Sophister Option Description Template 2016-17

Option Name: The Golden Age of Children’s Literature

Option Short Title: The Golden Age of Children’s Literature

Lecturer Name: Dr Jane Carroll

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester/Term Taught: HT

Option Content & learning aims

The period between the mid nineteenth century and the early twentieth century was a time of social, cultural, and political upheaval. It was also a period that saw enormous changes in the way children’s literature was produced, marketed and consumed. This so-called ‘golden age’ of children’s literature was marked by a movement away from didacticism towards entertainment and by an increased sensitivity towards and focus on the child reader. This module offers students a chance to engage with mid nineteenth- and the early twentieth-century children’s texts. While some of these texts have become the classics of children’s literature, others have fallen out of favour and out of print. We will investigate the origins of key genres including the school story, the island adventure story, the domestic fantasy and the toy narrative and consider why and when these genres developed. We will explore whether individual texts can be considered to establish patterns and stereotypes perpetuated in modern children’s literature.

This module aims to examine the children’s literature of this period and investigate whether or not this was really a golden age of children’s literature. How can reading children’s literature shine a light on contemporary culture? How does our knowledge of the historical period impact on our understanding of children’s literature? We will ask what makes a text successful and what ensures a text’s continuing success? What makes a text a timeless classic? What makes a text hopelessly dated? Do recent critical editions of forgotten texts such as Brenda’s Froggy’s Little Brother indicate a need to revisit a text and reassess its importance?

Students will explore a range of critical approaches to children’s literature including Clementine Beauvais, The Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children’s Literature (2015); Humphrey Carpenter, Secret Gardens: A Study of the Golden Age of Children’s Literature (2012); Marah Gubar, Artful Dodgers: Reconceiving the Golden Age of Children’s Literature (2010); Maria Tatar, Enchanted Hunters: The Power of Stories in Childhood (2009). In addition to secondary critical material, students will be supplied with extracts from other texts (such as Christina Rossetti’s Speaking Likenesses which is deeply indebted to Carroll’s work) and historical documents to help situate the core module texts within a broader cultural and textual context.

Option Content (in order of reading):

- George MacDonald, At the Back of the North Wind (1871)
- Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865)
- R.M. Ballantyne, The Coral Island (1858)
- Brenda, Froggy’s Little Brother (1875)
- Mary Louisa Molesworth, The Cuckoo Clock (1877)
- L.T. Meade, A World of Girls: The Story of a School (1886)
- Rudyard Kipling, The Jungle Book (1894)
- E. Nesbit, The Story of the Treasure Seekers (1899)
- Beatrix Potter, The Tale of Peter Rabbit (1902), The Tailor of Gloucester (1903), The Tale of Ginger and Pickles (1909)
- Frances Hodgson Burnett, The Secret Garden (1911)
A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner* (1928)

Note: A final reading list will be confirmed later in the year. The vast majority of these texts are available for free online and you can download, print, or read online as suits you.

Assessment Details:

One essay of 5,000 - 6,000 words due April 18th

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the module students will be able to

- Apply close-reading techniques and analytical skills
- Situate the texts on the module within their socio-historical, cultural and textual contexts
- Engage with a range of key critical approaches to specific to the study of children’s literature and evaluate the usefulness of a range of these approaches
- Demonstrate and test their knowledge of the production and reception of 19th and early 20th century children’s literature through seminar discussion and debate
- Identify the aspects of the module interest you most and undertake independent research as the basis for an essay
- Demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the material on the module and their confident engagement with relevant critical methodologies and theoretical frameworks in an essay
- Apply the skills acquired above to a range of other texts and modules on the course