

## 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](mailto:lavanro@tcd.ie)

**ECTS Weighting:** 10

**Semester Taught:** MT 2026

**Year:** SS

### Learning Outcomes:

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

1. Analyse and compare diverse literary, cultural 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, including those from the perspectives of cultural, gender, queer, Black, and postcolonial studies, 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 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 memoir, poetry and the diverse fictional and dramatic strategies of writers including Sam Selvon, Muriel Spark, John Osborne, Angela Carter, Buchi Emecheta, J. G. Ballard, Lorna Sage, and Jeanette Winterson. 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 political and social reform is markedly one of creeping disappointment, which these writers explore in their consistent shifts between depictions of individual and collective experience. Students will also be required to engage with photography, film, and television from the period, and the first assessment will be rooted in independent primary research in the journalism of the period, using periodicals in Early Printed Books.

**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**

Texts covered on the module in 2025 included the following (but this list is subject to change):

1. INTRODUCTION – Culture, Criticism, and ‘Ordinary People’
2. POSTWAR – Muriel Spark, *The Girls of Slender Means*
3. (POST)COLONIAL – Sam Selvon, *The Lonely Londoners*
4. SEASIDE – John Osborne, *The Entertainer*
5. NORTH AND SOUTH – Angela Carter, essays from *New Society*, and Buchi Emecheta, extracts from *In the Ditch* in the *New Statesman* + Early Printed Books visit\*
6. HOME – J. G. Ballard, *High-Rise*
7. **READING WEEK**
8. PRESENTATIONS 1
9. PRESENTATIONS 2
10. FAMILY – Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are not the Only Fruit*
11. EDUCATION – Lorna Sage, *Bad Blood*
12. LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE – Zaffar Kunial, *England’s Green* (2022)

**Initial Recommendations for Secondary Reading**

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

Justin Bengry, Matt Cook, Rebecca Jennings and E-J Scott EDS., *A Queer Scrapbook: Britain and Ireland since 1945* (Manchester UP, 2026).

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

Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson eds., *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Sub-Cultures in Post-war Britain* ([1975] Routledge, 2006).

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

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

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

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

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

Kelly M. Rich, *The Promise of Welfare in the Postwar British and Anglophone Novel: Sates of Repair* (Oxford UP, 2017).

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

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

Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain* ([1989] Bloomsbury, 2007).

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

Patrick Wright, *A Journey through Ruins: The Last Days of London* ([1991] Oxford University Press, 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.**