Some peoples, such as the Romans, think of their myths historically; the Irish think of their history mythologically; and so, too, of their geography.
--- Marie Louise Sjoestedt

[In early Irish tradition] the power of language enables us to build in our minds an image of the earth in which we dwell: outside is taken inside, and the Other becomes a portion of ourselves. The prophet and poet, transcending the passing ages and matching the truth of things with the truth of his own inspired speech, can win the heart of the mysterious world.
--John Carey

**Seminar Vision**

To gain a better understanding, as a community of learners, of the literary traditions of early medieval Ireland in a scholarly context, especially their distinctively rich synergy of mythological and Christian traditions in “retro” perspectives, and the continued relevance of resulting notions of the Otherworld to English literature, religious syncretism, and human identity in relation to nature and spirituality.

**Seminar Mission and Goals**

To develop analytical and creative research approaches--in discussions, blogs, presentations, and final projects--to early Irish texts as a vital early subset of medieval European literature with a special influence on English literature to gain an introductory overview of the field for potential future studies and scholarly and creative contributions.

**1-2 Ancient traditions--the goddess of sovereignty and the Otherworld--and Irish Christian synergy**

*Prehistoric survival question; meaning of tradition in literature*

M. Jan. 23

Classical accounts and Book of Invasions
Tuan
MacCana on Sovereignty
Voyage of Bran
Second Battle of Mag Tured
Hag of Beara

M. Jan. 30

“Baptism of the gods” (BB); “Colors of the Winds” handout; handout on early medieval Christian theology in relation to Irish literature; Cary-Louth handout; Irish Adam and Eve story (PDF); “The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmedón” (Niall of the Nine Hostages) in *Celtic Heroic Age*; article on Sovereignty (BB); Cormac son of Art in CHA; Conversation with Columcille in CHA; “Ultán’s Hymn” (to St. Brigit) and “Voyage of St. Brendan” in *Celtic Spirituality*

3-5. **Mythology as landscape: The Ulster Cycle**

*The greatest early Irish heroic cycle*

M. Feb. 6

Ulster Cycle and related Mythological Cycle tales (in Gantz, Koch, Kinsella)

M. Feb. 13

*The Táin*

M. Feb. 20

*The Táin*

6-8. **Patrick and the saints in dialogue with the ancients**

*Tales of the saints and of Finn and his band*

M. Feb. 27


Mar. 6.

Finn tales from Dooley, Koch books

SPRING BREAK

M. Mar. 20
Finn tales from Dooley, Koch books

9-13. **Irish Cosmic Christianity and its narratives**

*A familiar but different faith*

M. Mar. 27 *King of Mysteries, Iona* and Davies books

M. April 3 *Hibernicus, De Ordine* and Eriugena selections/articles; *A Single Ray of the Sun*

M. April 10 Early Irish poetry; Tolkien article

M. April 17; Eriugena and Columbanus homilies, Cambrai Homily, penitentials and laws; Yeats’ *Only Jealousy of Emer*

**14-15. Retro Literary Otherworlds**

M. April 24; *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; The Dead*; Northrop Frye essay; Ossian selections

*Early Irish literature, modernism, and urban goth*

M. May 1—Yeats-Lady Gregory’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*; C.S. Lewis’ Narnia Chronicles, and Emma Bull’s *War Among the Oaks*. **Final blogging and farewells.**

F. May 5—**Final projects due**

**Required Books:**
Jeffrey Gantz, trans., *Early Irish Myths and Sagas*
John Carey, *A Single Ray of the Sun*
*The Táin*, trans. Thomas Kinsella
Thomas Clancy, *Iona, Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery*
Gerard Murphy, trans., *Early Irish Lyrics*
John Carey, trans., *King of Mysteries*
Ann Dooley, trans., *Tales of the Elders of Ireland*
Oliver Davies, ed. *Celtic Spirituality*
John Koch, ed., *Celtic Heroic Age*
*Dictionary of Celtic Mythology*

Other required readings (subject to adjustment) will be in photocopied or electronic form.

**On-line resources**
For a start, see the Celtic Studies Association of North America bibliography (current up to 2002) at http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/celtic/csanbib.html
Also see the 1994 bibliography (still definitive in many ways) at http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/gaeilge/sean_ghaeilge.html
Warning: There are many websites of dubious background and motivation regarding early “Celtic” myths, druids, etc. Please rely on websites with “edu” suffixes (“ac” in Britain) or from Irish universities, and on-line scholarly journals, and don’t automatically accept information as given on others.
Among the best journals with recent English-language scholarship in early Irish studies: Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies, Celtica, Peritia, Cosmos; also in terms of serials the annual publications of CSANA, the International Celtic Studies Congress, and the Harvard Celtic Studies Colloquium.
You also might be interested in an on-line journal of Celtic Studies with a postmodern bent: http://www.celtic-cultural-studies.com/index.html

**Required Assignments**
In addition to regular readings and participation in class discussion, there will be eight required weekly blog entries (each a minimum of 650 words), and one long final research-analysis project. There will also be one required class presentation.

**Grading**
30 percent class participation (includes active discussion, attendance, evidence of preparation) and presentation
30 percent blogs and related tutorials
40 percent final project (10 points for thesis/draft/revision process)

**Fine Print**
Each part or sub-component of the grade is scored on a 0 to the maximum range; 0 being unacceptable or not handed in, to the maximum being outstanding/publishable/work of professional quality. Assignments handed in late will be penalized. Missing a seminar without an official written excuse will result in a lowered grade for participation; missing more than two seminars without such excuse will result in additional lowering of the semester letter grade. Plagiarism will result in a failing semester grade.

**Tutorials and Conferences**
During designated weeks, there will be required 15-minute appointments to discuss blogging and projects, which will be scheduled in regular time slots.