

Sophister Module Description

Full Name: The Wild Child: Wildness in Children's Literature

Short Name: The Wild Child

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Dr Sinéad Moriarty, moriars1@tcd.ie

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of this course students should:

- Be able to demonstrate an understanding of landscape and spatial theories
- Competently apply theories of landscape and spatial studies to selected children's texts
- Complete close readings of children's texts, from picturebooks to novels for young adults with a focus on depictions of landscape
- Have a detailed understanding of the culturally constructed nature of concepts of 'wilderness' and 'childhood' and to evaluate selected texts for children in view of this.
- Have developed an understanding of key theories within ecocriticism and how they have been applied to children's literature

Learning Aims and Content:

Kenneth Kidd and Sidney Dobrin in their 2004 collection *Wild Things: Children's Culture and Ecocriticism* note that 'Children are still presumed to have a privileged relationship with nature' (p.6). In fact, children are often positioned as somewhat wild, and childhood as a period before the child is fully inducted into the civilized adult world. This course looks at the idea of 'wildness' in children's literature. The first half of the course examines landscape wilderness as it appears in a range of different children's texts, from Ingalls Wilder's canonical American text *Little House in the Big Woods* to Nicki Singer's environmentally-themed *Island*. The second half of the course focuses on depictions of wildness associated with childhood, from Emily Hughes' picturebook *Wild*, to David Almond's *The Savage*. Throughout the course we will problematize the idea of wilderness, both in connection to the landscape and to the child. We will consider the long-standing connection between the child and nature, and how this might impact on our broader understanding of childhood.

This course offers students the opportunity to explore representations of landscape and wilderness in a range of children's texts. The 'spatial turn' in literary criticism (and the humanities more broadly) highlights the cultural influence on concepts such as landscape, wilderness and nature. Utilising ecocriticism, landscape theory and ecopedagogical theory we will explore the depictions of spaces and how people inhabit these spaces before moving on to consider how children come to embody 'wildness' in a selection of contemporary texts.

The key aim of this course is to problematize the concepts of both wilderness and childhood, and to explore how these concepts have been depicted in a broad range of texts for child readers. Students will have the opportunity to explore different modes of writing from picturebooks to novels for young adult readers and will be encouraged to compare the differing ways that concepts of wilderness and the 'wild' child are depicted for these different audiences.

Assessment Details:

- Short written piece (1,000 words) analysing one of the texts covered to date in the module using ecocritical theory. Due end of Week 6. (20%)
- Essay (4,000-5,000 words). Week 13. (80%)

Preliminary Reading List:

Texts

Week 1: Introduction – wilderness and the ‘wild’ child

Week 2: Making the wild a home: Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods* (1932)

Week 3: The wild Irish landscape: Eilis Dillon, *Island of Ghosts*, (1990)

Week 4: The threatening wild landscape: Geraldine McCaughrean, *The White Darkness* (2005)

Week 5: The endangered wild landscape: Nicki Singer, *Island* (2015)

Week 6: The endangered wild landscape: Robert Macfarlane, *The Lost Words* (2017)

Week 7: READING WEEK

Week 8: The happy Wild Child: Emily Hughes, *Wild* (2013)

Week 9: Domesticating the wild child: Karen Hesse, *The Music of Dolphins* (1996)

Week 10: Wild fantasies: J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* (1911)

Week 11: The Wild Child, Trauma: Patrice Lawrence, *Indigo Donut* (2017)

Week 12: The Wild Child, Trauma: David Almond, *The Savage* (2008)

Please note:

- ***Curricular information is subject to change.***
- **Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.**