

Marriage, Sex, and Genre in Eighteenth-Century Ireland

Short Title: Eighteenth-Century Ireland (10 ECTS)

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Semester Taught MT/HT: HT **Year:** JS

Course Description and Learning Aims:

The navigation of heterosexual relationships and the anticipation of marriage are recurring themes across writing from eighteenth-century Ireland. Marriage represented an important goal in the lives of most young women, and the prospect of betrothal inspired a variety of writing by both men and women, from diary entries steeped in heightened feelings, to plays employing the marriage plot for farcical entertainment, to the exploration of courtship in the newly emerging novels of the period. Alongside more conservative depictions of relationships and moralistic messages embedded within the texts, many of these writings also include more transgressive representations of sex and marriage, and feature instances of cross-dressing, adultery, female agency, and reflections on intense same-sex friendship.

The course texts also repeatedly underscore the fragility of women's existence at the time, and the dangers at play in terms of both reputation and violence. The importance placed on female resistance to sexual activity before marriage shaped both men and women's sexual behaviour, and eroded the value of female consent, a topic that features across the texts.

Writing from eighteenth-century Ireland is rich in textual diversity, with a remarkable formal fluidity across genres. This module explores the generic intersections, experimentation, and innovation in evidence across the course texts, which include novels, poetry, diaries, memoirs, letters, a comedy, and a farce. We will consider literary and cultural cross-fertilization, and examine concepts of paratext, while exploring portrayals of marriage, sex, and power in Ireland during the long eighteenth century.

The module strives for breadth of representation and aims to include the voices of people from different religious and socio-economic backgrounds, and different age groups.

Module Content

1. **Introduction**
2. **Virginity and early Irish fiction:** Anon., *Vertue Rewarded* (1693)
3. **Sex and subterfuge:** Poetry by Jonathan Swift (1730s)
4. **The Marriage Market:** Diary extracts
5. **Sentimental suffering:** Frances Sheridan, *Memoirs of Miss Sidney Bidulph* (1761)
6. **Life Writing and Sex Work:** Mrs Leeson's *Memoirs* (1795)
7. Reading Week
8. **Epistolary Romance:** Elizabeth and Richard Griffith, *Genuine Letters* (1750s)
9. **Marriage on stage:** Elizabeth Griffith, *The Platonic Wife* (1765)
10. **Farcical Courtship:** Charles Macklin, *Love à la Mode* (1759; pub. 1779)
11. **Acts of transgression:** Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (1801)
12. **Conclusions**

Learning Outcomes:

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

- Write critically about literature in Ireland in the long eighteenth century.
- Analyse critically the set texts while also relating them to each other and their social, cultural, and political contexts.
- Demonstrate an awareness of changes to, and the development of, those genres studied, and be able to recognise and discuss generic intersections.
- Achieve enhanced understanding of the Irish contribution to eighteenth-century literature.
- Identify themes and discourses relevant to the construction of gender in Ireland.
- Undertake independent research, identifying topics of interest and employing appropriate research methods.

Assessment Details:

This module will be assessed by a combination of a short written piece (1,500 words, 25%) and an essay (c. 4,000 words, 75%). The essay topic may be of the student's own choice, reached upon consultation with the module convenor.

Please note:

- *Curricular information is subject to change.*
- **Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.**