MT 2026

Writing Childhoods: Power, Voice, and Agency

Module convenor: Professor Jarlath Killeen
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Lecturers: Professor Jarlath Killeen, Dr Pádraic Whyte, Dr Jane Carroll.

ECTS weighting: 5
Year: Junior Fresh
Term taught: Michaelmas Term
Assessment: Essay

This module involves both lectures and tutorials. Both are essential and obligatory parts of the module. See your timetable at my.tcd.ie for details on tutorial times and locations.

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, Growing Up, The 'Victorian' Child, Irish Childhoods, Childness, 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 Lecture Schedule

Week 1: No lecture

Week 2: Introduction: Theorising Childhood | Jarlath Killeen

Week 3: Romanticism and Preludes | Jane Carroll
Extracts from William Blake's Songs of Innocence and Experience (1789), and William Wordsworth's The Prelude (1850)

Week 4: The 'Evil' Child | Jarlath Killeen
Lionel Shriver, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003)

Week 5: The 'Victorian' Child | Jarlath Killeen
Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865)

Week 6: Irish Childhoods | Ellen Orchard
Seamus Heaney, selected poems – see Blackboard

Week 7: Growing Up | Pádraic Whyte
JD Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)

Week 8: The Eternal Child | Jarlath Killeen
J.M. Barrie, *Peter and Wendy* (1911)

Week 9: Power | Jane Carroll
Mary Norton, *The Borrowers* (1952)

Week 10: Life-Writing| Pádraic Whyte
Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969)

Week 11: Agency and Rebellion | Pádraic Whyte
Carolyn Swift, *Robbers on TV* (1989)

Week 12: Picturing Childhood | Jane Carroll

Indicative Critical Reading:

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

Beauvais, Clémentine*. The Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children's Literature* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015)

Bradford, Clare, Mallan, Kerry, Stephens, John, and McCallum, Robyn, *New World Orders in Contemporary Children's Literature: Utopian Transformations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008)

Grenby, M. O., *Children's Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008)

Hollindale, Peter, *Signs of Childness in Children's Books* (Gloucester: Thimble Press, 1997)

Hunt, Peter (ed) *Children's Literature Vols 1-4* (London: Routledge, 2006)

----------, *Literature for Children: Contemporary criticism* (London: Routledge, 1992)
Joosen, Vanessa, and Vloebergs, Katrien (eds), *Changing Concepts of Childhood and Children's Literature (*Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006)

Knowles, Murray and Malmkjær, Kirsten, *Language and Control in Children's Literature* (London: Routledge, 1996)

Lesnik-Oberstein, Karín (ed), *Children's Literature: New Approaches* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

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)

McCallum, Robyn, *Ideologies of Identity in Adolescent Fiction: The Dialogic Construction of Subjectivity* (New York: Garland, 1999)

McCallum, Robyn and Stephens, John, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture. Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature* (New York and London: Garland, 1998)

Nikolajeva, Maria, *Children's Literature Comes of Age; Towards a New Aesthetic* (New York and London: Garland, 1996)

----------, *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)
----------, *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Children's Literature* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009)

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

Nodelman, Perry, *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Book* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988)
----------, *The Pleasures of Children's Literature,* 2nd. edn. (New York: Longman, 1992/1996)

Reynolds, Kimberley (ed), *Modern Children's Literature: an introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

Rose, Jacqueline, *The Case of Peter Pan or The Impossibility of Children's Fiction*, Revised edn (London: Macmillan Press, 1994)

Stephens, John, *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction* (London: Longman, 1992) ---------- ---------- (ed), *Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children's Literature and Film* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002)

Trites, Roberta Seelinger, *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2000)

Tucker, Nicholas, *The Child and the Book: A Psychological and Literary Exploration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981)

Wall, Barbara, *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1991)

Waller, Alison. *Rereading Childhood Books: a Poetics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018)

Warner, Marina, *Managing Monsters; Six Myths of Our Time* (London: Vintage: 1994)

Zornado, Joseph L., *Inventing the Child. Culture, Ideology, and the Rise of Childhood* (New York: Garland, 2001)

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