WOMEN AND LITERATURE IN IRELAND – 5 Creds.

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I. PRESENTATION AND OBJECTIVES

This master course will give students the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the different aspects of Irish culture, history and society, and it will also encourage the interdisciplinary exchange of ideas and insights within the broad field of Irish Studies. It will also expand the students’ knowledge on subjects such as Irish literature, traditionally concealed in the syllabus of Spanish universities under headings such as “Literatura Inglesa” or “Cultura y Civilización Británicas”.

In particular, the main objective of this master course is to explore the different and contesting representations of Irish femininity in a large corpus of cultural texts. In the Irish context, womanhood has been a metaphor intrinsically connected with national identity. By maintaining the traditional Irish association between woman and land, and by inscribing a female motherly voice that speaks on behalf of an oppressed community, many early twentieth-century poets and rebels have depended on women as motifs in their poetry and oratory. Whichever the medium of expression, Irish women have been doubly silenced, both as national(ist) icons and idealized custodians of tradition, and also as beloved muses of the male artist. I will use jointly feminist and postcolonial studies in order to explore how some Irish women have been doubly marginalized and constructed as subordinated ‘Others’ by colonialism and/or patriarchy.

As we intend to analyse both real women and their artistic representations, the cultural manifestations we will look at will cover this complexity:

1) First of all, we will focus on the literary arena, and we will select some key examples of the different genres of poetry, novel, short story and drama, in order to analyse comprehensively works written both by men and women.

2) Secondly, we will pay attention to other forms of cultural manifestations that will give us a clue of how ‘womanhood’ is perceived and/or understood in Ireland. In particular, we will see the extent to which music, the media, the film industry and the advertising perpetuate and/or deconstruct conventional representations of Irish femininity.

Such a multidisciplinary approach to the notion of ‘Irish womanhood’ implies other complementary approaches that will enrich our initial object of study: analysis of conventional and innovative representations of women in Ireland, and hence, in the West; contrastive analysis of masculinity vs. femininity; contrastive analysis of male and female authors in Ireland; and finally, comparative analysis of how women have been represented in Ireland and other once-colonized nations. This analysis of Irish femininity is also the starting point from which to tackle other representations of the so-called ‘Otherness’ that prevail in a society where everything that distances itself from the masculine canon is secluded to the margins (i.e. homosexuals, immigrants, travellers, gypsies, the poor, etc.)

Taking all these priority thematic lines into account, the specific aims of the course are:

1) To study the concept “womanhood” as perceived and understood in some key examples of Irish poetry, fiction and drama, written both by men and women in the 20th
and 21st centuries. We will particularly focus on how contemporary Irish literature (re)formulates stereotypical notions of femininity such as the ‘mother’, the ‘wife’, the ‘new Eve’, the ‘witch’ and the ‘whore’. We will also carry a contrastive analysis of literary and mythological creations, and ordinary heroines. In order to do so, we will focus both on canonical and marginal authors, in order to study their perpetuation or subversion of conventional myths and their reinterpretation of canonical literature. The corpus of authors we will use in this literary study will be the following:

- Poetry: Eavan Boland, Paula Meehan, Dorothy Molloy, Colette Bryce, Mary O'Donnell, Mary O'Malley; etc.
- Novel: Patrick McCabe, Roddy Doyle; Mary O'Donnell; Julia O'Faolain
- Short Story: James Joyce; Anne Enright; Claire Keegan; Eilis Ni Dhuibhne; Mary O'Donnell
- Drama: W.B. Yeats, Brian Friel
- Autobiography: Frank McCourt, Nuala O'Faolain

(2) To analyse changing representations of womanhood during the second half of the twentieth century, as observed within a range of popular music lyrics and the images associated with them. Principal objects of analysis will be the work of Irish musicians such as the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, Christy Moore, Van Morrison, U2, Enya, Sinead O'Connor and the musical *Once*.

(3) To analyse representations of womanhood (both conventional and subversive) in Irish films: *Michael Collins*, *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, *The Commitments*, *Angela's Ashes* and *Once*.

(4) To analyse women in Irish society, with special attention to a paternalist text of vital importance, the Constitution, and to other sociological aspects of great relevance: domestic violence, abortion, the use of contraceptives and divorce.

(5) To carry out a comparative literary analysis of Irish women and other “Others” present in 21st century Ireland (immigrants, homosexuals, handicaps, the poor) bearing in mind how they are represented in all cultural mediums of expression.

(6) To encourage discussions of understandings of Ireland as a postcolonial country and to contest ‘Orientalist’ perceptions of Ireland abroad, by analysing the American reception and success of writers such as Eavan Boland, Frank McCourt and Nuala O'Faolain.

II. SYLLABUS

1. IMAGINARY, IMAGINED AND REAL WOMEN IN IRISH CULTURE: TOWARDS A DECONSTRUCTION OF IRISH FEMININITY
   1.1. The Celtic Heritage: Sovereignty goddesses; Sheela-na-gigs; Celtic heroines
   1.2. British (imperialist) representations: Hibernia, Britannia, and John Bull
   1.3. The National Muse: Mother Ireland, Dark Rosaleen, Cathleen Ni Houlihan.
      1.3.1. The “aisling” tradition
      1.3.2. The Irish Literary Revival: the Abbey Theatre, Mangan, Pearse, etc.
      1.3.3. Eamon de Valera and the 1937 Constitution
      1.3.4. The Ireland of the 1930s: Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*
1.4. Conventional and contesting representations of womanhood in traditional Irish music and pop music (Christy Moore; Sinead O’Connor; The Corrs, musical Once)

2. TWENTIETH-CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS: A SUBVERSIVE FEMININITY
   2.1. A new national muse: ‘(M)Other Irelands’ in Edna O’Brien, Eavan Boland, etc.
   2.2. New perspectives on maternity: Paula Meehan, Eavan Boland, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, etc.
   2.3. New perspectives on sexuality. The Female Body in the Foreground: Eavan Boland, Susan Connolly, Nuala Archer, etc.
   2.4. Gender and class: Paula Meehan (Poetry and documentary) and The Commitments
   2.5. The ‘Orientalist’ reception of Irish Literature in the ‘West’. Eavan Boland’s The Lost Land, Frank McCourt’s Angela’s Ashes, Nuala O’Faolain’s memoirs

3. BETWEEN TRADITION AND MODERNITY: 'IRISH' FEMININITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY
   3.1. A ‘new’ unrecognizable Ireland: Eavan Boland, Paula Meehan, Vona Groarke, Caitríona O’Reilly, etc.
   3.2. Is feminism still necessary?: Domestic Violence and rape in Dorothy Molloy, Sineád Morrissey, Leanne O’Sullivan, Eavan Boland
   3.3. The interplay of gender, race and multiculturalism: Paula Meehan, Colette Bryce, Leontia Flynn, Mary O’Donoghue, Mary O’Donnell, Michael O’Loughlin, Roddy Doyle
   3.4. The immigrant in contemporary Irish literature: Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland

4. ‘MOTHER IRELAND’ IN FILM
   4.2. The immigrant in Irish films: the musical film Once and discussion of other films recently released.

III. DETAILED PROGRAMME AND TASKS (to be confirmed in February 2013)

IV. METHODOLOGY

The programme consists of

- Lectures by myself and one invited keynote speaker: Jason King (University of Limerick).
- Theoretical-methodological seminars which discuss the state of a given field or methodological/theoretical approach on the basis of selected texts (feminist and postcolonial theory in particular). These theories will be applied to the discussion and (re)interpretation of particular literary texts, films and other cultural texts.
- Student papers: presentation of participants' research projects followed by discussion.
- Tutorials: individual discussions of participants' research with participating scholars
V. EVALUATION METHODS

- Attendance and active participation in class: 10%
- Tasks: 20%
- Oral Presentation: 30%
- Final Essay: 40%

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY: UGR Library


**ELECTRONIC RESOURCES**

*Éire-Ireland: A Journal of Irish Studies*

*Irish journal of gothic and horror studies*

*Irish University Review*

*Irish studies review*

*New Hibernia Review*

*Irish Political Studies*

*The Irish Book Review*