The Art of Fiction: The Irish Short Story, English 325
Professor: Andrew Kincaid

Spring Semester, 2020
M/W 11:00 AM-12.15 PM
Lapham 253

Brief Course Description

Frank O'Connor (1903-1966), one of the twentieth century’s great short story writers, argues that whereas England is the home of the novel, it is Ireland, and by default, other smaller, politically divided countries, that is home to some of the best short story writers. It is hard to argue with O'Connor’s core fact when one recites the list of names: James Joyce, Oscar Wilde, Samuel Beckett, Liam O'Flaherty, William Trevor, Elizabeth Bowen, Mary Lavin, and Edna O'Brien. While it would be hard to live up to the standards set by Joyce and Trevor, a new generation of young Irish writers has taken up the task of exploring how the genre of short prose fiction continues to shed light upon the dark corners of modern life and its quiet sufferers. Roddy Doyle brings humor to immigration. Brigit Keegan and Anne Enright bring pathos and understanding to lives of those who remain in small towns and rural outcrops. Kevin Barry and Colin Barrett update the age-old themes of community, violence, and friendship in the setting of contemporary urban Ireland.

This class has two primary goals. The first is to read and enjoy some wonderful, rich, and deep writing. The second is to develop a theory of the genre of the short story itself – what are its histories, its strengths, and its weaknesses. We will learn a lot about Irish history and postcolonial culture along the way.

Authors we will read include:

- Anonymous: some early Irish folktales
- Claire Keegan
- Colin Barrett
- Donal Ryan
- Edith Somerville and Martin Ross
- Elizabeth Bowen
- Edna O’Brien
- Frank O’Connor
- James Joyce
- Maria Edgeworth
- Mary Lavin
- Liam O’Flaherty
- Oscar Wilde
- Roddy Doyle
- Sally Rooney
- Samuel Beckett
- Sean O’Faolain
- Sheridan Le Fanu
• William Carleton