

Sophister Module Description Template 2025-26

Full Name: Writing Postwar England

Short Name: Writing Postwar England

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Dr Rosie Lavan, lavanro@tcd.ie

ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught: MT 2025

Year: SS

Learning Outcomes:

On successful completion of these course, students should be able to:

1. Analyse and compare diverse literary and critical engagements with, and representations of England after 1945
2. Identify and discuss the ways in which historical, political and social contexts inform the texts studied
3. Evaluate a range of theoretical and critical arguments in this area, and challenge, extend, or synthesise them
4. Propose and justify their own readings of these texts, and the relationship between text and context in this period
5. Reflect on the issues raised by this module, and apply insights and methodologies developed here elsewhere in their study

Learning Aims:

In *A Journey through Ruins: The Last Days of London*, Patrick Wright's witty yet deeply serious essays about East London in the late 1980s, he concluded that "half a century after the Second World War [. . .] the London that really was dying was the city of planning and the Welfare State born of the post-war settlement". Wright's observational cultural analysis was intended to be more widely applicable to the condition of England under Margaret Thatcher, whose election in 1979 is generally agreed to mark the end of the postwar period and the broad consensus on the value of the state's intervention in supporting the lives of its citizens, most prominently through the provisions of the Welfare State. Proceeding from the work of Wright and other literary and cultural theorists whose work was both enabled by and preoccupied with the conditions of postwar England, this module considers the role of writers in constructing our lasting impressions of this era of seismic social and cultural change. Students will encounter journalism, memoir, and the diverse fictional and dramatic strategies of writers including Sam Selvon, Muriel Spark, John Osborne, J. G. Ballard, Angela Carter, Caryl Churchill, Hanif Kureishi, and Lorna Sage. As their work shows, the slow dismantling of the British Empire in this period did not dislodge imperial attitudes, which persist even now in the resurgent popular nationalism

of the post-Brexit era. And this era of reform is also markedly one of creeping disappointment, which these writers explore in their consistent shifts between depictions of individual and collective experience. In weekly small group presentations students will also be required to engage with poetry, film, and television from the period.

Assessment Details:

- Type of Assessment: Continuous
- Presentation, delivered in class: 30%
- Final essay: 70%
- Number of Components: Two
- Word Count of Component(s): 1000 and 4000
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 30%; 70%

Preliminary Reading List:

Primary Texts

Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956)

John Osborne, *The Entertainer* (1957)

Muriel Spark, *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963)

Angela Carter, essays from *New Society* (1970s)

J. G. Ballard, *High-Rise* (1975)

Caryl Churchill, *Cloud 9* (1979)

Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990)

Lorna Sage, *Bad Blood* (2001)

Initial Recommendations for Secondary Reading

Lanre Bakare, *We Were There: How Black Culture, Resistance and Community Shaped Modern Britain* (London: Penguin, 2025).

Mary Eagleton and Emma Parker eds., *The History of British Women's Writing, 1970-Present* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).

Clare Hanson and Susan Watkins eds., *The History of British Women's Writing, 1945-1975* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2017).

David James ed., *The Cambridge Companion to British Fiction since 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Sue Kennedy and Jane Thomas eds., *British Women's Writing, 1930-1960: Between the Waves* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020).

Malachi McIntosh, *Emigration and Caribbean Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).

Leo Mellor, *Reading the Ruins: Bombsites, Modernism and British Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 2012).

Sukhdev Sandhu, *London Calling: How Black and Asian Writers Imagined a City* (London: Harper, 2003).

Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* (1989; London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (London: Penguin, 2017).

Patrick Wright, *A Journey through Ruins: The Last Days of London* (Oxford:

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.**