Literature after Darwin

Dr Seán Hewitt TCD email to be confirmed

ECTS Weighting: 10
Semester Taught: HT

Learning outcomes:

On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

1. Discuss a variety of post-Darwinian literary texts and the ways in which they respond to scientific thought.
2. Explore the implications of class, gender and empire in literary depictions of scientific study.
3. Employ a range of interdisciplinary methodologies in the study of literature and science.
4. Examine a range of primary scientific texts and explore the wide-ranging cultural implications of scientific discourse.
5. Discuss the emergence of modernism in the wake of Darwinism.

Learning aims:

This option explores the complex relationships between literature and science in the wake of the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Exploring poetry and prose, and a wide range of scientific texts, we will survey the far-reaching upheavals of Darwinian and post-Darwinian culture. In seminar discussions, we will pay close attention to the ways in which scientific knowledge informs and alters literary works, disrupting religious, spiritual and ethical norms. From natural history to energy physics, botany to psychology, and from anthropology to various ‘pseudo-sciences’, we will explore a broad spectrum of writers who worked to create new literary modes in the wake of Darwinism. Working across disciplines, this module invites students to explore the influence of scientific modernity on the development of modernism in British and Irish literature, all the while considering gender, empire, history and nationhood.

The primary module texts will be accompanied by directed critical reading (provided on Blackboard).

Module outline:


Week 2: Philip Henry Gosse, *A Year at the Shore* (1865)

Week 3: Gerard Manley Hopkins, selected poems and prose

Week 4: Vernon Lee, *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories* (1890)

Week 5: Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (1895)
Week 6: Emily Lawless, *The Book of Gilly* (1906)
Week 7: Reading Week
Week 8: W.B. Yeats, selected poetry and prose
Week 9: D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (1915)
Week 10: W.H. Hudson, *A Hind in Richmond Park* (1922)
Week 11: Virginia Woolf, selected prose
Week 12: Critical review and assessment preparation

**Assessment details:** 1 x short essay (2000 words), 30%; 1x essay (4000 words), 70%

**Preliminary background bibliography:**

Childs, Donald, *Modernism and Eugenics* (Cambridge University Press, 2001)
King, Amy C., *The Divine in the Commonplace: Reverent Natural History and the Novel in Britain* (Cambridge University Press, 2019)
Mahood, M.M. *The Poet as Botanist* (Cambridge University Press, 2008)
Ruse, Michael, *Darwinism and its Discontents* (Cambridge University Press, 2006)