

**Advanced English: Irish Literature**  
**Maybeck High School, Spring 2011**  
**Teacher: Michael Ditmore**  
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**SYLLABUS**  
**TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRISH LITERATURE:**

In this advanced literature course, we will examine canonical and non-canonical authors in relation to the culture which produced the works of Joyce, Yeats, and Beckett. This period might seem a bit narrow, but it is a period of enormous and varied literary output. Our focus will start out in the last years of the Irish literary revival, moving past the day of *Ulysses*, in 1904, past the memorable Easter of 1916, and culminating in the war of independence which led to the founding of an independent Irish nation and national government as well as to the fateful partitioning of Ireland. We will use the literary texts in tandem with an investigation of the cultural history of Ireland in this crucial period in order to arrive at a deepened understanding of the period and culture of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ireland so formative to the constellations of power and conflict in contemporary Ireland.

**COURSE GOALS**

We will read a range of material reaching from the resurrections of Irish mythological material in works published in the early-twentieth century to plays produced in the Abbey theater, newspaper articles, political manifestoes, poetry, short stories, and two novels, all manifesting a complex blend of historical and cultural perspectives. Part of my aim is to convey the vital and productive cultural ferment that existed in the presence of the growing agitation towards the overthrow of British rule. But the most important objective of the course is to bring the students to a point that any subsequent Irish material they encounter is more deeply laden with intellectual connections to the actual events and ‘matter’ of this complex period. A corollary to that aim is that, since much of the matter of this period consists of translations of the earliest Irish literature, the student is exposed to a very broad spectrum of the Irish literary heritage without thwarting the design of staying within a limited historical period.

**Texts**

- *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*: Penguin
- Henry Arbois de Jubainville. *The Irish Mythological Cycle and Celtic Mythology*: Nabu Public Domain Reprints
- *Modern and Contemporary Irish Drama*. Norton Critical Edition
- *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*: Scribner Paperback Poetry
- James Joyce. *Dubliners*: Norton Critical Edition
- James Joyce. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: Norton Critical Edition
- Flann O’Brien. *At Swim-Two-Birds*: Dalkey Archive Press
- Occasional handouts

**Recommended readings:**

- Robert Welch, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*. Oxford UP (1996)
- Terry Eagleton. *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*. Verso (1995).
- Robert Welch. *Changing States: Transformations of Modern Irish Writing*. Routledge (1993).
- J.W. Foster. *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival: A Changeling Art*. Syracuse UP (1987).
- Ulick O’Connor. *Celtic Dawn: A Portrait of the Irish Literary Renaissance*. Black Swan Press (1984).
- Richard Fallis. *The Irish Renaissance*. Syracuse UP (1977).

**Instructional methods:**

- In class the method will be a mixture of lecture and close-reading of a number of texts assigned for the day. Students must work hard to understand and be able to discuss the themes of the course as well as the novels, short stories, poems, and other literary works we read.
- As in all English courses, writing is a major component of the work required. Students are expected to produce thoughtful analytical writing in a professional manner, on time, and correctly formatted.

**Credit requirements**

- 25%: In-class discussion, quizzes, and informal writing
- 25%: Keeping up on, and being able to talk about the readings
- 25%: Written assignments consisting of three five page-papers and one ten-page paper
- 25%: Comprehensive Final Exam