Do you believe in faeries, W. B. Yeats asked a woman in the west of Ireland. No, she said, but they’re there.

Course Description

English 2461: *The Celtic Revival in Literature* is a study of the Celtic Renaissance in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The course focuses primarily on the myths and sagas of pre-Christian Ireland and their influence on writers of the Irish Literary Renaissance: for example W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and J.M. Synge. In this context we shall consider the role of the Gaelic Movement and the Celtic Twilight in Ireland’s rediscovery of its culture through translation of its ancient texts and the creation of a national identity.

We begin with a study of Irish myths, particularly the mythology of love and the otherworld in, for example, the stories of Midir’s 1,012-year wooing of Etain through a series of reincarnations; and the dream of Oengus, the Celtic god of love, whose transformation in the form of a swan is connected with one of the most famous of faery mounds in Ireland: Newgrange. Other tales reveal the values of pagan, Irish society, particularly those of Cú Chulaind whose longing for a faery love from the Otherworld threatens to destroy the heroic values he represents. In Celtic mythology, and mythology generally, the boundaries between the natural and supernatural are constantly shifting and meeting each other at sacred places, such as the sidhe or faery mounds, and during special times such as the twilight of the day or *Samhain* (Halloween), the twilight of the Celtic year. Faery folk and gods are shape-shifters and tricksters whose whims, desires and mischief are entangled with the visible world of our daily experience.

The word myth derives from the Greek word for tale or story. Myth also suggests *muthos*: to murmur with closed lips or to mutter. To hear their hidden meaning we must lean into the stories with a close ear as we would lean into the voice of a storyteller who murmurs secretly through closed lips. Joseph Campbell describes myths as “public dreams: dreams as public myths.” English 2461 explores the public dreams of Ireland’s mythologies, its patterns of gods and goddesses, heroes and madmen, holy places and other-worlds. During its literary renaissance, nineteenth-century Ireland re-imagined itself by re-interpreting these ancient patterns and listening closely to the murmurings of its own mythologies.

One of the goals of the course is to become familiar with Irish mythology as a body of “serious stories” that tells us about the shared tradition of Celtic culture. What was the world of the Celts like? What can we learn from ancient tales and sagas about the supernatural realm of the Otherworld, the realm of faery? Such a world is known by many names in Old Irish: *tir tairngiri* (The Land of promise); *tir na nOg* (The Land of Youth); *mag mell* (The Pleasant Plain); the Welsh *Annwn*. These are parallel worlds inhabited by tricksters, faery harpers, spirit animals and other mysterious beings. What do the sagas and tales reveal about druids, bards and seers,
their gifts of shape-shifting and prophecy? Who were the gods and goddesses of the Celts? And what do the tales reveal about the Celts’ sacred places, rituals and passage tombs that have been identified by archaeologists? We shall explore these topics through a careful study and analysis of primary Irish texts in translation accompanied by secondary readings. We will engage in close readings of the tales with an emphasis on the inter-relationships between the myths, the literature and culture of the Celts.

**Reading List:**
From *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*:
- The Wooing of Étain
- The Dream of Óengus
- The Birth of Cú Chulaind
- The Boyhood Deeds of Cú Chulaind
- The Death of Aife’s Only Son
- The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulaind and the Only Jealousy of Emer
- The Exile of the Sons of Uisliu
- The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne
- The Voyage of Bran
- The Enchanted Deer: The Birth of Oisin

**Two Irish Dramatists:**
W.B. Yeats: *The Only Jealousy of Emer*
  *At the Hawk’s Well*
J.M. Synge: *Riders to the Sea*

To accompany our study of the myths, we shall read selections from Miranda Green’s *The Celtic Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Gods and Legends*. A good place to start is the Preface and Chapter 1 which highlight problems of sources and dating the myths as well as some recurring themes. Chapter 2 is a helpful overview of “the myth-spinners,” those who told and gathered the tales. As we begin the tales themselves, I think you’ll find Chapter 3 helpful as an introduction to the various spirits whose names you may find unfamiliar. As the term moves along, we shall read the remaining chapters from Green to expand our understanding of the myths.

I also recommend Alwyn and Brinley Rees’s *Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales*. Although this is an earlier study (1961), it is a classic in the field. Unfortunately it is out of print, so from time to time, I’ll supplement our readings with a photocopy of selected chapters. The following chapters are particularly relevant to our readings this term. You may find them useful as you work through the ancient tales:

- Introduction 11-25
- Ch 3 Darkness and Light 83-94
- Ch 7 The Centre 146-72
- Ch 13 Wooings 259-78
- Ch 16 Voyages 314-25
**Method of Evaluation**

Evaluation for English 2461 is based on two essays (20 marks each), class participation (20), and Christmas exam (40).

**Tentative Assignment Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percent of Mark</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 10</td>
<td>First essay due</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 9</td>
<td>Second essay due</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TBA</td>
<td>Christmas exam</td>
<td>40</td>
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There are no supplementary exams in this course.

**Required Texts**


**Some Journals and Newspapers:**

Books Ireland
Canadian Journal of Irish Studies
Celtica
Éigse
Eire-Ireland
Irish Literary Supplement
Irish Pages
Irish University Review
Irish Times
The Journal of Modern Literature
New Hibernia Review
Revue Celtique
Twentieth-Century Literature

**Cyber Ireland: Here are a few sites I found helpful:**

EIRData (Electronic Irish Records Dataset)
URL: [http://www3.monaco.mc/pglib/](http://www3.monaco.mc/pglib/)

Searcs Web Guide to Irish Resources (an interdisciplinary site)
URL: [www.searcs-web.com/](http://www.searcs-web.com/)

CELT (Corpus of Electronic Texts): Resource for Irish history, literature and politics from University College Cork. CELT includes many Irish texts but not all are translated.

Celtica: *Journal of the School of Celtic Studies*: posted table of contents of all volumes through 1991.

Irish Resources in the Humanities
URL:  http://www.irith.org/index.jsp

IASIL (International Association of Irish Literature)
URL:  http://www.iasil.org

Isos (Irish Script on Screen) project of Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. Digital images of Irish manuscripts.
URL:  http://www.isos.dias.ie/

BBC History
URL:  http://www.bbc.co.uk.history/

Irish Writers Online
URL:  http://www.irishwriters-online.com/

www.maryjones.us/ctexts/index_irish.html: Jones began collecting classical and medieval Celtic tales in 1998. This is a very rich site with links to translations of numerous tales and to other related sites. Her second project is the Celtic Encyclopedia, a helpful resource for tracing people and places from the myths.

http://www.ulstercycle.wordpress.com: Mary Jones refers to this site as the most complete collection of Ulster Cycle tales.

www.mythicalireland.com: offers fascinating connections between myth, astronomy and archaeology as well as useful information on ancient Irish sites and standing stones. Beware of the translations of the ancient tales which tend to be selections from earlier publications such as Charles Squires’ translations.


http://mysite.verizon.net/cbladey/irish/verse.html#Directory: Includes translations from the later Romantic Fenian tradition such as the Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne.

The Celtic literature Collective: translations of Irish tales from the mythological, Historical, Ulster and Fenian cycles as well as links to other resources.


http://www.stonepages.com/ireland/ireland.html: a guide to some of the stones of Ireland, including maps and a glossary.

http://celticmythpodshow.com: this is an ambitious and popular site providing free audio readings of the tales of the Celtic countries: Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, Brittany and the Isle of Mann. So far you can listen to tales from Ireland. Tales from Wales are just beginning.
Policies

Accommodation related to differently-abled students: see Jennifer keeping Accessibility Centre at www.cbu.ca/jkac. Students requiring special accommodation should let me know at the beginning of the course.

CBU Policy does not allow the use of electronic devices in the classroom without the permission of the instructor: see Academic Calendar, p 41. Recording of course presentations is not permitted.

CBU Policy on Academic Dishonesty: See Academic Calendar, pp. 41-39

CBU Inclement Weather Policy: see http://www.cbu.ca/pdfs/3-1-Weather.pdf

Class Policy regarding class cancellation and make-up assignments or tests: if an assignment is due on the same day on which the class has been cancelled, the assignment should be submitted during the next class. If a test has been scheduled on the day the class has been cancelled, the test will be conducted during the next class.