IRSH 380: Irish Women Writers

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Course Description:
Many courses on Irish literature are dominated by the writing of men. This course shifts the focus and places the work of Irish women writers at the center of our inquiry. Women were often seen as emblems of nation and motherhood; this course disrupts that binary to include Irish women as literary creators. To do this we will survey a range of Irish women’s writing including poems, novels, short stories, plays, cultural history, and literary criticism. To enhance our study, we will look to film and stage adaptations to explore the process of translating a written text into a visual or graphic format. We will discuss social, political, and cultural developments such as the formation of an Irish identity for the newly independent nation, women’s role in post-independent Ireland, the literary trope of woman-as-nation, and issues of gender, sexuality and ethnicity in the “new Ireland.”

This class is designed to provide students with the rhetorical knowledge and cultural perspectives neccessary to be successful writers at the college level and more specifically within the field of Irish Studies. This course emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, reading, and composing in an academic context. To do this, students will explore research practices within the field of Irish Studies and related disciplines (such as feminist rhetorical practices, women’s and gender studies, postcolonial studies, etc.) and successful composing methods to bring these insights to the page. Students will expand their purview by examining the literary, historical, national, and gender contexts for interpreting Irish texts. The writing assignments in this course are aimed at increasingly students’ fluidity at composing literary criticism, rhetorical analysis, and literature reviews through a series of scaffolded, reflective writing inquiries.
Students will learn to identify and enact key features of discipline specific writing such as summary, analysis, and argumentation by studying primary and secondary sources. Students will also focus on organization, clarity, and mechanics through a systematic series of revisions.

One of the more exciting elements of teaching this course is the diversity of knowledge we all bring to the classroom. With that said, no prior study of Irish literature is necessary for this course. Please feel welcome to ask questions as we build knowledge together.

**Required Course Texts**
Edna O'Brien, *Down by the River*
Emma Donoghue, *Room*
Anne Enright, *What are You Like?*
Kate O'Brien, *The Land of Spices*
Éilis Ni Dhubhne, *The Dancers Dancing*
Patricia Burke Brogan, *Eclipsed*

**General Class Expectations**

**IRSH 380 is an Approved Writing courses.** The university learning outcomes include:

- Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts
- Formulate and express opinions and ideas in writing
- Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose
- Revise written work based on constructive feedback
- Find, evaluate, and use information effectively
- Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions
- Demonstrate appropriate English language usage

**Grading Policy**
- Common Ground Presentation 15%
- Conference Paper 20%
- Field Day Anthology Assignment 20%
- Annotated Bibliography 15%
- “Major, Major” Seminar Paper 30%

Students enrolled in IRSH 380 are graded by the traditional letter grade A, B, C, D, F.

**Major Assignments**

**Common Ground Presentation (1 page):** At the start of each class, a group of 2-3 students, will begin our conversation on the assigned reading by offering commentary and guiding discussion questions for the class to grapple with. Presenters will be asked to consider the literary, historical, national, and/or gender contexts needed for us to understand the texts assigned for the day. Presenters should prepare a handout with a brief outline detailing the relevant research, textual support from the assigned reading, and the discussion questions.

**Conference Paper (4-6 pages):** To accompany the Common Ground Presentation (CGP), you will also write a conference paper about the text you do your CGP on. Conference papers will be due two weeks after your CGP so you are welcome to use class discussion to inform your analysis. This paper should focus on one of the themes or issues you found most compelling in the text. To bolster your claims you must include one secondary source that I have not assigned for class reading. I encourage you to use the sources assigned by me if they contribute to your argument, but these sources do NOT count as your additional source. This assignment will receive formal, written feedback from me and you are required to revise this essay.
Field Day Anthology Assignment (4-5 pages): “The long-anticipated, two-volume publication of Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions will...redress the traditional exclusion of women's voices from Irish literature.” (Los Angeles Times)

Hailed by many as the definitive collection devoted to Irish writing, the Field Day Anthology, is oft criticized for underrepresenting the work of Irish women writers. Volumes 1 thru 3 showcase a wide-range of male writers, but it wasn't until the publication of volumes 4 & 5 that texts written by women were accurately represented. Since this course holds as its central theme the writing of Irish women, this assignment asks you to engage with a compare and contrast between two volumes (the “regular” volumes 1-3 and the “women’s volumes” 4-5) of the Field Day Anthology (just excerpts, not the entire collection). You will need to read against the grain and engage in critical analysis in order to track elements of inclusion and exclusion. This assignment will receive formal, written feedback from me and you are required to revise this essay.

Annotated Bibliography (2-4 pages): The annotated bibliography must include a minimum of five, secondary sources discovered in the process of your own research. Your annotated bibliography will include a brief summary of the source, analysis of the source (credibility, etc.), and a rationale for how you intend to use this source in your seminar paper. You are welcome to choose any topic related to the course and we will have ample time to discuss and conference your ideas as they develop.

The “major, major” Seminar Paper (8-10 pages): The crowning jewel of the semester is 8-10 page seminar paper. For the scope of this assignment, you are welcome to focus on a topic of your choosing related to the course content; please pay particular attention to the literary, historical, national, and/or gender contexts of the texts we studied this semester. Using the research methods practiced all semester, this paper should highlight a critical awareness of your topic through the incorporation of diverse sources. A more detailed explanation will be distributed in class. During the last two weeks of the semester all students must meet with me to conference their work-in-progress seminar paper. During our individual conferences, I will offer each writer strategies for revision, additional sources of research, and content analysis.