THE SPACE OF DEATH IN CONTEMPORARY IRISH WRITING (LEVEL 3
OPTION MODULE)

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Course Description:
This module explores contemporary Irish writers’ response to the challenge of death and nothingness. Whether religious, or post-religious, metaphysical, cynical or ironic, these literary works engage with the humanization of life’s end and the unknown beyond. Can nihilism be overcome? Is there such thing as positive annihilation? What part can post Celtic-Tiger religiousness play in the relationship with death and afterlife? Does post-modern spiritualism offer comfort? Is it possible to refuse to see nihilism as a problem? Is it possible to talk about death at all? The course will investigate diverse literary responses to these and many similar questions thrown up by life’s inevitable end.

1. 17 September: Introduction: “Very Little, Almost Nothing”
2. 24 September: “A Stitch of Silence”: Eiléan Ní Chuilleáin and the Death of Language
   Poems to be discussed: “Autun”, Translation”, “Jesse” (from The Girl Who married the Reindeer) and “The Informant” (from The Magdalene Sermon)
3. 1 October: Unstable Narratives of Death in Conor McPherson’s The Weir
4. 8 October: Elegies for the Environment: Michael Longley’s Ecopoetry in The Ghost Orchid
5. 15 October: Death and Memory. Hugo Hamilton: Disguise
6. 22 October: Afterlife? Medbh McGuckian’s The Book of the Angel
   --- Reading Week ---
7. 5 November: The Ethics of Death in Ronan Bennett’s Havoc, In Its Third Year
8. 12 November: Gothic Laughter: Martin McDonagh’s Lieutenant of Inishmore
9. 19 November: The Intimacy of Death in Paula Meehan’s Dharmakaya
10. 26 November: The Performance of Death in Anne Enright’s The Gathering
Primary Reading:
- McPherson, Conor. The Weir (play) (Nick Hern, 2004) [GEN 822 IR/MCP]
- Longley, Michael. The Ghost Orchid (Cape Poetry, 1995) [GEN 821 IR/LON]
- Hamilton, Hugo. Disguise (novel) (4th Estate, 2008) [will be available in UCD Library. Also widely available in bookshops.]
- McGuckian, Medbh. The Book of the Angel (Gallery Press 2004) [GEN 821 IR/MCG]
- Bennett, Ronan. Havoc, In Its Third Year (novel) (Bloomsbury, 2004) [GEN 823 IR/BEN]
- McDonagh, Martin. Lieutenant of Inishmore (play) (Methuen, 2001) [Available on Amazon or Play.com]
- Meehan, Paula. Dharmakaya (Carcanet, 2000) [GEN 821 IR/MEE]
- Enright, Anne. The Gathering (novel) (Jonathan Cape, 2007) [GEN 823 IR/ENR]

Secondary Reading:
- Kristeva, Julia. Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia (Columbia UP, 1989) [GEN 157.3/KRI]
- Brearton, Fran. Reading Michael Longley. (Bloodaxe, 2006) [GEN 821 IR/LON/B]
- Campbell, Matthew ed. The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry (CUP, 2003) [GEN 821.09 IR/CAM]
- The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories / edited by Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan. (Carysfort Press, 2006) [GEN 822 IR/MCD/C]