Writing Childhoods: Power, Voice, and Agency

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ECTS weighting: 5
Year: JF
Term taught: Michaelmas Term
Assessment: Essay

Module Description:
This team-taught module will explore the multiple ways in which literature has engaged with ideas of childhood across several centuries. Through an examination of mainstream/adult literature about childhood experience as well as literature written specifically for children this module will introduce students to a variety of expressions and cultural constructions of childhood in a diverse range of texts. The module will examine texts through the lens of ‘childhood’ – with a particular focus on issues of power, voice, and agency – and students will be encouraged to engage with subject areas such as Romanticism, Evil and Innocence, Growing Up, The ‘Victorian’ Child, The Narrator’s Voice, Life-Writing, Families, Agency and Rebellion, Illustration, Gender, Race, Ability, Class and Sexuality.

Learning Outcomes:
On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

• discuss and evaluate the construction of childhood and youth in a broad range of writing across several centuries
• distinguish between ‘literary childhoods’ and ‘children’s literature’
• relate textual analysis to broader critical and cultural debates
• take responsibility for their own learning experience
• develop existing critical and analytical skills, become empowered citizens, and think beyond the confines of ‘learning outcomes’
Module Outline:

1  **Theorising Childhood**  

2  **Romanticism**  
   Extracts from Maria Edgeworth’s *The Parent’s Assistant* (1796), William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789), William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* (1850)

3  **Evil and Innocence**  
   Lionel Shriver, *We Need to Talk about Kevin* (2003)

4  **Growing Up**  
   JD Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)

5  **The ‘Victorian’ Child**  
   Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)

6  **The Narrator’s Voice**  
   E. Nesbit, *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* (1899)

7  Reading Week

8  **Life-Writing**  
   Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969)

9  **Power & Might**  
   Roald Dahl, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964)

10 **Agency and Rebellion**  

11 **Transformative Potential**  

12 **Images of Childhood**  
   Patrick Ness and Jim Kay (illus.), *A Monster Calls* (2011)

**Indicative Critical Reading**

*Appleyard, J. A., Becoming a Reader: the Experience of Fiction from Childhood to Adulthood*  
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)


------------, *Literature for Children: Contemporary criticism* (London: Routledge, 1992)


Mallan, Kerry and Pearce, Sharyn (eds), *Youth Cultures: Texts, Images and Identities* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003)

Mallan, Kerry, *Gender Dilemmas in Children’s Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)


------------, *From Mythic to Linear; Time in Children’s Literature* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2000)

------------, *Aesthetic Approaches to Children’s Literature: an Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005)


Nikolajeva, Maria and Scott, Carole, *How Picture Books Work* (New York and London:
Garland, 2001)


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**Online Journals:** (available in library)

The Lion and the Unicorn

Children’s Literature in Education

Children’s Literature Association Quarterly

International Research in Children’s Literature