

# English 577.03: Irish Folklore

09106-7, Fall 2008

Professor: Ray Cashman  
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Class Time: TR 1:30-3:18  
Class Location: Denny 238

## Course Description:

This course introduces the popular beliefs, vernacular customs, material culture, and especially, oral traditions of Ireland. Although much Irish folklore has roots in the far distant past, we will focus on those traditions documented from the late 18th through 21st centuries—a period during which folklore inspired an Irish literary revival and served the nation-building project of a newly independent republic. We will conclude with an investigation of the politics of culture, identity, and heritage in contemporary Northern Ireland where the legacy of British colonialism remains most pronounced.

## Required Text:

- Henry Glassie. *The Stars of Ballymenone*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006.

*Ordered only at SBX bookstore, 806 North High St. between 14th and 15th Ave*

**All other readings available on [Carmen](#)**

## Recommended Texts:

- Sean O'Sullivan. *The Folktales of Ireland*.
- Henry Glassie. *Irish Folktales*.
- Georges Dennis Zimmerman. *The Irish Storyteller*.
- Diarmuid Ó Giolláin. *Locating Irish Folklore*.

*Another, more comprehensive list of recommended books will be provided.*

## Expectations:

Attendance. I will take attendance, and I expect you at every class session, barring significant

illness or other unavoidable personal emergency. Also, please come on time. Lateness is disruptive and inconsiderate to your fellow classmates and to me. Habitual absences and lateness will negatively affect your grade.

Preparation and contribution. You must keep up with the readings and come prepared to discuss them. Participation in class discussion is expected and necessary; it ensures the best possible educational experience for all. Contributing is not necessarily about having the right answers. Discussion allows us to raise questions and critical concerns, try out new ideas and positions (even if we eventually abandon them), and help each other consider all sides of an issue. Lack of preparation, unwillingness to contribute to discussion, and/or habitually unproductive or negative contributions to discussion will adversely affect your grade.

Plagiarism. Plagiarism is the representation of another's work or ideas as one's own: it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. All cases of suspected plagiarism, in accordance with university rules, will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

Due dates. Late work is a sure sign of indolence, shiftlessness, and moral turpitude. (Contact me ASAP if you have compelling reasons to need an extension.)

**Assignments:**

**Transcription:**

**Mid-term:**

**Final paper:**

You will transcribe (type word-for-word) a portion of a recorded interview with Irish storyteller Patrick James ("Packy Jim") McGrath. In addition to hearing interesting and entertaining primary materials, you will get hands-on experience as a folklorist and contribute directly to the greater cause of preserving Ireland's folklore.

I will brief you in class about the nature and content of this exam. Potential essay questions will be given ahead of time.

8-10 pages. See our Carmen page for the assignment.

**Grading:**

20%

40%

40%

participation and preparation-includes attendance, contribution to discussion, and transcription efforts

mid-term exam

final paper (8-10 pages)

### **Class Schedule (subject to change)**

N.B.: Readings in *italics* are primary sources (folklore texts), and the rest are analytical journal articles or book chapters.

*Week 1 - 9/25*

#### **Introduction to the course**

*Week 2 - 9/30*

#### **The Study of Folklore in Ireland**

Ray Cashman, "Irish Folklore" (from *Greenwood Encyclopedia of World Folklore* 2006)

Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, "Folklore and Ethnology" (from *The Heritage of Ireland* 2000)

#### **Recommended but optional:**

Breandán Ó hEithir, *O'Brien Pocket History of Ireland*, 2004 (on Carmen)

E. Estyn Evans, "Peasant Beliefs in Nineteenth-Century Ireland" (from *Views of the Irish Peasantry 1800-1916*, 1977)

*Week 2 - 10/2*

#### **Supernatural Legend and Belief: The Good People part I**

*A selection of Irish fairy legends (on Carmen, from various sources)*

Conrad Arensberg, "The Good People" (from *The Irish Countryman* 1936)

*Week 3 - 10/7*

## **Supernatural Legend and Belief: The Good People part II**

Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, "Fairy Belief and Official Religion in Ireland" (from *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* 1997)

Patricia Lysaght, "Fairylore from the Midlands of Ireland" (from *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* 1997)

Angela Bourke, "The Virtual Reality of the Irish Fairy Legend" (from *Éire-Ireland* 31, 1996)

### **Recommended but optional:**

Susan Eberly, "Fairies and the Folklore of Disability: Changelings, Hybrids, and the Solitary Fairy" (from *The Good People: New Fairylore Essays* 1997)

*Week 3—10/9*

### **Folk Religion: Patterns and Wakes**

Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, "Perspectives in the Study of Folk-Religion" (from *Ulster Folklife* 36, 1990)

Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, "Revisiting the Holy Well" (from *Éire-Ireland* 40, 2005)

Ray Cashman, "Dying the Good Death: Wake and Funeral Customs in County Tyrone" (from *New Hibernia Review* 10, 2006)

### **Recommended but optional:**

Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch, "The Merry Wake" (from *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850* 1998)

*Week 4—10/14*

### **The Fireside Tale: Hero Tales**

James MacKillop, "Finn MacCool: The Hero and Anti-Hero in Irish Folk Tradition" (from *Views of the Irish Peasantry 1800-1916*, 1977)

"The Birth of Finn MacCumhail" (from *Irish Folktales* 1985)

"Fin MacCumhail and the Son of the King of Alba" (from *Myths and Folk-Lore of Ireland* 1890)

"Diarmaid and Gráinne" (from *The Folklore of Ireland* 1974)

"Finn and the Big Man" (from *The Folklore of Ireland* 1974)

*Week 4—10/16*

### **The Fireside Tale: Wonder Tales**

\*\*\* Check out mp3s and transcriptions of Frank McKenna's tales on Carmen \*\*\*

Dan Ben-Amos, "Folktale" (from *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments* 1992)

"*The Twelve Brothers*" (from *Seán Ó Conaill's Book* 1981)

Joan Radner, "The Woman Who Went to Hell" (from *Midwestern Folklore* 15, 1989)

**Recommended but optional:**

"*The King of Ireland's Son*" (from *Irish Folktales* 1985)

"*Fair, Brown, and Trembling*" (from *Irish Folktales* 1985)

**Week 5—10/21**

**History, Memory, and Commemoration, part I**

Brynjulf Alver, "Historical Legends and Historical Truth" (from *Nordic Folklore* 1989)

Ray Cashman, "The Heroic Outlaw in Irish Folklore" (from *Folklore* 111, 2000)

Ray Cashman, "Visions of Irish Nationalism" (from *Journal of Folklore Research* forthcoming)

**Recommended but optional:**

Lawrence Taylor, "Stories of Power, Powerful Stories: The Drunken Priest in Donegal" (from *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society* 1990)

Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, "The Image of the Vikings in Irish Folk Legends" (from *Béaloides* 62-3, 1996)

"*Daniel O'Connell*" (from *Irish Folktales* 1985)

"*Cromwell and the Friar*" (from *Folktales of Ireland* 1966)

**Week 5—10/23**

**NO CLASS**

(American Folklore Society Conference)

**Week 6—10/28**

**History, Memory, and Commemoration, part II**

Niall Ó Ciosáin, "Approaching a Folklore Archive: The Irish Folklore Commission and the Memory of the Great Famine" (from *Folklore* 115, 2004)

Guy Beiner, "Who Were 'The Men of the West'? Folk Historiographies and the Reconstruction of Democratic Histories" (from *Folklore* 115, 2004)

**Week 6—10/30**

**The Irish Origins of Hallowe'en**  
(a timely tangent into calendar customs)

**\*\*\* FIRST PART OF TRANSCRIPTION DUE \*\*\***

*Week 7—11/4*

**EXAM**

*Week 7—11/6*

**The Black North, part I**

Bill Rolston, "From King Billy to Cúchullain: Loyalist and Republican Murals Past, Present and Furture" (from *Éire-Ireland* 33, 1999)

**Recommended but optional:**

Neil Jarman, "Painting Landscapes: The Place of Murals in the Symbolic Construction of Urban Space" (from *Symbols in Northern Ireland* 1998)

*(N.B.: These readings are minimal so you can get started on The Stars of Ballymenone, 420 pp.!)*

*Week 8—11/11*

**NO CLASS**  
(Veterans' Day)

*Week 8—11/13*

**The Black North, part II**

Dominic Bryan, "Northern Ireland: Ethnicity Politics and Ritual" (from *Orange Parades* 2000)

**Recommended but optional:**

Anthony Buckley and Mary Kenney, "The Chosen Few: Biblical Texts in a Society with Secrets" (from *Negotiating Identity* 1995)

Anthony Buckley, "Royal Arch, Royal Arch Purple and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*: Secrecy in Orange and Masonic Ritual" (from *From Corrib to Cultra* 2001)

*(N.B.: These readings are minimal so you can get started on The Stars of Ballymenone, 420 pp.!)*

*Week 9—11/18 and 11/20*

**Light in the Darkness**

Henry Glassie, *The Stars of Ballymenone*, 2006

*Week 10—11/25*

**Room to Rhyme**

Ray Cashman, "Christmas Mumming Today in Northern Ireland" (from *Midwestern Folklore* 26, 2000)

Ray Cashman, "Mumming on the Northern Irish Border: Social and Political Implications" (from *Mumming in Cross-Border and Cross-Cultural Contexts* forthcoming)

*Week 10—11/27*

**NO CLASS**  
(Thanksgiving)

*Week 11—12/2*

**Folklore, Local Identity, and Reconciliation**

Ray Cashman, "Storytelling and the Construction of Local Identities on the Irish Border" (from *Orality and Contemporary Irish Culture* forthcoming)

Ray Cashman, "Critical Nostalgia and Material Culture in Northern Ireland" (from *Journal of American Folklore* 119, 2006)

**Recommended but optional:**

Anthony Buckley, "Ethnic and Other Identities: Are There Really Two Traditions?" and "Postscript" (from *Negotiating Identity* 1995)

*Week 11—12/4*

**Q & A with Henry Glassie**

**\*\*\* SECOND PART OF TRANSCRIPTION DUE \*\*\***

**\*\*\* FINAL PAPER DUE\*\*\***

*Tuesday 12/9/08 by noon, in my mailbox, Denny 421*