

Option title: Censorship & Irish Writing
Lecturer: Paul Delaney
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ECTS weighting: 10
Semester taught: MT 2025
Year: JS

Learning Outcomes:

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

1. Demonstrate close knowledge of a range of authors and texts from the middle decades of the twentieth century.
2. Situate that work in its broader social and cultural contexts.
3. Reflect on the workings of the Irish Censorship Board, and its involvement in the banning of certain books.
4. Consider the impact of censorship on the careers of several writers, on the practice of writing, and on the development of a reading public in Ireland.
5. Relate these issues to other Sophister modules on Irish literary culture, and apply them to contemporary discussions about censorship and freedom of expression, nationally and internationally.

Option Description:

Following the passage of the Censorship of Publications Act in 1929, state censorship exerted considerable pressure on literary practice in Ireland. These pressures were grounded in a socially conservative politics, and were part of a larger drive towards – what the historian Donal Ó Drisceoil has termed – the ‘Catholicization’ of Irish culture. Censorship continued through the middle decades of the 20th century, with many writers of the period finding their work banned on the grounds of ‘obscenity’ or ‘indecenty’.

If some writers joked that this was a perverse badge of honour, censorship nonetheless had a huge impact on the development of Ireland in the decades after partition and independence. It thwarted the careers of many authors, it restricted the spread of thoughts and ideas, it ensured that institutional abuses were not widely publicised, it curbed the growth of a native publishing industry, and it did untold damage to the larger populace. Censorship only began to ease in the early 1960s, with the growing liberalisation of Irish society. Legislation in this area was finally overhauled in 1967.

This module explores the history of literary censorship in 20th century Ireland. It explores a cluster of texts from across several decades, and it engages with a few infamous cases and controversies. It also considers the legacies of censorship, reflecting on some of these issues in a contemporary context – especially as they pertain to the curtailment of rights and freedom of expression in the digital age, nationally and internationally.

Seminars will be arranged as follows:

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Seán O’Faoláin and Frank O’Connor, selections *
- 3 Kate O’Brien, *The Land of Spices* (1941)
- 4 Eric Cross, excerpts from *The Tailor and Ansty* (1942) *
- 5 Norah Hoult, selected stories *
- 6 Sam Hanna Bell, *December Bride* (1951)
- 7 Reading Week
- 8 Brian Moore, *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955)
- 9 Brendan Behan, *Borstal Boy* (1958)
- 10 Edna O’Brien, *The Country Girls* (1960)
- 11 John McGahern, *The Dark* (1965)
- 12 Conclusion and legacies *

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) will be uploaded to Blackboard

Assessment: One end-of-term essay