

Sophister Option Description Template

Option Name: Reading Nature Writing

Option Short Title: Nature Writing

ECTS Weighting: 5

Semester/Term Taught: MT

Staff: Dr Jane Carroll (jane.carroll@tcd.ie)

Option Content & learning aims

This module explores nature writing, the non-fiction produced about the natural world. With a special emphasis on nature writing produced in Britain and Ireland in the last 10 years, this module ranges widely, from the flat fields of Lahore to the Blasket islands off the coast of Kerry, from the underside of glaciers to the peaks of the Cairngorms. We'll follow the textual trails laid down by obsessives, hobbyists, naturalists, environmentalists, tourists, and farmers as they write about landscape, seascape, plants, weather, insects, fish, birds, animals, and humans as animals.

We'll trace the emergence (or re-emergence) of nature writing as a genre and consider the key features of this genre. We'll question to what extent writing about nature is writing about *us*: we'll think about how nature writers weave their own memoirs into their accounts of birds, animals, and plants that are, frankly, indifferent and explore how nature writers negotiate the broader challenges of the Anthropocene and the catastrophic and benevolent impact of humans on the world around them. We'll also explore questions of identity and engage deeply with work that challenges the racial, gendered, classist, and ableist aspects of earlier nature writing. The reading list is purposefully diverse.

The module aims to create a space for our reading and for us to come together to share our experiences of these texts and our observations of the natural world. The module assessment is designed to allow space for reflection and for you to articulate your responses to the primary and secondary texts on the module. We'll also keep a digital "nature table" on Blackboard and I encourage everyone in the group to share photographs, field notes, findings, and things you come across on your walks across campus or further afield.

Module Outline and Key Reading

1. Introduction: Reading Nature Writing
2. J.A. Baker, *The Peregrine* (2017 [1967])
3. Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* (2019 [1977])
4. James Rebanks, *A Shepherd's Life: A Tale of the Lake District* (2015)
5. Noreen Masud, *A Flat Place* (2023)
6. Robert MacFarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (2019)
7. Reading Week
8. Dara McNulty, *Diary of a Young Naturalist* (2020)
9. Patrick Barkham, *Badgerlands* (2013)

10. Elizabeth-Jane Burnett, *Of Sea* (2021)
11. Jasmine Donahaye, *Birdsplaining: A Natural History* (2023)
12. Broadcasting Nature: Anja Murray, *Nature File*, Seán Ronayne, *Bird Song*, Hamza Yassin, *Get Birding* (links will be provided)

The reading list will be finalised before the start of term.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module you will be able to

- Identify the key features of nature writing as a genre
- Demonstrate your understanding of range of key critical approaches to nature writing and environmental literature
- Discuss the key themes and issues of the module in connection to a range of primary sources
- Plan and organise your reflective journal so that it reflects the aspects of the module that interest you most
- Articulate your responses to key critical methodologies and theoretical frameworks
- Demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the material on the module through your reflective journal

Assessment: Reflective journal (3,000 words)