

English 8540, Spring 2018
English & European Literature:
21st Century Ireland
Dr. Rosemary Johnsen
Fully online course

Brexit's Irish Question | by Fintan O'Toole

The Irish Question rises yet again, looming on the road to Brexit like the Sphinx on the road to Thebes. It threatens to devour those who cannot so...

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Ireland's long, contentious history with England has taken a new turn in the twenty-first century, one that has restored significance to what used to be known as "the Irish Question." Current events impact both Ireland *and* the United Kingdom, giving renewed urgency to the relations between them and drawing attention to the broader European context in which they negotiate their political relations. In the wake of Brexit, the U.K.'s plan to withdraw from the European Union, foundational political realities in Ireland are again under discussion. For example, the partitioning of the island into two countries—determined only after a rebellion, treaty, and civil war during the original "troubles" of 1912-1923, and violently contested in the latter part of the twentieth century—is receiving new attention as the challenges of a "hard border" between the Republic of Ireland and the North loom over U.K. plans to leave the European Union. Meanwhile, in June, 2017, Ireland elected a new Taoiseach (Prime Minister), Leo Varadkar, a striking leader for socially conservative Ireland, which enshrines the Catholic Church in its Constitution. Varadkar, son of an Indian immigrant father and Waterford-born mother, became the first openly gay Irish government minister (roughly equal to a U.S. Cabinet Secretary) in 2015. Now 38, he is the youngest person ever to become Taoiseach, the first person from a minority ethnic background to do so, and is only the fourth openly gay head of government in the world. These are only a few indications of what an interesting time it is to consider Ireland in a specifically European context. Twenty-first century Irish literature is the ideal focus for the first-ever offering of English 8540 in its new guise of "English and European Literature."

The course opens with a short book by the distinguished historian of Ireland, R. F. Foster, *Luck and the Irish: A Brief History of Change 1970-2000*. Foster's book provides essential background, orienting us for the twenty-first century Irish literature we will engage. Short lyrical novels by Donal Ryan bookend our reading: we'll begin with *The Thing About December* (2013) and close with *The Spinning Heart* (2012). In between, we will read Gene Kerrigan's *The Rage* (2011), a novel by Booker-prize winner Anne Enright, *The Green Road* (2015), *Multitudes* (2016), a collection of short stories by Northern Ireland's Lucy Caldwell, and Brian McGilloway's crime novel *Bad Blood* (2017). We will be reading popular genre fiction, literary novels, and short stories written by well-regarded Irish and Northern Irish writers; these works are set in Dublin and Belfast, in rural communities in central, western, and northern Ireland, and in locations outside of Ireland. Through reading and research, we will develop a portrait of twenty-first century Ireland in a broader landscape of relations with a Brexit-minded U.K. and its own strong sense of being European. Contributions to a lively online discussion forum will guide us throughout the semester, and the major research/writing assignments are a curated set of online sources on pertinent topics and a seminar paper.



Gene Kerrigan @GeneKerrigan · Oct 1

This is true.
I, for instance, have fears that immigration declines and we return to the parochial backwater of my youth.



Books have been ordered at the GSU bookstore and are available online. Interested in learning more? Check out some of the articles I've posted on Twitter using the class hashtag of #ENGL8540, or send me an email at rjohnsen@govst.edu.

website: rosemaryj.com

twitter: @johnsenrm