

Teaching the Early Modern Period, Newman House, 27 June 2008

8.30 am *Coffee and Registration*

9.00 am *Conference opening & welcome*
John McCafferty, Vice Principal for Research and Innovation, College of Arts & Celtic Studies, UCD

9.10-11.00 am **Ages of information: theories and practice**
Chair: Cormac O' Cuilleain, Trinity College Dublin

- Renaissance Teaching and Learning
Danielle Clarke, University College Dublin

This paper will investigate what modern pedagogy might be able to learn from Renaissance epistemology, and how this might be applied in the modern classroom to the end of enhancing students' understanding both of the early modern period, and the kinds of transactions that they undertake in their own studies. The paper focuses on two key areas: rhetoric, and the organisation of knowledge. In the first case, I will suggest ways in which modern teaching methods are indebted to Renaissance humanist pedagogy (thus brainstorming is invention; Powerpoint is inductive reasoning; the lecture has its roots in oratory), and ways in which the teaching of formal rhetoric can enhance students' understanding of argument, logic, the citation of evidence/authority and expression. In the second, I wish to focus on the ways in which electronic media (search engines in particular) reconfigure knowledge (and access to knowledge) in ways that parallel the coming of print and its apparatuses (indexes, annotation). I will argue, overall, that modern humanities education, far from being 'dumbed down' or diluted by access to electronic media, is in fact returning to its Renaissance humanist roots. My arguments will be supported by reference to classroom experiences and materials, based on a Level 1 course, 'Rhetoric in the World', and on plans to introduce Enquiry Based Learning into the teaching of early modern English literature and language.

- Revolutionary Shakespeare
William Spates, Auburn University / Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education, Tehran

Teaching early modern literature to students in the Middle East can be problematic. This teaching environment becomes more complicated when one is teaching via online notes, interactive assignments, and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) lectures. There is also the matter of politics. While living and working in the U.S., I also teach Shakespeare courses at the Bahá'í Institute of Higher Education (BIHE) in Tehran. The Bahá'í were purged from the Iranian state university system in 1980. BIHE was founded in 1987 as a response to this purge. The institute has experienced persecution by Iranian authorities including the arrests of faculty members and the seizure of equipment. As a result, an awareness of politics and technology occupy a substantial role in curriculum development.

In early modern England from the Revels Office to the Court of Star Chamber, official responses indicate an omnipresent concern with the control of information. Edmund Tilney and the Revels Office specifically endeavoured to control the discourse of what was essentially a new technology in England: the permanent theatre. Tilney attempted to censor the lively political, social, and economic debates that were occurring on the stage. In early modern England, this drama became a somewhat acceptable means exploring and anatomizing life issues. In this paper, I will discuss how the internet has allowed for a pedagogical stage to study Shakespeare as well contemporary political and social concerns in potentially oppressive environments.

Short break

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- Information revolutions past and present, and teaching the early modern period
Paul M. Dover, Kennesaw State University

This paper explores the ways in which the parallels between the early modern information revolution and that of our own age may be fruitfully exploited in the classroom. It is by now a prosaic notion that we are amid an information revolution, one that places at our fingertips, often in an instant, a staggering amount of data. It is a revolution that both empowers and paralyzes us in our personal and professional tasks, and it is one that finds echoes in the early modern Europe that I teach.

I contend that one of the key features of early modern history was the challenge of processing, storing and putting to use the large quantities of information that new technologies, institutions and practices were producing in a variety of areas of human endeavour. The struggle of early modern Europeans to make sense, and then make use, of the resulting data offers clear parallels with our own day. Here I discuss how highlighting such parallels can make the early modern period more accessible to today's students. I believe it is one means of generating empathy, a way of making the unfamiliar familiar, in the teaching of this important epoch in the European past.

- Weblogs in History Teaching at the University of Dundee
Martine van Ittersum, University of Dundee

In my presentation, I will explain a) the reasons for the introduction of weblogs in history teaching at all levels at the University of Dundee, b) the mechanics of weblogs and discuss c) the results we have booked so far. Ever since semesterization was introduced in 2003/04, the History staff at Dundee have been concerned about a perceived lack of "deep learning" on the part of our students, who did not seem to realize that they were supposed to 'reading' for their degree. Weblogs is one way of addressing this concern. The weekly submission of weblogs (which vary in length according to the course level) forces students to discuss — and reflect on — the reading which they do for any given course, including their preparation for other assignments like presentations, essays, etc. In the second half of the semester, we expect students to make connections between the various themes of the course. In my own courses, I also ask students to reflect on their own learning experience by critically analyzing classroom presentations and discussions, their own essay outlines and draft essays etc., etc. As our External Examiners have noted, the weblog is a very challenging piece of work for students, which rewards deep learning, originality and creativity. The submission of weekly weblogs (rather than a module journal in hard copy, handed in at the end of the semester) allows staff to give formative feedback throughout the semester, simply by writing something in the 'comment box' attached to each weblog. Students have responded well to the feedback: indeed, the brighter ones inform us that this kind of constructive criticism is a great inducement for them to truly excel in their coursework (and, consequently, in their exams). In sum, weblogs are there to stay at the University of Dundee.

11 am Coffee

11.30 am - 12.30 pm **Teaching the past (whose past?) in multi-cultural environments**
Chair: Graham Gargett, University of Ulster

- *Tríocha bliana ag teagasc: representing the past in 'these islands'*
Steven G. Ellis, National University of Ireland, Galway

This paper is largely a reflection on the problems of teaching (mainly) Irish and British history to different groups of students in different languages. Teaching reflects a dialogue between lecturer and students which, to be successful, must take on board the background and training both of the students and also of the lecturer. The ideological aspects of this process mean that what works in one context may fall flat in another. Since the 1980s, moreover, aspects of globalization/Europeanization (the Bologna process, TUNING, ENQA) have exerted new influences on this process. By and large, the Irish university system has been more deeply affected than its

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continental counterparts by external pressures for internal restructuring, and QA/QE. To date, however, it has undergone far less change than elsewhere in regard to its traditional first-cycle and second-cycle programmes. For instance, despite the Revisionist Debate, the 'national agenda' for early modern Ireland has developed only gradually, whereas all over eastern Europe what was 'early modern' was radically transformed following the fall of communism. Cumulatively, however, these influences have reshaped quite profoundly both what we teach as early modern and also how we teach it – as also has, at a local level, the ending of 'the Troubles'.

- Lobola, the Intombi, and the Soft-Porn Centaur:
Teaching *King Lear* in the Post-Apartheid South African Classroom
Deborah Seddon, Rhodes University

This paper centres on teaching *King Lear* in a third-year undergraduate course at Rhodes University, South Africa. The most important challenge facing the teaching of the early modern period in South Africa is facilitating students' critical thinking about the connection between culture, politics, and gender, not only in relation to one text, but towards understanding the influence of the early modern period as a whole. One possible approach, I will suggest, is to highlight for students the ways in which the early modern period, and a text as controversial as *King Lear*, can be assessed in terms of their own complex cultural heritage as young South Africans. I will describe an approach to teaching *King Lear* which engages with the disparate socio-cultural influences in contemporary South Africa – from cyberspace to evolving forms of indigenous familial culture. This method utilises my own research into the work of Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje – the first translator of Shakespeare into an African language. Plaatje's conception of the commensurability of early modern English and Tswana cultures provides teachers of the early modern period with a new approach: one that suggests we direct our critical attention to the places where our different cultural heritages intersect.

12.30- 1.45 pm Lunch in Newman House

1.45 - 3.15 pm **Contents and discontents**
Chair: Ruth Whelan, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

- Literature, philosophy and medicine: strategies for an interdisciplinary approach to the seventeenth century
Bernadette Höfer, Harvard University

How can we teach the history of the "mind/body problem" to students enrolled in French literature courses, while adopting an interdisciplinary perspective? Starting with the importance of the ongoing current debate within mind/body medicine and neurobiology, we will raise the question of the implicit "dialogue" between specifically the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries, as is clear, for example, from the titles of neurobiologist Antonio Damasio's recent works, *Descartes' Error* and *Looking for Spinoza*. We will then survey the conceptualization of mind and body throughout seventeenth-century Europe to show conflicting positions with a special focus on Descartes and Spinoza, and the holistic explanation of illness given in the medical thought of the era (melancholy). Links to the visual arts, music, and film will be considered important for the full study of mind/body question. My talk will then address how three French authors in particular, Molière, Lafayette, and Racine can be used in the classroom to study literary opposition to the dualism postulated by Descartes. In such a course we can turn to the powerful relationship between the seventeenth-century understanding of how the body and the mind work and contemporary knowledge of the same, and study the establishment in the seventeenth-century of a view of human existence that fully anticipates contemporary medical discoveries concerning the mind/body question.

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- Breaking the early modern ice: a focus on censorship
Karolyn Waterson, Dalhousie University

Many contemporary students consider the early modern period remote or irrelevant. However, triumphs of the human spirit, whenever and wherever they thwart external pressures that would stifle critical thinking, remain perennially galvanizing and pertinent.

When my research led me to examine classical French writers who circumvented censorship, I soon discovered that analyzing creative ways to express dissident thought also offered a gateway to fruitful and lively classroom discussions of early modern literature. Initially captivated by the intellectual “cloak and dagger” atmosphere of ingenious, often humorous defiance of censorship, students subsequently honed their close-reading skills and become eager to explore other aspects of early modern thought.

My paper will show how such an introduction to classical French literature, which colleagues could easily adapt to other early modern fields, can be used to generate interest in a purportedly “dusty” period. Relying on critics, such as Georges Couton, Marc Fumaroli, Annabel Patterson, David Pottinger, Perez Zagorin, for theoretical grounding, this initiation begins with an overview of censorship. It then explores the communicative strategies and complementary perspectives of courageous writers and sophisticated readers by examining fictitious early modern “self-help guides” (*On Writing around censorship; an author’s guide, On Reading around censorship; a reader’s guide*).

- Relevance and its discontents: Teaching Sofia Coppola’s *Marie Antoinette*
Amy Wygant, University of Glasgow

Relevance is generally considered to be a good thing. But the word itself is etymologically not, as we might assume, a cousin of ‘relate’. Instead it belongs to the same family as ‘relieve’, as in ‘to set free from a burden, obligation, grievance, etc.’. When we sense that spirit that we call ‘relevance’, the idea is not that it reduplicates us or connects to us, but instead that it cures our pain and sets us free.

Coppola’s 2006 film biography of the doomed French queen was, as was widely acknowledged, relevant. Its soundtrack, its portrayal of fierce fashion strategies, and its incorporation of twenty-first-century French luxury goods spoke to twin mass-cultural obsessions with fame and dazzle. My teaching of the film occurred in the context of an academic department which, in 2001, successfully resisted a collapse of the teaching of history in the French curriculum. This paper will attempt to convey a sense of the dilemmas I faced in trying to encourage students to develop a resistance to unexamined relevance. The implication of my title is that a pedagogical strategy taking account of the psychoanalytic scenario is required.

3.15 pm *Coffee*

3.45 – 4.45 pm Round table: Teaching our research in the early modern period
Chair: Jane Conroy, National University of Ireland, Galway

The nine speakers and three chairs will be joined for this session by Derval Conroy (UCD) and Alan Fletcher (UCD).

5 pm *Close of conference by Professor Mary Daly, Principal, College of Arts & Celtic Studies, UCD*

followed by

5 - 6 pm *Wine reception*

7.30 pm *Conference dinner*

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This conference is funded by the Early Modern Research Strand, UCD.
Organiser: Dr Derval Conroy