Dr Rosie Lavan
lavanro@tcd.ie

Heaney and his Contexts

Hilary 2017
10 ECTS

Course description

Seamus Heaney’s clarity of style, his routine appearance on school syllabi, and his bestselling popularity have formed the image of an eminently readable poet. This module is designed to offer new and refreshed approaches to Heaney’s writing through attention to its diverse and complex contexts. Alongside the published poetry, Heaney’s literary criticism, media work, and translations will be explored, in relation to key critical and theoretical engagements with his work which have become in themselves seminal texts in Irish studies. While Heaney is the focus, the module seeks to generate discussions of broader relevance to issues in modern and contemporary poetry.

Aims and outcomes

On successful completion of this module, students will:

1. Show a sound critical understanding of the range and development of Heaney’s works, across genres and forms
2. Be conversant with key critical, theoretical, and ethical questions raised by and applied to his writing, and the contexts from which they emerge
3. Employ and critique different methodologies for the analysis of poetry
4. Demonstrate a broad awareness of issues in literary culture which have affected the writer in public, in Ireland and beyond, over the past 50 years

Assessment

- Critical commentary: 2000 words (30%)
- Essay: 4000 words (70%)

Course outline

**Week 1**  
**Introduction: Heaney’s Preoccupations**


**Week 2**  
**Contemporaries and Successors: The ‘Northern Ireland Renaissance’ and after**
Poems from *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) and *Door into the Dark* (1969) and the prose pieces ‘Mossbawn’ and ‘Belfast’ in *Finders Keepers*; plus selected texts (pdf)

**Week 3**  
**Heaney’s Difficulties**  
Poems from *Wintering Out* (1972), *North* (1975), and *Station Island* (1984)

**Week 4**  
**Influences 1: Ireland and England**  

**Week 5**  
**Influences 2: Europe and America**  

**Week 6**  
**Heaney’s Classics**  

**Week 7**  
**READING WEEK**

**Week 8**  
**Heaney and the Archive**

**Week 9**  
**Vision and Form**  
Poems from *Seeing Things* (1991), and ‘Crediting Poetry’ (1995) (pdf; also reprinted in *Opened Ground* (1998))

**Week 10**  
**Revision and Redress**  

**Week 11**  
**Local and Global**  
Poems from *Electric Light* (2001) and *District and Circle* (2006)

**Week 12**  
**Retrospectives**  

**Texts to buy**


You may also wish to invest in a copy of O’Driscoll’s *Stepping Stones: Interviews with Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber, 2009): the best preparation for this course would be to read this book cover to cover.

**Recommended secondary reading**


—, ‘Unhappy and at Home’, *The Crane Bag* 1:1 (Spring, 1977), pp. 61-7. [Interview with Heaney]


There have been special issues of several journals since Heaney’s death in 2013, gathering essays and tributes from numerous critics and writers. See, for example:

*Poetry Ireland Review* (August 2014)
*Irish Pages* 8:2 (2015)