



LT/CU 270 CELTIC MYTH AND LEGEND: FOLKLORE, FABLES, FAIRY TALES
IES Abroad Dublin

DESCRIPTION:

This interdisciplinary course will delve into the murky world of Celtic mythology and the magical folkloric traditions of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Through a combination of medieval texts and modern retellings we will explore the Irish Mythological, Ulster, and Finn Cycles, the Welsh *Mabinogion*, and a selection of Scottish folktales and legends. A diverse range of topics will be covered, such as the pre-Christian Celtic world, the distinctions between insular and continental Celtic mythology, comparative mythologies, oral folk traditions, and the close cultural connections between Ireland and Scotland. In addition to the literature aspect of this course, we will explore the inextricable link between myths and legends and landscape and archaeology, which will enable us to place our stories within historical, geographical, and literary frameworks. We will also read legends about the otherworldly fairy beings of the Irish *Aos Sí*, the Welsh *Tylwyth Teg*, and the *daoine sìth* of the Scottish Seelie Court. We will consider how the myths, legends, and folklore of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales are integral aspects of their respective societies and stand as bastions of cultural heritage and national identity. Students will be encouraged to draw upon their own knowledge of myths and legends from their respective cultural and educational backgrounds as well as make parallels between these ancient legends and modern fairy tales, children's literature, and pop-culture.

CREDITS: 3 credits

CONTACT HOURS: 45 hours

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION: English

PREREQUISITES: None

ADDITIONAL COST: None

METHOD OF PRESENTATION:

Lectures, large group discussion, small group discussion, student presentations

REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:

This is a reading intensive course. You must have the required reading completed for the assigned day and be prepared to discuss the readings with your classmates. As our stories have been handed down as part of oral folk tradition, instead of the written word, some myths and legends will be in audio form so that students can get a sense of how these stories were intended to be shared.

Lectures are designed to illuminate themes, generate discussion, and expand your knowledge of this exciting, complex subject. You must complete the required reading for each class and take notes during the lectures. The lectures are not a substitute for the readings.

Participation: 10%

Presentation (in groups or pairs): 20%

Midterm Essay: 25%

Final Essay: 25%

Final exam: 20%

Evaluation Criteria: Oral and written assignments will be evaluated and graded according to the following: Content, Critical Engagement, Clarity, Research, Original Thoughts, and Ideas. Please see Moodle for a more detailed grading rubric.

1. **Content:** Clear, concise central thesis presented, line of argument is focused and sustained throughout the presentation/paper.
2. **Critical Engagement:** Line of argument is fully developed, ideas and points put forward are thoroughly analysed and fleshed out.
3. **Clarity:** Writing style/presentation is clear and fluently expressed with correct grammar, spelling and punctuation, paper/presentation is well organised and secondary sources are correctly cited.
4. **Research:** The presentation/paper is well-researched, and all secondary sources are thoroughly engaged with and clearly referenced.
5. **Original Thoughts and Ideas:** In addition to engagement with secondary sources, original ideas and independent analysis must be offered.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- By the end of this course, students will be able to assimilate the connections between Irish, Scottish, and Welsh archaeology, mythology, folklore, and fairy tales. This will enable students to engage critically and analytically with early literary texts and place them within a historical framework. Students will be able to discern how early mythological stories came to form the folklore and fairy tales of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

IES Dublin Attendance Policy:

Because IES courses are designed to take advantage of the unique contribution of the instruction and the lecture/discussion format, regular class attendance is mandatory. Any missed class, without a legitimate reason will be reflected in the final grade. A legitimate reason would include: documented illness or family bereavement. Travel, (including travel delays) is not a legitimate reason.

CONTENT:

Choose an item	Content	Assignments
Session 1	Introduction to Celtic Culture, Mythology, and Literature. • Lecture: Introduction to Celtic Mythology • How can we define the word “Celtic”? What does the word encompass? This class will examine the word and its many associated cultural meanings and misinterpretations.	• Discussion: What is a myth? There are myths from every culture in the world—what myths are you familiar with? How have myths shaped society? Students will discuss in small groups then share their ideas with the class.
Session 2	Cosmogony: The Irish Mythological Cycle • Lecture: The Four Cycles of Irish Mythology and Early Irish Literary Sources • Discussion: Why does Irish mythology lack a world creation story? What is the purpose of this sort of tale? This class will investigate the cultural significances of these symbolic narratives.	• Reading from Allison: <i>The Early Invasions; Balor of the Evil Eye and The Coming of Lugh</i> • Reading from Heaney: <i>The Milesians Come to Ireland</i> • Assignment: Each student should research a creation myth from a world mythology of their choosing. Be prepared to discuss the cultural, religious, and historical impacts of these myths.

Choose an item	Content	Assignments
Session 3	The Role of the Hero: Mortal Immortals - Lecture: Myth and Archaeology - Discussion: Mythology and landscape are very much intertwined in Ireland. Many archaeological sites around Ireland are known for their associations with mythological figures and events. Numerous mythologies around the world have stories of magical births and legendary hero figures who are born at a sacred location. This class will discuss why magical birth stories are so widespread across mythologies, along with themes such as myths as cultural heritage, the role of the hero in past and present societies, and the appeal of the modern superhero. We will also look at the cultural links between Ireland, Scotland, Wales.	- Reading from Cross and Slover: <i>The Ulster Cycle Begins: The Birth of Conchobar</i> - Reading from Fanning: <i>The Hound of Cullan</i> (Ulster Cycle) - Reading from Fanning: <i>Fionn and the Salmon of Knowledge</i> (Finn Cycle) - Video: <i>Ceridwen and Taliesin</i>
Session 4	Welsh Myth and <i>The Mabinogion</i> - Lecture: Medieval to Modern: Welsh Mythology and The Four Branches of the <i>Mabinogi</i> - Early Irish myths and medieval Welsh myths share many common features, from mythological figures to plot narrative. We will discuss why there is a such a close link between the two traditions, the ways in which Welsh myth was adopted into Arthurian legend, and how the Welsh mythological tradition is reflected in Welsh culture and heritage.	- Reading from Jacksties: <i>Arianrhod</i> - Reading from Fayers: <i>Rhiannon and Pwyll</i> - PDF of graphic novel from the Cadw, Llywodraeth Cymr website: <i>The Story of Branwen</i> - Listen: <i>The Tale of Culhwch and Olwen</i> (audio link from Cadw, Llywodraeth Cymr website on Moodle) - Further discussion: myths as children's literature
Session 5	The Tynged and the Geis: Romance and Tragedy - Lecture: Sky Gods, Seers, and the Supernatural - Discussion: Romance and tragedy are often intertwined in myths and legends. We will discuss why love and loss, mixed with magic and the supernatural, are staple features of so many stories, not just in our Celtic sources but as a cross-cultural phenomenon.	- Reading from Heaney: <i>The Wooing of Emer</i> (from the Ulster Cycle) - Audio/Video: <i>Deirdre of the Sorrows</i> (from the Ulster Cycle) - Audio/Video: <i>The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne</i> (from the Finn Cycle) - Audio/Video: <i>The Welsh Goddess Blodeuwedd</i> (from the <i>Mabinogion</i>) - Further discussion: myths as children's literature

Choose an item	Content	Assignments
Session 6	Irish Epic: The Ulster Cycle and <i>The Táin</i> - Lecture: Warriors, Goddesses, Wives - Discussion: Whilst epics generally focus on the exploits of a male hero figure, female characters often feature prominently in the narrative. In this session we will discuss the role of women in the Irish epic <i>The Táin</i> and, reflecting back upon texts we read in previous weeks, the inherent misogyny in mythological stories.	- Reading from Heaney: <i>The Weakness of the Ulstermen</i> - Reading from Fanning: <i>The Cattle-Raid of Cooley</i> - Video: <i>The Táin Trail</i> - Excerpt from Kinsella's translation of <i>The Táin: Medb's Downfall</i>
Session 7	The Death Tales of the Ulster Cycle - Lecture: Death, the Afterlife, and the Celtic Otherworld - Discussion: All heroes must die, but in what manner? A hero's death often involves magic, the supernatural and/or the fulfilment of a prophecy. We will look at the deaths of our Ulster Cycle heroes and discuss the influence of Greek mythology and Christianity in these texts. Students should consider these themes in advance of class and be prepared to offer examples and comparisons.	- Reading from Heaney: The Ulster Cycle: <i>The Death of Connla, The Death of Cú Chulainn</i> - Reading from Cross and Slover: <i>The Death of Conchobar</i>.
Session 8	In-class presentations	This day will be devoted to student presentations. Please be prepared to ask questions and interact with your classmates
Session 9	The Journey to Fairyland - Lecture: The Fairy Otherworld, part 1 - Discussion: From myth to folklore, from folklore to fairy tale. Not all myths are folklore and not all folklores are derived from myths, and a fairy tale is often something completely separate, yet in Celtic tradition, the three are intertwined. In this class students will work together to try and define these categories and differentiate between them.	- Reading from Heaney: <i>The Voyage of Bran</i> - Reading from Fanning: <i>The Birth of Oisín; Oisín in the Land of Youth</i> (both stories are from the Finn Cycle) - Video: <i>Púca agus Péist (Fathaigh): Finn and the Giant's Causeway</i> - Read (online article): Irish Fairy Tales

Choose an item	Content	Assignments
Session 10	Seanacháí, Seanchaidh, and Cyfarwydd: Fairy Tales, Legends, and Oral Folktradition - Lecture: The Fairy Otherworld, part 2 - Discussion: This class will discuss the power of oral folk tradition and the role of the storyteller. We will compare the written and oral versions of several stories and consider which medium is best for learning myth, legends, and folklore.	- Reading from Fayers: <i>Llyn-y-Fan-Fach</i> - Readings from Folklore Scotland: <i>The Kelpie of Loch Ness; Angus and Bride; Taken by the Fair Folk</i> - Video: <i>The Banshee Lives in the Handball Alley</i> - Video: <i>Púca agus Péist (Na Daoine Maithe; Reamhtheachtairi an Bhais; Cailleacha)</i>
Session 11	Fabricated Traditions and Cultural Appropriation: Fakelore or Folklore? Discussion: Many of our stories involve some sort of enchantment that leads to transformation. This class session will examine why this motif is a staple aspect of folk tales and fairy tales and delve into the deeper meanings behind the idea of transformation. Also under consideration: how have cultural traditions been enshrined as cultural truths when they are, in fact, based on fabricated traditions?	- Reading from Fayers: <i>Tappers in the Copper Mine</i> - Reading from Folklore Scotland: <i>The Mermaid Wife</i> - Reading from Heaney: <i>The Children of Lir</i> - Reading from Scott: <i>The Sea Maid, Conla and the Faery Maiden</i> - Video: <i>Púca agus Péist</i>, continued
Session 12	Final Exam to be taken via Moodle	Final Exam

COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- National Museum of Ireland, Archaeology (self-guided)
- Newgrange (or Hill of Tara: destination and date TBA). This trip may take place on a Friday and is a compulsory part of the course. You **MUST** attend this field trip. Failure to do so will count as an absence and will incur a 3% deduction on your final grade. The **ONLY** acceptable reasons to miss the field trip are: documented illness, family bereavement, conflict with internship hours.

REQUIRED READINGS:

Allison, D. *Irish Mythology: The Children of Danu (Celtic Myths & Legends Retold)*. Scotland: House of Legends Publishing, 2023.

Berresford Ellis, Peter, *The Mammoth Book of Celtic Myths and Legends*. London: Running Press, 2002.

Cross, T.P. and C.H. Slover, eds. *Ancient Irish Tales*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996.

Fanning, K. *Irish Fairy Tales, Myths, and Legends*. London: Scholastic, 2020.

Fayers, C. *Welsh Fairy Tales, Myths, and Legends*. London: Scholastic, 2021.

Gantz, J. *Irish Myths and Sagas*. London: Penguin, 1982.

Heany, M. *Over Nine Waves: A Book of Irish Legends*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995.

Jackson, J. (ed). *Scottish Myths*. London: Flame Tree Publishing, 2020.

Jacksties, S. *Myths of Gods and Goddesses in Britain and Ireland*. Cheltenham: The History Press, 2022.

Kinsella, T. (trans). *The Táin: Translated from the Irish Epic Táin Bo Cuailnge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.



O'Toole, F. *Ireland in 100 Objects*. Dublin: Royal Irish Society, 2013.

Scott, M, *Irish Folk and Fairy Tales*, Omnibus Edition. London: Sphere, 2013.

Scott, M. *Irish Myths and Legends*. London: Sphere, 1992.

Websites:

Cadw: Llywodraeth Cymr

Folklore Scotland

Videos: *Púca agus Péist* (TG4)

NB: All readings, videos, and weblinks will be made available in class or via Moodle

RECOMMENDED READINGS:

- Carey, J. & Koch, J.T.. *The Celtic Heroic Age: Literary Sources for Ancient Celtic Europe and Early Ireland and Wales*. Dublin: Celtic Studies Publications, 2001.
- Condren, M. *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland*. Dublin: New Island Book, 2002.
- Daimler, M. *Pagan Portals—The Gods and Goddesses of Ireland: A Guide to Irish Deities*. London: John Hunt Publishing, 2016.
- Dillon, M. *Early Irish Literature*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994.
- Dunn, V.A. *Cattle-Raids and Courtships: Medieval Narrative Genres in a Traditional Context*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1989.
- Evans Wentz, W.Y. *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, 1911
- Freeman, P. *Celtic Mythology: Tales of Gods, Goddesses, and Heroes*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017.
- The Philosopher and the Druids: A Journey Among the Ancient Celts*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008.
- Gilles, W. "Arthur in Gaelic Tradition." *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 2 (Winter 1981), pp. 47-72.
- Green, M. *Animals in Celtic Life*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- . Bog Bodies Uncovered*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2015.
- . Celtic Goddesses: Warriors, Virgins and Mothers*. London: British Museum Press, 1995.
- . The Gods of the Celts*. London: Sutton, 2011.
- Haywood, J. *The Historical Atlas of the Celtic World*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2001.
- Jacobs, J. (ed). *Celtic Fairy Tales*. London: Senate Press, 1994.
- Kearney, A. *Lovers, Queens, and Strangers: Strong Women in Celtic Mythology*. Dublin: A&A Farmer, 1999.
- Lysaght, P. *The Banshee: The Irish Supernatural Death-Messenger*. Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 1986.
- Vermont: Inner Traditions Press, 1996.
- Mallory, J.P. *In Search of Irish Dreamtime: Archaeology and Early Irish Literature*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2016.
- McCaffrey, Carmel and Leo Eaton, *In Search of Ancient Ireland: The Origins of the Irish from Neolithic Times to the Coming of the English*. Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2002.
- Moffat, Al. *The Sea Kingdoms: The History of Celtic Britain and Ireland*. London: Harper Collins, 2002.
- O'Leary, P. "Choice and Consequence in Irish Heroic Literature." *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 27 (Summer 1994), pp. 49-59.
- . "Jeers and Judgements: Laughter in Early Irish Literature."* *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 22 (Winter 1991), pp. 15-29.
- Rolleston, T.W. *Celtic Myths and Legends*. London: Senate, 1994.
- Sims-Williams, P. *Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*. Oxford: OUP, 2011.
- Thomson, D. *The People of the Sea: Celtic Tales of the Sea-Folk*. London: Canongate, 2001.
- Yeats, W.B. (ed). *Fairy and Folk Tales of Ireland*. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd., 1973.
- Waddell, J. *Archaeology and Celtic Myth*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015.
- White, C. *A History of Irish Fairies*. Cork: Mercier Press, 1976.
- Williams, J.E. Caerwyn. *The Irish Literary Tradition*. Patrick K. Ford, trans. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992.
- Williams, M. *Ireland's Immortals: A History of the Gods of Irish Myths*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Williams, M. *The Celtic Myths that Shape the Way We Think*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2023.

There are many articles, not listed above, that are uploaded to Moodle. You are strongly advised to read these