



**LT 342 GOTHIC IRELAND: FOLKLORE AND FICTION**  
IES Abroad Dublin

**DESCRIPTION:**

The Irish imagination has long held a deep fascination with macabre stories of ghosts, changelings, and other supernatural manifestations. It is a legacy that can be traced back to the mythology and folklore of pagan times and, in some cases, such as in the legends of the Banshee, the púca, and the Dullahan, have been maintained in wives' tales and superstitions right through to the present day. This course will explore the supernatural side of Irish fiction by tracing the origins of Irish "Gothic"—beginning with folkloric traditions, continuing to the rise of vampire fiction in the nineteenth century, and finishing with more recent works of fiction about fairies, ghosts, hauntings, and witch hunts. We will begin with a selection of writings from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that depict Ireland as a country inhabited by capricious fairies and supernatural beings, along with accounts that describe Dublin as a dark, dangerous place filled with ghosts, ghouls, and acts of treachery. Ireland's deep-rooted superstitions inspired the literary creations of Sheridan Le Fanu, planted the seeds of inspiration for Bram Stoker's ground-breaking novel, *Dracula*, and helped to give rise to Oscar Wilde's sinister and thought-provoking piece, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. We will look at how these early works, superstitions, and folklore influenced contemporary Irish writers such as John Connolly and Peadar Ó Guíllín, discuss Conor McPherson's take on vampires in his dramatic monologue *St Nicholas*, and delve into Martina Devlin's gripping novel *The House Where It Happened*, which is a fictionalized account of Ireland's last witch trial that took place in Co. Antrim in 1711. We will consider Irish Gothic within the social, political, and cultural contexts that inform the genre's engagement with gender, sexuality, race, marginalization, and class structure.

**CREDITS:** 3 credits

**CONTACT HOURS:** 45 hours

**LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION:** English

**PREREQUISITES:** None

**ADDITIONAL COST:** None

**METHOD OF PRESENTATION:**

Lectures, seminar discussion, small group discussion, student presentations

**REQUIRED WORK AND FORM OF ASSESSMENT:**

This course is reading-intensive, and students will be expected to have all assigned reading completed for the appropriate day and to contribute to class discussion.

Weekly class participation and classroom citizenship will comprise 20% of your final grade and a presentation will be worth 20%. There will also be a midterm exam paper worth 25% and an end of term research paper worth 35%.

**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:

Engage with a wide variety of theories, themes and issues associated with Irish Gothic fiction. Students will have developed their analytical and critical thinking skills via both the written assignments required for this course and the strong emphasis on verbal engagement during group discussion.

#### 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      | <p>Introduction: In our first class, we will explore the term “Gothic”, the rise of Gothic literature in England, America, and Ireland, and the enduring popularity of the genre. We will also examine different theoretical approaches that aid in understanding, interpreting, and analysing Gothic fiction, such as Freud’s <i>The Uncanny</i> and Julia Kristeva’s <i>the Abject</i>.</p> <p>Lecture: Introduction to Gothic</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discussion: What do you know about Gothic fiction? What is the difference between terror and horror?</li> </ul> |

| Choose an item | Content                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Assignments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| Session 2      | <p>Irish Gothic: We will explore the origins of Irish Gothic, from mythology to folklore, examining how these tales and legends have become integral to Irish cultural identity.</p> <p>Lecture: The Realm of the Sídh: Celtic Gods and Fairy-Folk</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To form a basis for the literature we will explore this term, we will look at a combination of so-called “eyewitness” accounts of banshees and other fairy-like supernatural manifestations, along with fairy beings from Irish mythology. To complement this, we will read Yeats’ famous fairy poem, “The Stolen Child”.</li> <li>We will explore the mythological origins of Irish Gothic. Readings this week: Old Irish tales, such as <i>Connla and The Fairy Maiden</i>, and <i>How Cormac Mac Airt Went to Faery</i>.</li> <li>Film clips: Púca agus Péist and The Banshee Lives in the Handball Alley.</li> </ul> |
| Session 3      | <p>“A Very Strange Agony”: Regarded as a ground-breaking novella that paved the way for the future success of other vampire stories, Sheridan Le Fanu’s “Carmilla” also left a lasting impression on Bram Stoker. One critic has described Le Fanu’s writings as being about “men in an Irish situation.” We will explore the significance and accuracy of this statement and discuss ways in which the novella taps into Irish fairy folklore.</p> <p>Lecture: Ancient Evils</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sheridan Le Fanu’s “Carmilla”</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Session 4      | <p>“The Children of the Night”: Probably the most famous vampire story ever written, <i>Dracula</i> remains to this day one of the most widely read books in the world. We will discuss why both the book and the character of Dracula have made such an impact upon society, from literature, to films, to pop culture and Halloween costumes.</p> <p>Lecture: Vampire Folklore</p>                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bram Stoker’s <i>Dracula</i></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Session 5      | <p>Society and the “New Woman”: Stoker was himself a native Dubliner but wrote and set his novel in England. We will question the “Irishness” of Stoker’s most enduring and influential novel and question the novel’s representations of gender, sexuality, class, and marginalisation of “the other.”</p>                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bram Stoker’s <i>Dracula</i>, continued</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Session 6      | <p>Field Trip:</p> <p>Montpelier Hill, “The Hellfire Club”</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Field trip details to be found on Moodle</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |

| Choose an item | Content                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Assignments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
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| Session 7      | <p>Split-Personalities and Sinister Portraits: Oscar Wilde's masterpiece, <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>, which confronts issues such as the inherent evil inside man and his consequent descent into madness. Queer theory will be used as a framework for discussing and understanding gay identity and a heteronormative society.</p> <p>Lecture: The Seedy Underbelly of Victorian Society</p>                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Oscar Wilde's <i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i></li> <li>First assignment due end of this week</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Session 8      | <p>Ghost Stories and Gothic Humour: This week we will read short stories by the contemporary writer John Connolly, whose exquisitely haunting prose captures the sinister and macabre world of the supernatural. We will also read a selection of short stories by Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen who was a firm believer in the supernatural and often took a light, humorous approach when writing ghost stories.</p>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We will read a selection of short stories by Elizabeth Bowen and John Connolly</li> <li>Students will be assigned specific short stories and will be required to bring discussion questions to class. Class discussion will be entirely facilitated and lead by the students.</li> </ul> |
| Session 9      | <p>Gothic on Stage: Vampires, a mid-life crisis, and the unreliable narrator in Conor McPherson's one-man play, <i>St Nicholas</i>. Under discussion will be vampires as metaphors for capitalism and ingrained societal misogyny.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conor McPherson's <i>St Nicholas</i></li> <li>Students are required to bring three discussion questions to class. Class discussion will be entirely facilitated by and lead by the students.</li> </ul>                                                                                  |
| Session 10     | <p>The Islandmagee Witch Trials: Inspired by a true story, <i>The House Where It Happened</i> offers a fictitious account of the last recorded conviction for witchcraft in Ireland. The events occurred amongst the Ulster-Scots community in 1711 in a remote corner of County Antrim. We will continue the discuss from the previous week about societal misogyny and examine topics such as marginalised women.</p>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Martina Devlin's <i>The House Where It Happened</i></li> <li>Students are required to bring three discussion questions to class. Class discussion will be entirely facilitated by and lead by the students.</li> </ul>                                                                   |
| Session 11     | <p>From Salem to Biddy Early: A cross comparison of the Islandmagee witch trials and the events that occurred in Salem, Massachusetts. We will also look at two other Irish women accused of witchcraft, Petronilla de Meath in 1324 and Biddy Early in 1865. We will question why past communities were swept away by the "moral panic" of witchcraft fever and why women who didn't conform to societal expectations were branded as witches.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>The House Where It Happened</i>, continued.</li> <li>Short readings: Salem, Biddy Early and Petronilla de Meath</li> <li>Class discussion will be entirely facilitated by and lead by the students. Please have discussion questions prepared in advance.</li> </ul>                  |

| Choose an item | Content                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Assignments                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Session 12     | The Sidhe in a Dystopian World: An engrossing blend of folklore, horror, and fantasy, for our final text we will read Peadar Ó Guilín's YA novel <i>The Call</i> . This class will look at topics such as female protagonists, (dis)ability, and the novel as a metaphor for contemporary Ireland. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peadar Ó Guilín's <i>The Call</i></li> <li>Students are required to bring three discussion questions to class. Class discussion will be entirely facilitated by and lead by the students</li> </ul> |

#### COURSE-RELATED TRIPS:

- Montpelier Hill (aka "The Hellfire Club").

#### REQUIRED READINGS:

Bowen, E. *The Collected Short Stories of Elizabeth Bowen*. Hermione Lee, ed. London: Vintage Press, 1999.

Connolly, J. *Nocturnes*. London: Hodden and Stoughton, 2004.

Curran, B. *A Bewitched Land: Ireland's Witches*. Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2005.

-----*Bloody Irish*. Dublin: O'Brien Press.

Devlin, M. *The House Where It Happened*. Dublin: Ward River Press, 2015.

Le Fanu, S. "The Child That Went to Fairy."

McPherson, C. *St. Nicholas*.

Ó Guilín, P. *The Call*. Oxford: Dave Fickling Books, 2017.

Stoker, B. *Dracula*, PDF available on Moodle

Wilde, O. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Any edition. PDF available on Moodle.

Williams, A. (ed). *Three Vampire Tales: Dracula, Carmilla and The Vampyre*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002.

#### RECOMMENDED READINGS:

Bloom, C. *Cult Fiction: Popular Reading and Pulp Theory*. Macmillan Press, 1998.

-----*Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Botting, F. *The New Critical Idiom: Gothic*. Routledge, 1995.

Bourke, A. *The Burning of Bridget Cleary*. London: Penguin, 1999.

Ellis, M. *The History of Gothic Fiction*. Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

Hill, T. *Decadence and Danger: Writing, History and the fin de siècle*. Sulis Press, 1997.

Hogle, J. *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*. CUP, 2002.

Hughes, W. (ed). *Bram Stoker: History, Psychoanalysis and the Gothic*. London, St. Martin's Press, 1998.

Leatherdale, C. *Dracula: The Novel and the Legend: A Study of Bram Stoker's Masterpiece*. Aquarian Press, 1985.

Skal, D. *The Monster Show: A Cultural History of Horror*. Faber and Faber, 2001.

-----*Hollywood Gothic: The Tangled Web of Dracula from Novel to Stage to Screen*.

Stevens, D. *The Gothic Tradition*. CUP, 2000.

Thorne, T. *Children of the Night: Of Vampires and Vampirism*. London

There are numerous articles on Moodle that you are strongly advised to read.