

# TENTATIVE SYLLABUS: IRISH-AMERICAN LITERATURE

Spring 2010

In a study of Irish-America, Andrew Greeley relates the story of a colleague who visited the Office of Education seeking funding for a summer program in Irish studies. The bureaucrat listened for over an hour, and when the colleague asked why there was funding for other ethnic experiences but not Irish, the bureaucrat finally exclaimed, “The Irish don’t count!” As Greeley adds, “Everyone knows everything worth knowing about [the Irish] and they don’t count anymore, anyhow, cause they are nothing more than lower-middle-class WASPs.” In this class Irish-Americans, their literature and culture, will indeed count as we consider issues such as emigration, assimilation, identity, politics, etc.

M--1/25--Introduction

M--2/1--Critical Review

M--2/8--Mary Doyle Curran, *The Parish and the Hill* (1948)

M--2/15--**FURLOUGH**

M--2/22--James T. Farrell, *Studs Lonigan* (“Young Studs”) (1932)

M--3/1--Maureen Howard, *Bridgeport Bus* (1965)

M--3/8--Mary Gordon, *The Other Side* (1989)

M--3/15--**FURLOUGH**

M--3/22--Eugene O’Neill, *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* (1940)

M--3/29--**SPRING BREAK**

M 4/5--O’Neill, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*

M--4/12--Alice McDermott, *At Weddings and Wakes* (1992)

M--4/19--William Kennedy, *Very Old Bones* (1992)

M--4/26--J. P. Donleavy, *The Ginger Man* (1958) (1994) **PRECIS DUE**

M--5/3--F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

M--5/10--*The Brothers McMullen* **FINAL EXAM DUE**

**CAVEAT:** Many of these works deal with raw, sensitive issues; more specifically, they deal with subjects and reveal attitudes many find repugnant or retrograde. If you are looking for politically correct works, you will not find them here. Be prepared for issues such as racial bigotry, anti-Semitism, sexism, ageism, etc., to be openly discussed. If you find such discussions unacceptable, consider looking for another course.

**INSTRUCTOR** Dave Madden, Calaveras 156, Office Hrs--MW 10:00-11:00 & M 6:00-6:30. Office phone: 278\_5623 or English Dept.: 278\_6586; email: maddendw@csus.edu. Entire syllabus posted at <http://www.csus.edu/indiv/m/maddendw>

### **EXPECTATIONS**

- \*Complete all reading assignments by dates assigned
- \*Participate in class discussions
- \*Attend class regularly

Since this is not a correspondence course and since we meet only once a week, attendance is mandatory. A student will be allowed no more than one (1) unexcused absence (and no more than one excused absence). Those who have more than 1 unexcused absence will have a whole grade deducted from the final grade for each additional absence. Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. If a student arrives after attendance has been taken, it is his/her responsibility to see that s/he is recorded as being present. Excused absences will be granted only for extenuating circumstances (neither general malaise nor an assignment in another class will do) and must be cleared no later than the next class period. It is your responsibility to check your attendance; my records are final.

I recommend you date your class notes in order to demonstrate your attendance should there be a conflict in records. Be prepared to show those notes at the time that you inquire about your absences.

Attendance policy--Class begins on the hour; students arriving consistently late by more than 5 minutes will be considered absent for any time missed. The time missed will be calculated as absences which will affect the final grade as explained above.

### **GRADING**

The final course grade will be based on:

- 2 essays\_\_60% final grade
- 1 essay final exam (blue book required)\_\_25% final grade
- 1 precis of a critical work\_\_15% final grade
- class participation, effort, improvement\_\_swing factors

\*To miss any of the assignments above will result in an automatic failure of the course. NO EXCEPTIONS.

**GRADING STANDARDS** (as stated in CSUS. catalog under "Academic Regulations")

- A Exemplary achievement of the course objectives. In addition to being clearly and significantly above the requirements, the work exhibited is of an independent, creative, contributory nature.
- B Superior achievement of the course objectives. The performance is clearly and significantly above the satisfactory fulfillment of course requirements.
- C Satisfactory achievement of the course objectives. The student is now prepared for advanced work or study.
- D Unsatisfactory achievement toward the course objectives, yet achievement of a sufficient proportion of the objectives so that it is not necessary to repeat the course unless required to do so by the academic department.
- F Ineffective achievement toward the course objectives. The student has made no clearly significant progress.

**NB:** I do **not** negotiate grades. If you have questions about performance on an assignment (not about the grade on same), I will be glad to explain, but I will not barter a grade up or down.

### **GENERAL POLICIES**

**LATE PAPERS**--in this class they do not exist; the date an assignment is due is the date the assignment is due. If there is some clear and compelling reason for a late paper (not great powder at one's favorite ski resort, general malaise, or an assignment in any other class), see or call me in advance of submission. All papers must be submitted in class the week before the essay is to be considered by the class.

**TYPING**--mandatory for all papers. Papers should be neat and free of extreme typographical errors. Double\_space and use 1" margins. Use only a 12 pt font and print on only one side of the paper. Number pages, beginning with second page, in upper right hand corner, and secure pages only with a staple in the upper left hand corner. On a cover page center the title and put in the lower right hand corner your name, the date the assignment is due, the title of the novel you are writing about, the course number (250Q), and my name.

**MISCELLANEOUS**--Students must keep abreast of assignments; I will not accept the excuse that because someone misses a class s/he did not know there was a change in the syllabus or an assignment. If there are any changes in the syllabus, they will be announced in class, and students are then responsible for these on dates announced.

### **MECHANICS OF THE COURSE**

**SEMINAR PAPERS**--for each novel there will be a 2-3 essays (6-8 pages in length) submitted on the same topic. These essays will form the basis of class discussion. Writers must keep in mind that their assignment, in every case, is to present a reasoned, well-documented, analytical, argumentative response to the topic assigned. In other words, the essays are not simply plot

summaries but may indeed include some limited summary in order to make their cases. Keep in mind that your audience is one that has read the novel but that needs persuading of your point of view. These assignments are not necessarily exercises in literary research, though a knowledge of extant scholarship on your subject will, of course, be helpful in articulating an individual point of view. If you do use the words or ideas of someone else, be sure to document accurately according to the recent MLA style of citation reference. As stated above, papers will be submitted a week before they will be discussed. Writers must submit the original copy to me and anonymous photo copies for each student in the class a week in advance of the discussion of that work.

**SEMINAR RESPONDENTS**--just as there will be two essays under consideration for each meeting, there will be 2-3 volunteers to lead discussion for that meeting. The respondents should consider the essays submitted, respond to issues and ideas presented there, raise any pertinent questions, as well as discuss or pose questions regarding other relevant issues suggested by or even ignored by the essays. The essays offer a place to begin but they are by no means all that will be discussed. Respondents must type up and distribute a copy of their questions on the night of discussion.

**CRITICAL PRECIS**--on a first-come-first-served basis, students will select a critical text from a distributed list. Students must read the work and then summarize its main ideas, contents, critical position, bibliographic information, etc. in two pages only. The point of this assignment is to briefly describe the work for someone who is probably unfamiliar with it. Submit the original and copies for each member of the class. Thus each student will have a brief, carefully annotated bibliography of secondary sources for further reading or research. Writers must submit the original copy to me and anonymous photo copies for each student in the class.

**PLAGIARISM**--Plagiarism is the false assumption of authorship, and, as the MLA Handbook notes, it constitutes the "use of another person's ideas, information, or expressions without acknowledging that person's work. . . . Passing off another person's ideas, information, or expressions as your own to get a better grade or gain some other advantage constitutes fraud." Simply put, if you didn't think of it, didn't say it, or didn't write it, you must give full attribution in the form of proper citation. I will not tolerate plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, and I will fail anyone I catch cheating and report that student to the Dean of Students. For information on the university's policy concerning plagiarism and academic honesty, see <http://www.csus.edu/umanual/student/UMA00150.htm>.

**BEHAVIOR**--recently a professor in another department did a survey of standards of behavior, and the results suggested there is some confusion about what is (and is not) acceptable in university classes. She has advised that professors define their standards, so here are mine: certain fundamental standards of behavior must be observed in this class. Common courtesy and respect is demanded of all enrolled in this class. Therefore you are not to read the newspaper or a textbook for another course once the class meeting has begun. **Turn off your cell phones**; no one is to take or make a call during class; the same goes for texting, don't send or view any during class. **Turn off the laptops**; no one may use a laptop during class. Likewise, no one is

to work on assignments for another course in this class. Do not talk or otherwise interrupt me or another student who is speaking, and under no condition will anyone be permitted to sleep during class lectures or discussions. Those who cannot or will not follow these obvious rules of behavior will be counted as absent for that class period and may be subject to dismissal from the course.

**ESSAY TOPICS: IRISH-AMERICAN LITERATURE**  
**Spring 2005**

Submission Date:      Topics:

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|------|--|
| 2/3  | Emigration has become an unfortunate fact of Irish life. Trace and analyze the range and types of emigration detailed in <i>The Parish and the Hill</i> .  |
| 2/8  | James T. Farrell is often described as a premier American naturalist and a writer who dedicated much of his work to his native Chicago. At the time the <i>Studs Lonigan</i> takes place, Chicago had grown from a slimy slaughter yard to a vital metropolis. Examine Farrell's depiction of the urban landscape and consider how space operates in the novel and perhaps reinforces Stud's ethnic condition. |
| 2/22 | Analyze the novel as a bildungsroman; however, consider two important components foregrounded in <i>Bridgeport Bus</i> : gender and ethnicity. What changes or implications do Mary Agnes Keely's gender and ethnic identity add to this "apprentice novel?"   |
| 3/1  | Leo Tolstoy opens <i>Anna Karenina</i> with the famous line, "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Indeed, the MacNamaras in Mary Gordon's <i>The Other Side</i> are uniformly cursed with unhappiness, but why? The novel is a family chronicle about Irish-Americans; explain this unhappiness in terms of family and ethnicity.                                   |
| 3/8  | Scholars have debated the fog imagery in <i>Long Day's Journey into Night</i> usually emphasizing Mary's drug-taking. Analyze that imagery in terms of Irish-American traits and the condition of the Tyrone's as representatives of that ethnic group.  |
| 3/22 | <i>The Moon for the Misbegotten</i> emphasizes even more than <i>Long Day's Journey</i> Irish-American ethnicity. However, some have argued that O'Neill is trading in stereotypes, reproducing the traditional stage Irishman. Argue how O'Neill uses distinctly Irish traits and explain to what ends.   |
| 4/5  | In her book <i>Irish America: Coming into Clover</i> , Maureen Dezel remarks that  |

Irish-Americans are “fighters of heart who assume much of life is predestined.” Analyze the sense of fate that defines the lives of the characters in Alice McDermott’s *At Weddings and Wakes*.

- 4/12 Analyze the significance of the Malachi McIlhenny story in *Very Old Bones*. Indeed, it is an inspiration for Peter’s art, but it suggests much more. Consider in terms both for the Phelan family but for Irish-Americans in general.
- 4/19 One way to read *The Ginger Man* is as an adult fairy tale (a point of view encouraged by the novel’s title). Analyze the novel as a distinctly Irish fairy tale—what does it suggest about Irish and Irish-American dreams and aspirations?
- 4/26 *The Great Gatsby* is a major American novel, which reveals a great deal about American culture, and certainly one of the major critical preoccupations with the work is its depiction of the American dream. Consider the novel, however, as a distinctly *Irish-American* fiction; what does it reveal about this ethnic group and its role in and accommodations to American culture?

## **STUDY QUESTIONS FOR CRITICAL ESSAYS**

### **“I Can’t Stand Your Books’: A Writer Goes Home”–Mary Gordon**

- 1.) What is Gordon’s thesis; explain her central idea.
- 2.) Explain the importance of the frequent Irish refrain, “Who do you think you are?”
- 3.) Gordon argues that there are relatively few Irish-American writers. Why, if this is true, does she say there are so few?
- 4.) If the latter is true, why do writers like Gordon devote their attention to them?

### **“That Much Credit: Irish-American Identity and Writing”–Shaun O’Connell**

- 1.) Who are the Irish-American in O’Connell’s view; how can we identify them?
- 2.) Explain the notion of the Irish in America “pass[ing] for white.”
- 3.) O’Connell looks closely at two memoirs by James Carroll and Michael Patrick MacDonald. What profile of Irish-America emerges from these?
- 4.) How does the average Irish-American view the homeland?

### **“Unappealing Ethnicity Meets Unwelcoming America . . .”–June Dwyer**

- 1.) Explain the notion of the “composite self.”
- 2.) Dwyer chooses three stories by Mary Gordon to construct aspects of the Irish-American character. What are some of these aspects?
- 3.) Explain the essay’s title. What does Dwyer mean by saying, “all ethnicities are not equally benign”?

### **“Cherishing the Irish Diaspora; On a Matter of Public Importance: An Address to the House of Oireachtas,” Mary Robinson**

- 1.) What is Robinson’s thesis; what does she advocate?
- 2.) On p. 5 she asserts that “commemoration is a moral act, just as this relation in this country to those who have left it is a moral relationship.” Explain this concept and its implications.
- 3.) Why should native Irish embrace members of the Irish diaspora?
- 4.) Explain the importance of the emblem of the “light in the window.”

**IRISH-AMERICAN SCHOLARSHIP FOR PRECIS**

- Byron, Reginald. *Irish America*. 1999.
- Casey, Daniel J. & Robert E. Rhodes, eds. *Irish-American Fiction: Essays in Criticism*. 1979.
- . *Irish Nationalism and the American Contribution*. 1976.
- Clark, Dennis. *The Irish Relations: Trials of an Immigrant Tradition*. 1982. (UCD)
- Cuddy, Joseph Edward. *Irish-America and National Isolationism, 1914-1920*. 1966.
- Deignan, Tom. *Irish Americans*. 2003.
- Doyle, David Noel. *Irish Americans: Native Rights and National Empires: The Structure, Divisions, and Attitudes of the Catholic Minority in the Decade of Expansion, 1890-1901*. 1976.
- Diner, Hasia. *Erin's Daughters in America*. 1983.
- Drudy, P. J. *The Irish in America: Emigration, Assimilation, and Impact*. 1985.
- Ebest, Sally Barr & Kathleen H McInerney. *Too Smart to be Sentimental: Contemporary Irish American Women Writers*, 2008. (UCD)
- Fallows, Majorie R. *Irish Americans: Identity and Assimilation*. 1979.
- Fanning, Charles. *Essays*. 2002.
- . *The Irish Voice in America : 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*. 2000.
- . *The Woman of the House: Some Themes in Irish-American Fiction*. 1985. (UCD)
- Flanagan, Thomas. *There You Are: Writings on Irish and American Literature and History*. 2004. (UCD)
- Gordon, Mary. *Good Boys and Dead Girls, and Other Essays*. 1991.
- Greeley, Andrew M. *That Most Distressful Nation: The Taming of the American Irish*. 1972.
- Hayden, Tom. *Irish on the Inside: In Search of the Soul of Irish America*. 2001.
- Henderson, Thomas M. *Tammany Hall and the New Immigrants: The Progressive Years*. 1976.
- Ignatiev, Noel. *How the Irish Became White*. 1995.



MacLaughlin, Jim, ed. *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities*. 1997. (UCD)

McCaffrey, Lawrence J. *The Irish Diaspora in America*. 1976.

—. *Textures of Irish America*. 1998.

Miller, Kerby A. *Emigrants and Exiles : Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*. 1985.

O'Grady, Joseph P. *How the Irish Became Americans*. 1973.

Shannon, William V. *The American Irish*. 1990.

Stephens, Michael Gregory. *Green Dreams*. 1994.

Waters, Mary C. *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. 1990.