

## **HONR 3309 Course One: Ireland's Storytelling Culture (with a Boston community-based storytelling Intro)**

May 28 – June 11, 2020 (M-F as well as one brief Saturday session June 6)

Instructor: Michael P. MacDonald

Attributes: Honors, NUPath Difference/Diversity (DD), Interpreting Culture (IC)

**Description:** In Course One we will look at the role of storytelling in the development of voice, agency and community. We will do this by first observing storytelling efforts in Boston, aimed at helping people transform difficult lived experiences into their voice and agency as community leaders. From there we will virtually travel to Ireland to look at the role of storytelling there, from the ancient indigenous to contemporary Irish culture and society. By closely observing the ancient myths—as well as the *story* told in landscape, in stone structures, and in tribal social and spiritual practices—we will develop a lens for reading later historical events and cultural dynamics from colonization through the Easter Rising of 1916 (often called “the poets’ revolution”), partition, the Troubles, and the current “post-conflict” period. In this module we will encounter poets, artists, activists and revolutionaries who play a central role in the historic life of this island. And we will virtually meet today’s makers of culture and history, all of whom are steeped in the storytelling tradition of this place.

This course will use Zoom to virtually bring students from Boston communities to Dublin, and onward to the ancient Northwest of Ireland, meeting many powerful voices along the way. We will end up in Derry as we finish Course One, finding ourselves at the outset of the 30-year conflict known as “The Troubles.”

As we study the fraught political divisions forged by British colonization of this island, we will pay special attention to the narratives of all. We will do so with an eye for stories that exist at the intersection of justice and healing. We will get an in-depth look at what telling one’s story does for the individual telling it, as well for the community impacted by the telling. And we will look at the outward rippling effects that story can have on community change.

*In what way does personal testimony contribute to a “de-colonization” for a historically marginalized people, whose stories are often told or interpreted by those of more privilege and power? We will examine this question for the Irish and discuss some global (and Boston) parallels. We will look at both top-down “Master Narratives” as well as the notion of bottom-up “people’s history,” and the role of each in wither maintaining or challenging power.*

## **HONR 3309 Course Two: Justice and Healing Through Story (A.K.A. “Dealing with the Past”)**

June 12-26, 2020 (M-F as well as one brief Saturday session June 20, and Final Group Presentations Saturday June 27)

Instructor: Michael P. MacDonald

Attributes: Honors, NUPath Societies/Institutions (SI), Writing Intensive (WI)

**Description:** Course Two will bring us from Derry to Belfast, North of Ireland, where we will study the larger history of “the Troubles,” and the competing narratives of both the war and the ongoing

peace process (recently complicated by Brexit). We will place emphasis not only on the war and its competing narratives between Loyalist paramilitaries and Republican paramilitaries but also on the role of the most significant player: the colonial British state. We will look at the period's "Master Narrative" constructed by the British state, as well as counter narratives being told today by victims of British state collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries. We will virtually meet, and hear the stories of, major players in the republican movement, including 1981 hunger strikers, political representatives, and peace builders in the lead up to the 1994 Ceasefire and 1998 Good Friday Agreement. We will also virtually meet, and hear the stories of, Unionist (pro British Union) political representatives and community activists with Loyalist affiliation. We will examine the false narrative of the Troubles and the larger centuries-old struggle on this island as "a religious conflict between Protestants and Catholics." We will look at that multiplicity of identities and narratives (rather than the false binaries of Catholic-Protestant, Republican-Loyalist) and examine what purpose these simplified binary narratives might have served vis a vis power/hegemony and the role of the British state.

Most crucial to the ongoing peace-building in the North of Ireland, we will hear the stories of victims and survivors of The Troubles and meet with activists and lawyers pursuing truth inquiries and advocating for a larger Truth and Reconciliation process that is both Independent and Internationally monitored.

To balance the intensity of the narratives of the Troubles, we will explore Irish notions of craic (fun) and the role of the story (and humor!) in resilience from trauma. We will take well deserved virtual excursions from the ancient bog landscapes of the Gaeltacht West (Irish Gaelic speaking west of Ireland) to the spectacular Glens of Antrim, and to lush green hills and valleys of South Armagh. We will look at *landscape as narrative* (whether some of the actual landscape settings in the mythologies we will have learned in Course One, or in terms of our general "reading" of landscape and place for the semiotics of power, violence and healing). And we will explore the role of arts, culture and the native Irish language in the resilience and rebirth of a post-conflict North of Ireland.

**These two combined courses will be a dynamic and interactive online journey through Ireland, with an emphasis on the ancient northern province of Ulster, with some relevant stops along the way. We will utilize video/film, virtual tours, and live sessions with poets, playwrights, artists, activists, storytellers, and musicians. And we will have lively seminar discussions and break-out groups on Zoom.**

**Assessment:** Both courses will essentially be seminar-style – involving discussion and reflective writing. We will virtually visit places of historical, cultural, & community significance, to inspire or our ongoing seminar discussion and our writing and ultimate final group projects. We will participate in some talks and lectures along the way, but this is primarily a seminar course. Therefore lectures and presentations are meant to inform and inspire our group community-wide discourse.

**30%:** Attendance, participation, engagement, and possible in-class writing/reflection exercises will account for 30% of the grade. Everyone is expected to attend all Zoom sessions. Additionally, there will be asynchronous out-of-class work uploaded to Blackboard.

Regarding Participation: For this seminar class, engagement is considered a form of participation. Engagement means first and foremost attending each Zoom session. All students will be expected to be visible, as face-to-face engagement is an important part of the community-building of seminar. Engagement also means clearly paying attention to what is going on and not being involved in activities outside of the classroom (e.g., looking at cell phone, engaging with friends and family at

home etc.). If there is any reason why you may not appear engaged (e.g., a disability, not feeling well on a particular day, etc.) or any reason you need to be monitoring electronics other than your computer for attending the Zoom classroom, you should let the professor or TA know. You should not, however, consider participation as how many times you talk during these discussions. We do understand that everyone may not have the same comfort level with speaking in groups. As such, there will be opportunities when students are broken up into smaller groups where speaking will be easier.

**10%:** Participation in free-form Journaling (on one's own time) will be frequent. It will be checked regularly *just for completion* to make sure it is being done. Journaling is for you. It is for your own internal processing. **It does not have to be the quality of a submitted paper. This cannot be stressed enough.** If you are thinking of someone else reading it while you're writing it, you are not doing it correctly. So just get your thoughts on the page for you.

**20%:** of the grade will be based on Weekly Travelogue (or "travelblog") entries in a closed classroom-forum online—one per week/two per each course semester, four in total for the entire virtual Dialogue.

**40%:** of the grade will be based on a Final Group Project which will span the two courses (four weeks). Groups will be formed early in Course One, based on the storytelling media of one's choice: Website, PowerPoint, Spoken Word, Play, Poetry, Video, Script etc. A list of media to choose from will be provided when the time comes to choose one. Each group will then collaboratively decide on their Topic.

### **Instructor Bio:**

Michael Patrick MacDonald is the author of the New York Times bestselling memoir, *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie* and *Easter Rising: A Memoir of Roots and Rebellion*. He received a 2019 Fulbright Scholar Award, teaching Transformative Storytelling at Queen's University, Belfast and bringing his community-based writing and storytelling curriculum to grassroots organizations dealing with post-conflict generational trauma. He has been awarded an American Book Award, a New England Literary Lights Award, and a fellowship at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Study Center.

MacDonald grew up in the Old Colony Housing Project in South Boston, a neighborhood that at the time held the highest concentration of white poverty in the US. After losing four of his eleven siblings and seeing his generation decimated by poverty, crime, addiction, and incarceration, he learned to transform personal and community trauma, becoming a leading Boston activist, organizer, and writer. His efforts have built diverse, class-conscious mutual aid coalitions to reduce violence by addressing root causes, promoting grassroots leadership from within the communities and families most impacted. He co-founded Boston's first gun buyback program, as well as local support groups for survivors of poverty, violence, and the drug trade. Today he leads a grassroots community-based writing and healing curriculum, "The Rest of the Story: Transforming Trauma to Voice and Agency."

At Northeastern University's Honors Department, MacDonald serves as Professor of the Practice. The focus of all of his work is *the intersection of justice and healing*.