Writing (About) God: The Victorian Literature of Belief.

Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in the relationship between religion and literature, with the broader critical turn to religion in the arts and humanities helping invigorate an interdisciplinary field. Indeed, the study of ‘religion and literature’ is at the cutting edge of humanities’ research. The focus of this one-semester option will be on literature that specifically engages with Christianity in the Victorian period, although other religious perspectives, including atheism, agnosticism, ‘spirituality’, and comparative religion, will form an important part of our discussions. The module considers both the religious dimensions of literary/scientific texts and the literary dimensions of explicitly religious texts, examining the treatment of faith in a wide range of texts from Victorian Britain. The class will look at a range of different versions of ‘faith’, both religious and secular. We will also look closely at how writers have understood, treated, represented and interrogated ideas of ‘God’, ‘religion’, and ‘meaning’ in their work. It is hoped that students will become attuned to the multitude of different voices on this subject. In an age when questions of faith are determining the direction of world events and different versions of faith are competing for allegiance (including secular versions of faith), this module will engage critically with the discursive construction of faith itself, and try to facilitate a conversation between literature, theology, philosophy and science in examining how writers and thinkers have engaged with these crucial issues.

This module will be assessed by one, two-hour exam.

The reading list will be finalised at the start of the summer term. Students are cautioned that this module involves reading some very long novels.

Dr. Jarlath Killeen
**Learning Outcomes:**

On successful completion of the module a student should be able to:

1. Identify and describe the issues relating to religious belief in Victorian Britain and analyse their impact on the literature of the period.
2. Recognise and distinguish between the major authors and movements within the field of Victorian religious studies.
3. Employ a highly developed range of interpretive strategies using appropriate critical vocabulary.
4. Differentiate between the significant theorists and theories of religion in Victorian Britain.
9. Engage in interdisciplinary dialogue and research of religion and literature.

**Week One: Introduction/ Ideas of Faith.**

**Week Two: Emily Brontë, Poems (1846).**

**Week Three: Anthony Trollope, The Warden (1855).**

**Week Four: Charles Darwin, Origin of Species (1859).**

**Week Five: Arthur Clough, Selected Poems.**

**Week Six: Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, In a Glass Darkly (1872).**

**Week Seven: Reading Week.**


Week Eleven: Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

Week Twelve: Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1843).

For any questions, please contact: killeej@tcd.ie
Secondary Reading List


Berger, Peter, *Rumour of Angels*


Hanson, Ellis, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).


McGrath, Alister E., *Christian Theology: An Introduction*


Rhodes, Royal W. *The Lion and the Cross: Early Christianity in Victorian Literature* (Ohio, 1995). Encyclopedic coverage of the “early church tale.”


Shaffer, E. S. ‘*Kubla Khan’ and the Fall of Jerusalem: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature 1770-1880* (Cambridge, 1980).


‘*New Atheism*’:

There is, at present, a very contentious debate taking place concerning what has been called the ‘new atheism’, sparked by the writings of the biologist Professor Richard Dawkins, the philosophers Sam Harris and Professor Daniel Dennett, and the journalist Christopher Hitchens. Much of the writing in this debate (by both the New Atheists themselves and those attacking them) is neither scholarly nor rigorous in intellectual terms, but since it draws so much (and depends so heavily) on nineteenth-century arguments and has become such a public issue, I have listed below the main titles (so far) in the ‘war’ on both ‘sides’.


Humphreys, John, *In God We Doubt* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2007).


*Intelligent Design*:
Another contentious topic – particularly in contemporary America – relates to what is called ‘intelligent design’ as a potential rival to neo-Darwinism as an explanation of biological complexity. This is either a knock-down argument against Darwinian theory or a spurious attempt at an academic comeback by disgruntled creationists in disguise. You may be hearing much more about this issue in the 2012 Presidential election (former Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin and contenders for the Republican nomination, especially Michele Bachmann, are vocal supporters of intelligent design). Since intelligent design has its roots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and since it is often an issue discussed in political and theological terms today, I have suggested some of the key readings in and about it.


**On Catholicism.**


**On Protestantism**
