

Sophister 5 ECTS Module Description Template 2024-25

Full Name: It Came From the 1950s! American Popular Fiction during the Cold War Era

Short Name: It Came From the 1950s!

Lecturer Name and Email Address: Dr Bernice M. Murphy (murphb12@tcd.ie)

ECTS Weighting: 5

Semester Taught: MT

Year: JS

Module Content:

In the decades after the end of World War II, it rapidly became apparent that the United States was now the most economically, technologically, and militarily powerful nation in the entire world. A series of unprecedented and federally funded building endeavours – most prominently, the construction of thousands of new suburban communities intended to facilitate the massive expansion of the white middle-classes, and the transformative Interstate Highways System – transformed the physical and the cultural landscape. Consumer culture, as we understand it today, began to emerge, as did a distinctively contemporary popular culture, whose influence is still felt today. Yet, for all that, the United States during the post-war era was also riven with gender, racial, and class tensions, haunted by the terror of nuclear annihilation, and obsessed with the spectre of psychological and familial breakdown.

This course will focus on 5 key novels which dramatize many of these powerful anxieties. They encompass a range of popular genres – horror, science fiction, crime fiction – as well as apocalyptic fiction and a female-centered ‘blockbuster’.

Each novel will be discussed over two weeks – the first week will feature an in-depth lecturer-led introduction to the novel under discussion that week, its author, and the critical and cultural contexts which pertain to that text. The second week will be a student-focused and led discussion to which the entire class contributes (take home and in-class exercises may also feature in these sessions).

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will analyse many of the most pressing political, historical, cultural and literary contexts of the post-war USA
- They will become familiar with the period during which American popular culture as we understand it today first emerged

- Students will engage with key literary and secondary critical texts, and be required to convey their own interpretations and perspectives in class discussion and in the written assignments associated with this course
- They will also be encouraged to think about the origins and evolution of specific popular fiction genres, and to further interrogate the relationship between these genres and 'literary' fiction.
- The course will also require students to critically engage with issues related to gender, race, class and community during this period.

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: **1**
- Name/Type of Component(s): **Essay**
- Word Count of Component(s): **3000**
- Percentage Value of Component(s): **100%**

Preliminary Reading List:

I Am Legend by Richard Matheson (1954)

In A Lonely Place by Dorothy Hughes

Psycho by Robert Bloch (1957)

The Sundial by Shirley Jackson (1958)

Time Out of Joint by Philip K. Dick (1959)

Valley of the Dolls by Jacqueline Susanne (1966)

Helter Skelter by Vincent Bugliosi and Curt Gentry

Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

IT by Stephen King (1985)

Students will also be expected to read a range of sociological, historical and literary sources related to the course, with specific secondary readings being assigned for each fortnight.

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.