

## Sophister Module Description Template 2023-24

**Full Name: George Orwell**

**Short Name: George Orwell**

**Lecturer Name and Email Address: Professor Darryl Jones; drjones@tcd.ie**

**ECTS Weighting: 10**

**Semester Taught: HT**

**Year: JS**

### **Module Content:**

This one-semester module will offer students the opportunity for an extensive study of one of the most important writers of the twentieth century.

Part of the great power of Orwell's writing comes from his background as a member of the English imperial establishment. He was an Old Etonian, and a member of the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. This led to powerful contradictions within his own politics, contradictions which Orwell was never really able to resolve, and which make him such a fascinating writer, and one who is definitely not a straightforward ideologue or propagandist. His experience in Burma, as recounted in *Burmese Days* (1934), his first novel, gave him a lasting hatred of the British Empire (a hatred which had been in him since childhood – his essay 'Such, Such Were the Joys' is a vicious denunciation of the English private school system), an overwhelming appreciation for the abuse of power and a strong sense of sympathy with the victims of power, all of which is very apparent in *1984*. His longer works of documentary non-fiction from the 1930s – *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), and *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) – are all written from this position of fundamental sympathy with the victims of political and economic power – the disenfranchised, the underclass, the oppressed, the unemployed, the tyrannized. In a late essay, 'Why I Write' (1946), he wrote: 'Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic Socialism, as I understand it. It seems to me nonsense, in a period like our own, to think that one can avoid writing on such subjects.'

We will look at a representative sample of Orwell's writing across a variety of forms and subjects, looking at Orwell as a novelist, a journalist, a memoirist, a social theorist, a political thinker and writer, and an essayist and cultural critic.

Week 1: Introduction

Week 2: *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933)

Week 3: *Burmese Days* (1934)

Week 4: *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935)

Week 5: *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936)

Week 6: *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937)

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: *Homage to Catalonia* (1938)

Week 9: *Coming Up for Air* (1939)

Week 10: *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941) and selected essays: 'Good Bad Books', 'Raffles and Miss Blandish', 'The Art of Donald McGill', 'Politics and the English Language', 'Boys' Weeklies', 'Such, Such Were the Joys'.

Week 11: *Animal Farm* (1945)

Week 12: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)

### **Learning Outcomes:**

- The student will be expected to gain detailed knowledge and understanding of the writing and career of George Orwell.

Students studying this module will develop:

- critical skills in the close reading and analysis of texts
- an ability to demonstrate knowledge of a range of texts, genres, and critical approaches
- an ability to discuss a range of texts in their intellectual, historical and critical contexts
- an informed awareness of formal and aesthetic dimensions of literature and an ability to offer cogent analysis of their workings in specific texts
- a sensitivity to generic conventions and to the shaping effects on communication of historical circumstances, and to the affective power of language
- an ability to articulate and substantiate an imaginative response to literature
- an ability to articulate knowledge and understanding of concepts and theories relating to Orwell's writings
- an ability to demonstrate skills in critical reasoning, including the ability to assess other critical readings
- skills of effective communication and argument

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### **Learning Aims:**

Our aim is to read critically through the full range of George Orwell's published works – all of his full-length books, and a representative sample of his essays. These are some of the most important books of the 20th century.

### **Assessment Details:**

- Number of Components: 1
- Name/Type of Component(s): Essay
- Word Count of Component(s): 5000 words

- Percentage Value of Component(s): 100%

### **Preliminary Reading List:**

Oxford World's Classics have recently (2021) published new scholarly editions of all of Orwell's books, in 10 volumes. These are by far the best editions available, with superb introductions by leading modern scholars.

Kristen Blemuel, *George Orwell and the Radical Eccentrics: Intramodernism in Literary London* (2004)

John Brannigan, *Orwell to the Present: Literature in England, 1945-2000* (2003)

Stefan Collini, *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (2006)

Robert Colls, *George Orwell: English Rebel* (2013)

Bernard R. Crick, *George Orwell: A Life* (1981)

Roger Fowler, *The Language of George Orwell* (1995)

J. R. Hammond, *A George Orwell Chronology* (2000)

\_\_\_\_\_, *A George Orwell Companion* (1982)

Graham Holderness *et al*, eds, *George Orwell*, New Casebooks series (1998)

David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain 1945-51* (2007)

John Newsinger, *Orwell's Politics* (1999)

John Rodden, *The Cambridge Introduction to George Orwell* (2012)

Loraine Saunders, *The Unsung Artistry of George Orwell: The Novels from Burmese Days to Nineteen Eighty-Four* (2008)

D. J. Taylor, *Orwell: The Life* (2004)

Raymond Williams, ed. *George Orwell: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1974)

\_\_\_\_\_, *Orwell* (1971)

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.