

Genre: An Introduction to Literary Studies (MT 2026)

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Module Description:

This module examines the concept of genre and introduces some of the key structures, themes, reading skills, and critical perspectives that underpin English literary studies. We will focus on three major literary genres – poetry, drama, and prose fiction – and discuss the ways in which these have evolved from the classical through to the contemporary eras. The module lecturers will explore a range of set texts to illustrate the formal, stylistic, and thematic qualities of certain genres, and to consider the relationship between literary genre and various social, historical, and cultural contexts. The module will also introduce some important critics and theorists of genre to students and reflect on the role of criticism in the formation of literary canons and traditions.

Learning Outcomes:

On completion of this module students will:

- Understand the evolution of literary genre in its major forms from the classical to the contemporary era
- Be able to locate specific literary genres in historical and cultural context
- Develop awareness of the critical frameworks and categories relevant to the study of literary genre
- Acquire a critical vocabulary relevant to the discussion of literary genre and related concepts
- Gain interpretative skills in reading a selection of illustrative texts from different periods in literary history.

Assessment: Mid-term assignment (30%) and Exam (70%)

Module Outline:

Week 2

Reading Genre

Texts: Aristotle, 'Poetics' (c.335 BCE); Jacques Derrida, 'The Law of Genre' (1980).

Week 3

Reading Poetry

Texts: extracts from Philip Sidney, *The Defense of Poesy* (c.1580); William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems* (1802); Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision' (1971); Selections from Mark Strand and Eavan Boland, eds, *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms* (2000).

Week 4

The Sonnet

Texts: selections from Mark Strand and Eavan Boland, eds, *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms* (2000); Christina Rossetti, 'Monna Innominata' (c.1881); Tony Harrison, from *The School of Eloquence* (1978).

Week 5

Epic

Texts: Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. John Dryden (1697), books 1–6; Derek Walcott, *Omeros* (1990), book 1.

Week 6

Tragedy

Text: Sophocles, *Antigone* (c. 440 BCE).

Week 7

Reading Week

Week 8

Comedy

Text: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* (411 BCE).

Week 9

Tragicomedy

Text: Samuel Beckett, *Happy Days* (1961).

Week 10

The Rise of the Novel

Text: Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).

Week 11

The Detective Story

Texts: Tzvetan Todorov, 'The Typology of Detective Fiction' (1966); Edgar Allan Poe, 'Murders in the Rue Morgue' (1841); Ernest Hemingway, 'The Killers' (1927); John Luis Borges, 'Death and the Compass' (1942).

Week 12

Postmodernism and Metafiction

Texts: Clarice Lispector *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964) and 'The Fifth Story' (1964); Ursula Le Guin's 'Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' (1986).

Primary Texts:

All primary texts will be made available via Blackboard or through TCD library databases, with the exception of the texts below which are to be purchased in the following editions.

Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*, trans. Idra Novey (Penguin, 2014).

Secondary Reading:

Secondary reading suggestions will be signposted via Blackboard, as well as in the lectures and tutorials. Do use these suggestions or ask your lecturers and tutors for further guidance. Do not just trawl the internet. The below offer some useful initial places to explore background reading:

POETRY

Attridge, Derek, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry* (2013)

Hurley, Michael and Michael O'Neill, *Poetic Form: An Introduction* (2012)

Lennard, John, *The Poetry Handbook* (2006)

Matterson, Stephen and Darryl Jones, *Studying Poetry* (2011)
Ramazani, Jahan, *Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres* (2013)

DRAMA

Bentley, Eric, *The Theory of the Modern Stage* (1968)
Brater, Enoch, 'Beckett, Ionesco, and the Tradition of Tragicomedy', *College Literature* 1.2 (Spring 1974).
Brook, Peter, *The Empty Space* (1968)
Carlson, Marvin, *Theories of the Theatre* (1993)
Foley, Helene P, 'Performing Gender in Greek Old and New Comedy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Comedy*, ed. Martin Revermann (2014)
Hall, Edith, 'The Sociology of Athenian tragedy', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P.E. Easterling (1997)
Kennedy, Dennis, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance* (2010)
Meisel, Martin, *How Plays Work* (2007)
Steiner, George, *The Death of Tragedy* (1961)

PROSE FICTION

Cooppan, Vilashini, 'The Novel as Genre', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Novel*, ed. Eric Bulson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
Eagleton, Terry, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (2005)
Hale, Dorothy, ed., *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (2006)
Levine, Caroline, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015)
McKeon, Michael, ed., *Theory of the Novel* (2000) – especially see McKeon's own chapter (this book is available on archive.org).
Prince, Gerald, *Narratology* (1982)
Shaw, Valerie, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (1983)

Module Convenor

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