COURSE OBJECTIVE:

Gaelic literature is the oldest vernacular literature in Western Europe; this course introduces the student to early Gaelic narrative literature and gives insights into the culture(s) which created that literature. Students read and interpret a selection of texts in translation, including tales of Cú Chulainn and the Ulster Cycle, Fionn Mac Cumhaill and the Fianna and tales of the Otherworld, and develop skills in engaging critically with the literature. Tracing the vicissitudes of the Irish language and its culture from the seventeenth century onwards, the course explores Irish folklore and the oral storytelling tradition and examines the emergence and development of modern Gaelic literature from the period of the Cultural Revival in the late-nineteenth century. The representation of so-called ‘Gaelic’ identity as portrayed through Irish language literature and folklore is explored; through the reading of selections of Gaelic prose and poetry in translation, students gain insights into the rapid changes within Gaelic culture from the nineteenth century as represented in folklore and literature. While demonstrating an intimate awareness of formal and thematic developments in a broad range of world literatures, contemporary Gaelic prose and poetry engages closely with earlier sources within the Gaelic literary, oral and cultural traditions. The course develops students’ understanding of the dynamic interplay between the traditional and the contemporary within modern Gaelic literature.

A knowledge of Irish is not a prerequisite for the course; all classes are through English. Introductory classes in the Irish language will be provided to interested students.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Part I
1. The beginnings of literacy in Ireland; an introduction to the sources and methods of interpretation of Old and Middle Irish literature (Part I)
2. The beginnings of literacy in Ireland; an introduction to the sources and methods of interpretation of Old and Middle Irish literature (Part II)
3. Tales of the Ulaid (Táin Bó Cúailnge)
4. Tales of the Monastery (Early Irish Poetry)
5. Tales of the Otherworld I (Echtrae Chonnlai)
6. Tales of the Otherworld II (Immram Brain)
7. Tales of the Fianna (Acallam na Senórach)

Part II
1. The establishment, methodology and legacy of the Irish Folklore Commission
2. ‘Away with the Fairies:’ Traditional Irish narratives of the slua sí [fairy folk] in their sociocultural context
3. ‘The Great Queen Speaks:’ The Poetry of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill
4. ‘I suppose that never again will there be an old woman as Irish as me on this Island:’ The Rural Autobiography and the Gaelic Revival
5. Graveyard Clay vs. The Dirty Dust: Máirtín Ó Cadhain’s Cré na Cille in translation
6. ‘Banished to this wasteland because of one sin:’ Exile in Irish-language Literature
7. ‘It has always been the destiny of the true Gaels to live in a small, lime-white house in the corner of the glen:’ Parody and Satire in Flann O’Brien’s The Poor Mouth

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY: Part I

Basic Text
Cross, T.P. & Slover, C.H. 1936 Ancient Irish Tales
Cross, T.P. 1952 Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature
Dillon, M. 1948 Early Irish Literature
Dooley, A. & Roe, H. 1999 Tales of the elders of Ireland
Gantz, J., 1981 Early Irish Myths and Sagas
Greene, D. & O’Connor F. 1967 A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry
McConne, K. 1990 Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature
McConne, K. 2000 Echtrae Chonnlai and the Beginnings of Vernacular Narrative Writing in Ireland
Murphy, G., 1956 Early Irish Lyrics
Welch, R. 1996 The Oxford Companion to Irish Literature

Students are required to purchase the basic textbook Gantz, J., Early Irish Myths and Sagas.
Further Reading:
Caerwyn Williams, J.E. & Ford, P. 1992 *The Irish Literary Tradition*
Carney, J. 1967 *Medieval Irish Lyrics*
Jackson, K.H., 1951 *A Celtic Miscellany*
Koch, J.T. & Carey, J. *The Celtic Heroic Age*
Mac Cana, P. 1980 *The Learned Tales of Medieval Ireland*
Mallory, J.P., 1992 *Aspects of the Táin*
Ó Corráin, D. 1989 ‘Early Irish hermit poetry?’ in *Sages, Saints and Storytellers*, (edd.) D. Ó Corráin, L. Breathnach, K. McCon, 251-67
Wooding, J., 2000 *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature: An Anthology of Criticism*

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY: Part II

Basic Text

Further Reading:

REQUIREMENTS FOR CREDITS:
1. Attendance at all lectures and participation in seminars.
2. One essay of 1,500 words on a subject of your choice, subject to the agreement of the Course Professor (Those seeking graduate credit must write a 3,000 word paper).
3. Written examination of material covered in lectures and seminars over both sections of the course.

COURSE PROFESSORS:
Clodagh Downey, PhD. (Director)
Clodagh Downey is a graduate of UCC where she graduated with a PhD in Early and Medieval Irish. She has worked in lecturing and research in various areas of Celtic Studies in University College Cork, University of Cambridge, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies and NUI Galway. Dr. Downey’s teaching and research interests include Old and Middle Irish language, the literature of medieval Ireland, including heroic, mythological and king-tales, and dindsenchas.
Kicki Ingridsdotter, M.A., Ph.D.
Kicki Ingridsdotter has worked as a lecturer of Old Irish and Celtic Civilization in the School of Irish at the National University of Ireland, Galway, teaching courses in Old Irish language and literature, Celtic society, Celtic kingship and Mythology. She studied for her B.A, M.A. and Ph. D. in Celtic languages at the University of Uppsala, Sweden. Her research topics are based on early Irish saga text in general and text editing in particular.

Ailbhe Nic Giolla Chomhaill, M.A.
Ailbhe Nic Giolla Chomhaill is a doctoral student in the Department of Modern Irish at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She has taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses at NUIG and has spent time as a visiting researcher at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her doctoral research focuses on the folktale tradition of Joyce Country, County Galway.