

Carleton University
Winter 2024 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 2908A: Celtic Literatures
Spending Time with Seamus Heaney

Prerequisites: second year standing or permission of the department
Preclusions: additional credit for ENGL 2602 and ENGL 2606

Day(s) of the week / Time(s) of lectures Tuesday/Thursday 1:05-2:35pm
Format: In-person, not suitable for online students

Instructor: Professor Collett Tracey
Email: Colletttracey@cunet.carleton.ca

*****This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change.
A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term.*****

“Between my finger and my thumb/The squat pen rests./I’ll dig with it.”
(From “Digging” by Seamus Heaney)

Far from being an overview of Irish literature, this course will focus exclusively on the work of one great writer, and that is Seamus Heaney. Over the course of his life, he was a professor of poetry at both Harvard and Oxford Universities. He was also an award-winning translator, a prose writer, and a broadcaster. However, it is his poetry that we will be studying in this course.

Critics have compared Heaney to W.B. Yeats, Patrick Kavanagh, Robert Frost, Ted Hughes and William Wordsworth. His subject matter ranges widely. In some poems he is playful with language and its possibilities. In others he is entirely personal. In others he is political, addressing the conflict he experienced during the Troubles in Northern Ireland and elegizing the friends and acquaintances he lost to the violence. His work navigates ideas of love, loss, the natural world, childhood and memory. His power is that he does so in a simple and direct way that speaks to every day people provoking thought and a visceral reaction.

Required Text:

Heaney, Seamus. *100 Poems*. Available at the University bookstore.

Grading:

There will be three forms of evaluation. Given that there is no final examination, a significant percentage of your final grade will be based on attendance and participation. The rest of the grade will be based on a seminar presentation and an essay, which will be submitted during the

final class. Grades for term work will be based on insightfulness, originality, focus, organization of ideas, clarity of expression, scholarly rigor, correct use of MLA style, spelling, and grammar.

Attendance and Participation & short reflective piece: 30%

Seminar Presentation: 30%

Final Essay (due on the last day of class): 40%

Class Participation/Attendance:

Critical reading, writing and analytical skills cannot be learned from books alone. Asking questions about the readings and contributing to class discussions will help you better understand the material, hone your critical and interpretive skills. Therefore, you are expected to attend all classes. Attendance will be taken on a random basis and absences will be noted. **Students who miss four or more classes per term without an acceptable reason will not be able to pass the course.** You are also expected to bring the assigned text having read it and being prepared for discussion. If you do have to miss a class, it is your responsibility to get notes from another student. **Unless absolutely necessary, due to a disability, cellphones and laptops must be turned off during class time.** To promote active reading, I encourage you, though, to take notes by writing in the margins of your books and poems, and by marking off key passages that stimulate thought or discussion.

Short Reflective Piece:

Within the first six weeks of the course, you will be required to choose a poem that resonates with you and write a reflective response to it that is 1 to 2 pages in length.

Seminars:

You will be divided into small groups to facilitate more in-depth discussions about various texts. You will be required to do an in-class seminar in which you share, as a group, your collective understanding and research of a theme or issue. This can be done from a creative or academic point of view. With the understanding that some students are more extroverted or introverted than others, you will be able to participate in a way that is comfortable for you. However, whether or not you are actually presenting on the day of the seminar, you will be required to attend class and respond to questions from other class members. Each member of the seminar group will be asked to grade their peers on their contributions to the seminar, and themselves. The final grade, assigned by me, will take these evaluations into account.

The Essay:

You will be encouraged to devise your own essay topic in consultation with me. It should reflect ideas and material relevant to the issues that we will be discussing. Your essay can be an in-depth study of a single text or a thematic exploration across more than one text. The usual essay rules apply: you will be expected to demonstrate a level of engagement and research that goes

beyond the content covered in seminars, and the essay must be presented in correct MLA scholarly format. The essay must be typed and paginated. You should always keep a digital copy of your essay.