

# IRISH LITERATURE: AN INTRODUCTION

Ondřej Pilný

**B.A. optional course**

Monday 14:10-15:45, Room 111

## OBJECTIVES

A survey course designed to introduce some of Ireland's major modern authors and discuss their work in its broader cultural and political context (Irish, Anglophone, and European respectively).

## SCHEDULE

19 Feb	Introduction
26 Feb	James Joyce, "The Dead"
4 Mar	J.M. Synge, <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i>
11 Mar	W.B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," "The Second Coming," "Sailing to Byzantium"
18 Mar	Frank O'Connor, "Guests of the Nation"; Elizabeth Bowen, "Sunday Afternoon"
25 Mar, 1 Apr	no class
8 Apr	Patrick Kavanagh, <i>The Great Hunger</i>
15 Apr	Flann O'Brien, <i>The Third Policeman</i>
22 Apr	Samuel Beckett, <i>All That Fall</i>
29 Apr	Seamus Heaney, "North," "Punishment," "Strange Fruit"
6 May	Stewart Parker, <i>Spokesong</i>
13 May	Christina Reid, <i>Tea in a China Cup</i>

## QUESTIONS to guide class discussion

### James Joyce, "The Dead"

1. What are Gabriel's greatest worries before and during Misses Morkan's dance? List at least four of these. 2. Pay attention to the occurrence of snow. How do you interpret the role of snow in the final scene of the story?

### J.M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*

1. Why is Christy Mahon glorified for what he has done, and what are the reasons for Pegeen Mike falling in love with him? 2. Why is Christy rejected after he has killed his father again, and what does this tell you about the local community?

### W.B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," "The Second Coming," "Sailing to Byzantium"

1. What attitude does "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" take to life in the country? Think of other texts that express the same view, based on your reading experience. 2. What does the idea of the "second coming" refer to in the Christian tradition? Consider the influence of the historical context on the atmosphere in "The Second Coming", a poem written in 1919. 3. List the reasons why the speaker in "Sailing to Byzantium" wishes to leave the contemporary world for Byzantium.

### Frank O'Connor, "Guests of the Nation"

1. Do the names of the characters in "Guests of the Nation" reflect their nature? 2. Is Jeremiah Donovan an evil person?

### Elizabeth Bowen, "Sunday Afternoon"

1. How is nature (e.g., plants, flowers, the weather) used in "Sunday Afternoon"? 2. How does the story respond to Ireland's neutrality in the Second World War?

**Patrick Kavanagh, *The Great Hunger***

1. Make a list of at least five principal qualities/features of the Irish peasant based on your reading of this poem. 2. Is this an anti-religious poem?

**Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman***

1. Characterise briefly the three policemen. Is the number three of importance? 2. How do de Selby's theories concerning time, space, and existence relate to the circumstances of the narrator-protagonist?

**Samuel Beckett, *All That Fall***

1. Why is Mr Rooney so furious when he gets asked about the black ball at the end of the play? 2. Outline briefly the relevance of the biblical allusion in the title of this play to what the play is about.

**Seamus Heaney, "North," "Punishment," "Strange Fruit"**

1. Why does Heaney speak about the Vikings in "North"? Does the title "North" refer only to Scandinavia? 2. What is the girl described in "Punishment" punished for? 3. How does "Strange Fruit" relate to the famous song of the same title (performed by Billie Holiday)?

**Stewart Parker, *Spokesong***

1. What do you imagine Belfast looked like in the 1970s, based on how it is depicted in the play? 2. What does the expression "trick cyclist" mean in slang? 3. How are ghosts treated in the play, and what symbolism do you see in that?

**Christina Reid, *Tea in a China Cup***

1. Compare the way in which Protestant and Catholic girls are raised by their families 2. How significant is the role of class in the play?

**BASIC BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**General:**

Kelleher, Margaret and Philip O'Leary, eds. *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature, Vol. 2, 1890-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

*The Irish University Review*. (The entire archive of the journal since its inception in 1970 is housed in the central library of the Faculty of Arts, and is available for research upon request from the librarians there.)

**Joyce:**

Frawley, Oona, ed. *A New and Complex Sensation: Essays on Joyce's Dubliners*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2004.

Ellmann, Richard. *James Joyce*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Levin, Harry. *James Joyce: A Critical Introduction*. London: Faber, 1960.

Attridge, Derek, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to James Joyce*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Brown, Richard, ed. *A Companion to James Joyce*. Malden: Blackwell, 2008.

**Synge:**

Hogan, Robert, and James Kilroy. *The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-1909*. Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1978. (available from the instructor)

Greene, Nicholas. *The Politics of Irish Drama. Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *John Millington Synge's The Playboy of the Western World*. New York: Chelsea House, 1988. (available from the instructor)

Levitas, Ben. *The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism, 1890-1916*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.

Pilný, Ondřej. *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama*. Praha: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006.

**Yeats:**

Yeats, W.B. *Poems*. Ed. and annot. A. Norman Jeffares. London: Macmillan, 1996.

Foster, R.F. *W.B. Yeats: A Life. I. The Apprentice Mage*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

—. *W.B. Yeats: A Life. II. The Arch-Poet*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Brown, Terence. *The Life of W.B. Yeats: A Critical Biography*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1999.

Howes, Marjorie and John Kelly. *The Cambridge Companion to W.B. Yeats*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

**O'Connor:**

Lennon, Hilary. *Frank O'Connor: Critical Essays*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007.

Steinman, Michael. *Frank O'Connor at Work*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990.

Foster, R.F. *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*. London: Penguin, 1989. (Chapters 19, 20.)

Hill, J.R., ed. *A New History of Ireland, VII: Ireland 1921-1984*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003

**Bowen:**

Corcoran, Neil. *Elizabeth Bowen: The Enforced Return*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.

Foster, R.F. "The Irishness of Elizabeth Bowen." *Paddy and Mr Punch. Connections in Irish and English History*. London: Penguin, 1995. (available from the instructor)

—. "Prints on the Scene: Elizabeth Bowen and the Landscape of Childhood." *The Irish Story. Telling Tales and Making It up in Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

**Kavanagh:**

Quinn, Antoinette. *Patrick Kavanagh: Born-Again Romantic*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993.

—. *Patrick Kavanagh: A Biography*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2003.

Brown, Terence. *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-1985*. London: Fontana, 1985. (Chapter 6.)

—. "After the Revival: Seán O Faoláin and Patrick Kavanagh." *Ireland's Literature: Selected Essays*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1988.

**O'Brien:**

Hopper, Keith. *Flann O'Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cork: Cork University Press, 2009; 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1995.

Booker, M. Keith. *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995.

Lanters, José. *Unauthorized Versions: Irish Menippean Satire, 1919-1952*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000.

Cronin, Anthony. *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien*. London: Paladin, 1990.

**Beckett:**

Knowlson, James. *Damned to Fame. The Life of Samuel Beckett*. London: Bloomsbury, 1996.

Pilling, John, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Ackerley, C.J. and S.E. Gontarski, eds. *The Grove Companion to Samuel Beckett*. New York: Grove Press, 2004.

Uhlmann, Anthony, ed. *Samuel Beckett in Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

**Heaney:**

O'Donoghue, Bernard, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Seamus Heaney*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

O'Driscoll, Dennis. *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008.

Vendler, Helen. *Seamus Heaney*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Parker, Michael. *Northern Irish Literature: The Imprint of History*. 2 vols. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

**Parker:**

Parker, Stewart. *Dramatis Personae and Other Writings*. Eds. Gerald Dawe, Maria Johnston and Clare Wallace. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2008.

Richtarik, Marilyn. *Stewart Parker: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Wallace, Clare. "Stewart Parker: A Sceptic in a Credulous World." *Ilha do Desterro*, Special Issue on Contemporary Irish Theatre 58 (Jan/June 2010): 157-178.

Pilný, Ondřej. "Comedy of Terrors: Stewart Parker." In *Irony and Identity in Modern Irish Drama*. Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2006. 135-153.

**Reid:**

Maguire, Tom. *Making Theatre in Northern Ireland: Through and Beyond the Troubles*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006.

Foley, Imelda. "Not Another Troubles Play: Theatre of Conflict in Northern Ireland 1968-1998." A Troubles Archive Essay. Arts Council of Northern Ireland, 2008.

[http://www.troublesarchive.com/resources/Not\\_Another\\_Troubles\\_Play.pdf](http://www.troublesarchive.com/resources/Not_Another_Troubles_Play.pdf).

Phelan, Mark. "From Troubles to Post-Conflict Theatre in Northern Ireland". In Grene, Nicholas and Chris Morash, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Irish Theatre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. 372-388.

**Please note that the library has dozens of other important volumes on the authors discussed in the course.**

## ASSESSMENT

Credit requirements consist of the following:

- 1) **Regular attendance and active participation in debates** based on the assigned reading.
- 2) **Submission of a written response to the assigned questions** on a week-to-week basis. The response must be submitted to the course instructor as an email attachment in MS Word or .odt format by the Friday preceding the class session (13:00); the minimum length of the response for each session is 250 words.
- 3) **Submission of a final essay** (min. length 2 000 words, Notes and Bibliography Chicago style strictly required). Essay topics must be consulted with the instructor in advance.

Students are advised not to use Internet sources in place of adequately researching texts available in print or in academic digital libraries. Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in a fail grade. Essays are submitted by e-mail to the course instructor (as an MS Word/Open Office document). **Deadline for all essays: 14 June 2024.** Any rewrites must be submitted by 5 September 2024.