yeats, Early Lyrics
Romance and Rebellion: W.B. Yeats, Cathleen ni Houlihan
Elocution & Independence: J.M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World
Cultural Options: James Joyce, The Dead
Politics and Revolution: Sean O’Casey, The Plough and the Stars
Reality Check: Patrick Kavanagh, The Great Hunger
Nothing Happens: Samuel Beckett, Krapp’s Last Tape
A Viable State? John McGahern, *High Ground*

Outside History: Eavan Boland, *Selected Poems*

Lines of Fire: Poets in Northern Ireland

Urban Ireland: Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments*

1930-1960: Poetry & Politics

1960-Present: Drama

1975-Present: Poetry
MODERN IRISH LITERATURE

Core Readings

- W.B. Yeats: Selected Poems (Penguin) or New Oxford Student Texts: WB Yeats
  - "Cathleen Ni Houlihan"
- J.M. Synge: Playboy of the Western World and Other Plays (Oxford World’s Classics)
- James Joyce: Dubliners (Penguin)
- Sean O’Casey: Three Dublin Plays (Faber & Faber)
- Patrick Kavanagh: Selected Poems (Penguin)*
- Samuel Beckett: Waiting for Godot (Faber & Faber) & Collected Shorter Plays (Faber & Faber)
- John McGahern: High Ground or Collected Stories (Faber & Faber)
- Eavan Boland: Collected Poems (Carcanet)

Extra Readings

- Dermot Bolger (ed.): Contemporary Irish Fiction (Picador)
- Marina Carr: Plays 1 (Faber & Faber)
- Donovan, Jeffares & Kennelly: Ireland’s Women: Writings Past and Present
- Peter Fallon/Derek Mahon (eds.): Contemporary Irish Poetry (Penguin)
- Brian Friel: Translations & Dancing At Lughnasa (Faber & Faber)
- Seamus Heaney: Opened Ground: Selected Poems, 1966-1996 (Faber & Faber or FS&G)
- Martin McDonagh: Plays 1 (Leenane Trilogy) (Methuen)
- Derek Mahon: New Collected Poems (Gallery Books)

Criticism

- Seamus Deane: A Short History of Irish Literature (Hutchinson, 1986)
- Declan Kiberd: Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modem Nation (Vintage, 1995)
- Christopher Murray: Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to Nation (Manchester University Press, 1997)
- A.N. Jeffares: Anglo-Irish Literature (Gill and Macmillan, 1982)
- Anthony Roche: Contemporary Irish Drama (Gill & Macmillan, 1994)

Assignment

Discuss the issue of cultural identity and self-confidence in Irish literature
Discuss the use of history in Irish literature
Discuss eloquence and violence in Irish literature
Discuss the importance of ‘place’ in Irish literature
Discuss the tensions between tradition & modernity in Irish literature
Discuss the role of the Irish writer as socio-political critic.
Examine the representations of women in the work of two writers on the course.
Write a critical introduction to the work of one modern Irish writer.