Introduction to Children’s Literature

Course Code: ENG 533
Course Convener: Dr Frosoulla Kofterou.
Lecture/Seminars: Monday and Thursday 9:00-10:30
Location: ΧΩΔ02, room 016.
Tutorials: 11:30 – 12:30 Monday and Thursday.
Contact Details: f.kofterou@gmail.com

Course Outline:
What is children’s literature and who is it for? This course is aimed at introducing students to the expansive and flourishing field of children’s literature whilst exploring its diachronic evolution from the oral tradition through to pivotal texts such as The Swiss Family Robinson, Tom Brown’s Schooldays, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, Lord of the Flies, Forever, Harry Potter and the Noughts and Crosses series. Students will be encouraged to develop their critical thinking by exploring the relationship between texts and their epistemological, as well as sociocultural contexts, as a means of challenging mainstream assumptions about children and childhood. Understanding how these changes developed into popular narrative trends, such as didacticism, adventure and fantasy fiction, the school story, young adult fiction and the crossover phenomenon will be an essential learning outcome. Students will also have the
opportunity to engage with the burgeoning field of picture books in their various educational, wordless, postmodern and multimodal forms. While focussing on well-known twentieth and twenty-first-century works, we will investigate the complex relationship between text and image, through a range of critical approaches drawing on narratology, psychoanalysis, semiotics and gender studies.

**Course Aims and Learning Outcomes:**

- Develop a diachronic understanding of the key theoretical approaches to the field of children’s literature, and map significant changes in this chronology.
- Develop a diachronic understanding of the epistemological and socio-cultural contexts that influenced trends in writing for or about children.
- Develop a critical approach to reading, through close textual analysis.
- Demonstrate the ability to identify and question commonplace assumptions about children’s literature and the ‘child’.
- Analyse how such assumptions are constructed and disseminated within culture, while subjecting your own thinking to the same critical scrutiny.
- Demonstrate the ability to discuss categories of children’s literature within a comparative context and identify their distinct literary characteristics.
- Incorporate subject-specific terminology when debating and communicating ideas within seminars and while writing assignments.

**Lecture and Seminar Program:**

**Week One: Introduction.**

This introductory lecture and seminar will outline the key debates and ideas concerning the field of children’s literature such as origins, classification, and theoretical approaches, which we will examine further in the forthcoming weeks. Course material will be provided.

**Week Two: Fairy tales, didacticism and evangelical moralism.**

Extracts from Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s *Children’s and Household Tales* (1812), Sarah Fielding’s *The Governess; or The Little Female Academy* (1749) and Mary
Martha Sherwood’s *The History of the Fairchild Family* (1818). Course material will be provided.

**Week Three: Enlightenment pedagogy and the castaway child.**
John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693): course material will be provided.
Jean-Jacques, Rousseau *Emile* (1763): course material will be provided.
Johann Wyss, *The Swiss Family Robinson.* (1816).

**Week Four: Empire and adventure fiction.**

**Week Five: The Post-Darwinian child.**
Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1864).

**Week Six: The school story.**
Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown’s Schooldays* (1857).

**Week Seven**
Presentations on J.M Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* (1911). You will be divided into groups and asked to present your views on this text.

**Week Eight: Animal stories: anthropomorphism and talking animals.**

**Week Nine: Post-WWII Children’s literature.**

**Week Ten: Sex, Gender and Identity.**
Week Eleven: Series fiction and the crossover phenomenon.

Week Twelve - YA fiction.

Week Thirteen - Picture Books: The relationship between text and image.

Method of Assessment:

Two Essays – 40% each.
Presentation – 20%.

Recommended Further Reading:


**Academic Journals.**

*Children's Literature Association Quarterly.*
*Children's Literature in Education.*
*International Research in Children's Literature.*
*The Lion and the Unicorn.*
*Jeunesse: Young People, Text and Culture.*

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated: you will receive a zero for the plagiarized assignment and be referred to the departmental board for further discussion of your case.