



## **WRITING THE CITY CWRT 3317 CAPA LONDON PROGRAM**

### **Faculty Biography**

Dr. Michael Hughes was born and raised in Northern Ireland, and has lived in London for almost twenty years. He read English Language and Literature at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and trained in theatre at the Jacques Lecoq School in Paris. Since then, he has worked for many years as an actor, under the professional name Michael Colgan, as well as in film development and production, and as a freelance fiction editor and writing mentor. He studied Creative Writing at Royal Holloway under Sir Andrew Motion, and at London Metropolitan University, where he also taught. He was awarded his PhD in 2013, and his first novel *The Countenance Divine* was published by John Murray in 2016.

### **Course Description**

The course explores the craft of Creative Writing in relation to the city, and explores the particular challenges of writing about place. We will examine different aspects of the city in relation to London narratives including the river, travel, urban spaces, solitude, radical politics, ethnicity, particular boroughs and characters (both fictional and real) as well as making use of practical exercises and field work.

### **Course Aims**

This practice based course aims to provide a theoretical and practical platform to enable you to develop your understanding of London, utilize the city within your own creative writing, and develop an understanding of the potential of place within narrative, including travel writing, prose fiction poetry and film. Through extensive reading and writing practice including rewriting, and an overview of various styles and narrative devices, you will develop your grasp of literary technique and explore and improve your own writing. The course seeks to enable students to 'write the city' for themselves. You will explore the concept of the 'global city', and the urban environment in which you find yourself. You will explore the diversity of the city and observe the way in which people interact with one another so that you can use your observations as the basis for character studies within your own writing.

### **Requirements and Prerequisites**

There are no specific prerequisites for this course other than a desire to write and to improve your writing. Bring a notebook and something to write with other than a laptop or ipad. Eg a note book and a pen!

### **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the course you should be able to

- a) Identify and utilize various writing styles and narrative devices and locate and critically evaluate different types of writing about the city of London;
- b) Communicate effectively about your own writing and provide constructive feedback to others in the class about their writing.
- c) Diversity: You should have gained a deeper understanding of the diversity of London. Students will be able to describe, interpret, and respect the differences within their student community and between their home country and the host country.
- d) You will improve your own creative writing and editorial skills.
- e) Globalization: Students will be able to recognize, describe, and interpret examples of the impact of globalization in the urban environment.
- f) Urban environments: Students will be able to explore and analyze the spaces they inhabit and reflect on differences and similarities between their home and host environments.
- g) Social dynamics: Students will be able to understand concepts of, and implications of, the realities of power, privilege, and inequality in urban environments.

### Developmental Outcomes

Students should demonstrate: responsibility & accountability, independence & interdependence, goal orientation, self-confidence, resilience, appreciation of differences.

### Class Methodology

Lecture, workshop, discussion, use of film, group work, fieldwork, class exercises, student oral presentation, weekly writing assignments and analysis of published London authors' work.

### Field Components

CAPA provides the unique opportunity to learn about the city through direct, guided experience. Participation in field activities for this course is required. You will actively explore the Global City in which you are currently living. Furthermore, you will have the chance to collect useful information that will be an invaluable resource for the essays/papers/projects assigned in this course.

### The assigned field component(s) are:

- 1) An exploration of the River Thames and its literature as the river runs through the square mile that constitutes the historic City of London.
- 2) An exploration of the rapidly changing social and economic demographic of the city as we walk from Warren Street to the Houses of Parliament.
- 3) A tour of the suburb of Stoke Newington, with particular attention to its radical and literary history, led by cultural historian Travis Elborough.
- 4) A psycho-geographical exploration of the landscape of J M Barrie's Peter Pan.

Students are also strongly encouraged to participate in **co-curricular** program activities, that compliment the field trips.

### Assessment/Grading Policy

Descriptor	Alpha	UK	US	GPA
Excellent	A	75+	93+	4.0
	A-	70-74	90-92	3.7
Good	B+	66-69	87-89	3.3
	B	63-65	83-86	3.0
	B-	60-62	80-82	2.7

Average	C+	56-59	77-79	2.3
	C	53-55	73-76	2.0
Below Average / Poor	C-	50-52	70-72	1.7
	D+	46-49	67-69	1.3
	D	40-45	60-66	0.7
Fail	F	<40	<60	0

### Grade Breakdown and Assessment of Learning Outcomes

Assessment Task	Grade %	Learning Outcomes	Due Date
<b>Class participation including small group discussions, class exercises and fieldwork/notes.</b>	<b>20%</b>	a, b, c, d, e, f, g	Weekly
<b>Class presentation</b> 10 minute presentation to the class of a poem or short essay (1000 words) written in response to matching a piece of literature with a place in London and a description of your process.	<b>20%</b>	b, c, d, e, f, g	Weeks 1 to
<b>1500 a short story inspired by a character from one of the novels in the reading list (see below) A1</b>	<b>20%</b>	a, c, d, e, f, g	Week
<b>1500 short story – fiction or life writing (travelogue, memoir or science writing). A2</b>	<b>20%</b>	a, c, d,	Week
<b>1000 word self-reflective essay A3</b>	<b>20%</b>	A, b, c, d, e, f, g	Week

#### Field work:

- a) 500 words inspired by your first field trip to the River Thames (week 2) to be delivered the following week.
- b) Observational notes based on your second field trip (week 4), for your own use.

#### Poem/Presentation

Identify a place in London, and a poem or other piece of writing associated with it, and briefly analyse this piece of writing, not necessarily in the sense of literary criticism, but rather to identify the links, both emotional and physical, between the place/location and the work itself, and the differences you find in them.

eg. The description of the River Thames at the beginning of Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, and the Thames as you find it today. You will, therefore, need to visit the place, preferably at the same time of day as the piece is set.

Then write a poem inspired by this place and / or process. You will share this poem, and the work/place that inspired it with to your classmates, in a presentation in Week 6. (Feel free to use photographs, maps, etc. in your presentation).

You will be graded according to both the written work 10% and your engagement with the process 10%.

### Written assignments in detail:

- 1) **A1 - 1500 word SHORT STORY BASED ON A FICTIONAL CHARACTER.** This assignment will be handed in to be critiqued and subsequently rewritten, before being graded. I will not grade the original submission, although I will give you notes. The grade will be based on your final submission.

**A2 - 1500 word short story fiction/life writing inspired by your experience of the city of London** but otherwise the subject is yours to choose. This is an opportunity for you to explore an aspect of the city that interests you. You may want to write a historical piece, a contemporary short story or piece of travel writing, a story inspired by the Underground tunnels or an object in the V&A Museum. You will have plenty of time to decide on your subject – ask for guidance if this level of freedom seems daunting.

**A3 - 1000 word self-reflective essay.** This is an opportunity for you to examine how far you have travelled since leaving the United States and is delivered in your last week.

Work is graded according to the following criteria:

- 1) Your use of language; whether it's crisp and new or tired and second hand.
- 2) Style: the originality, and authenticity, of your voice.
- 3) Your understanding of, and success in, inhabiting your chosen form, the genre (what kind of writing is it?)
- 4) Your content, it's originality, relationship to the brief.
- 5) Your awareness of your reader.
- 6) Presentation – punctuation, spelling, grammar, your use of conventions for dialogue, paragraph breaks etc.

Please submit all work in a user-friendly font, size 12, double-spaced, or 1.5 spaced, so that I can annotate your script before returning it. Please include the WORD COUNT. I will allow a 10% margin in word count after which you will be penalised. Email it directly to me via CANVAS.

Please submit work ON TIME. Late work will be penalised by 10% and a further 10% each week it is late. If you require an extension then contact me to arrange this at least two days in advance of the delivery date.

**Dress Code:** Please dress appropriately for field trips eg comfortable walking shoes and protection against cold and / or rain - an umbrella is strongly recommended! We will be outside for up to three hours and it can be chilly and wet!

**Course Materials:** the means with which to write! Please obtain two notebooks: one that you will use throughout the course for classwork, and one to use as a journal. Learn not to rely on electronic devices, they are too full of temptations for the writer!

### Required Readings:

Class hand-outs.

ONE book from the following OR a London narrative of your choice from which you will produce the first of your 1500 word assignments (A1).

### Recommended Reading(s):

#### Classic Texts:

*Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens  
*Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens  
*Bleak House* by Charles Dickens  
*The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde  
*The Secret Agent* by Joseph Conrad  
*Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf  
*Hangover Square* by Patrick Hamilton

#### Modern Texts:

*From Hell* by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell  
*Robinson* by Chris Petit  
*Lights Out For The Territory* by Iain Sinclair  
*Downriver* by Iain Sinclair  
*The Buddha of Suburbia* by Hanif Kureishi  
*London Fields* by Martin Amis  
*Hawksmoor* by Peter Ackroyd  
*White Teeth* by Zadie Smith  
*Bridget Jones's Diary* by Helen Fielding  
*Remainder* by Tom McCarthy  
*The City and the City* by China Miéville  
*Saturday* by Ian McEwan  
*The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst  
*Landfall* by Helen Gordon  
*The Countenance Divine* by Michael Hughes

### Weekly Course Schedule

#### Lesson 1

##### INTRODUCTION

Go through course syllabus.

##### **Screening: *My Fair Lady part 1***

Discussion on the importance of keeping notebooks and journals.

**Text: Andrew Cowan's *The Art of Writing Fiction*: Writing about what you know.**

#### Lesson 2

##### **Screening: *My Fair Lady part 2***

Discussion and analysis of structure.

Discussion about first drafts.

Readings: Toni Morrison and David Mitchell on writing habits and first drafts.

#### Lesson 3

##### **Field Trip: Thames. Meet at Embankment Station at your normal class time**

Why have writers, poets and painters been so beguiled and inspired by the river? We will walk along the Embankment observing the river and the life around it.

Bring your notebook and dress appropriately for what may possibly be very wet and/or cold weather. We will be walking approximately 3 miles. All field trips can be adapted for step free access. Please let me know beforehand if you require this.

Readings: from Dickens, Conrad, Blake, Iain Sinclair.

**NB Write 500 words on the Thames, which counts towards your participation grade based on your factual observations of the river. Deliverable in Lesson 5.**

#### **Lesson 4**

**Field Trip: Walk from Warren Street to the Houses of Parliament in a [roughly] straight line.**

**Meet** at Warren Street tube station at your normal class time.

Palimpsest: reading the cityscape. We will take a walk from Warren Street to the Houses of Parliament observing the changing demographic, the use of open spaces, the effects of war on landscape and changing land use by the simple device of following a straight line. Bring a notebook, as you will be writing, and dress accordingly. We will be walking approximately 3 miles. This field trip is suitable for step-free access.

You will make observations in your notebook for your own use (exercise b))

**Turn in: 1<sup>st</sup> draft of written assignment A1 (1500 words based on a character in a novel)**

#### **Lesson 5**

Writing exercises: Expressing ideas in concrete terms & exploring points of view (The Art of Writing Fiction). Writing exercises: Show Don't Tell.

Screening of *Alfie* + discussion.

Readings:

From: Stephen King/On Writing.

From: China Miéville/The City and the City

First workshop. (Workshops modeled on the UEA Creative Writing programme).

**Turn in 500 words on the Thames.**

**Assignment 1A returned with comments**

#### **Lesson 6**

**TBC** Novelist Helen Gordon, who teaches Creative Writing at the University of Hertfordshire, will talk to us about the process of writing her first novel, *Landfall*, and working on her second.

2<sup>nd</sup> workshop. Cont'd...

**Deliver Assignment A1 Final draft.**

**NB: Confirm that you have settled on a place/piece of writing for your poem and think about your analysis of this.**

#### **Lesson 7**

**3<sup>rd</sup> workshop**

**Field Study:** What are the day-to-day concerns of a Londoner? Be a flaneur. We will go to the V&A museum and people watch. Observe the place, the people, what happens, what you imagine. Describe your observations in your notebook and be prepared to use this as the basis for a character study.

**NB Begin working on/researching your own poem inspired by place.**

### **Lesson 8**

Bring your notes (made in lesson 7) back to the classroom, where you will read them out followed by exercises in character development based on Andrew Cowan's 20 Questions (using your observations).

**Deliver 1500 word short story, either fiction or non-fiction, inspired by London (A2)**

### **Lesson 9**

As writers we often feel a responsibility to get to the complex heart of the city, to discover the Why and the How of the 'invisible' citizen: the taxi driver, the cleaner, the illegal immigrant.

**Screening:** *Dirty Pretty Things*

**& 4<sup>th</sup> workshop**

**A2 returned with notes.**

### **Lesson 10**

**Stoke Newington. TBC** Field Trip guided by cultural historian Travis Elborough. Meet at Stoke Newington station (tbc) at your usual class time. **Exploring the way in which myths develop by exploring the suburban cityscape inhabited by generations of radical writers. Bring notebooks and dress suitably.**

### **Lesson 11**

**NEVERLAND – NOTTING HILL** the changing uses of London landscapes. Guided by writer Katherine Norbury, we look at the landscape that inspired J M Barrie by using "Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens" as a psycho-geographic exercise.

**Field Trip: Meet at Bayswater Tube at your usual class time.**

**Deliver Final Draft A2**

### **Lesson 12**

**Presentation of your poems.** You will deliver a ten minute presentation giving you the opportunity to share your experience of transforming a place/poem into a new poem and a shared narrative.

### **Lesson 13**

Exercises in listening (Shakespeare) cont'd...

Screening *Bridget Jones's Diary*

Discussion about the potential inherent in comedic writing in relation to *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

**Deliver Assignment A3 – 1500 word self-reflective essay**

## **Attendance, Participation & Student Responsibilities**

**Attendance:** CAPA has a mandatory attendance policy. Attendance is taken at the beginning of every class. Unauthorized absence from class will result in a reduction of the final grade and potentially a failure for the course.

**Missing classes for medical reasons:** If you need to miss a class for medical reasons or for a family emergency, **you must send an e-mail** to let the Associate Director of Academic Affairs (ADAA) know at least one hour in advance of your class or meeting at the following e-mail: [excused.absence@capa.org](mailto:excused.absence@capa.org). Note that calling the CAPA Centre (0207 370 7389) is acceptable only if you do not temporarily have access to the internet. An e-mail is still required as quickly as you can get access to the internet again. You will need to provide evidence of the reason for your absence. Unexcused absences will result in a grade reduction. In the event of a missed class or field trip, it is your responsibility to contact your instructor and make up any missed assignments.

**Class Participation:** Students are expected to participate actively and critically in class discussions, and the participation portion of the class will be graded accordingly. Students must read assignments **BEFORE** the class, and come in on time.

Participation is a vital part of your grade: students are expected to participate orally in seminars and in online forums and discussions in a critical and evaluative manner; to interact with the faculty and fellow students with respect and tolerance; and to actively engage in discussion. Derogatory or inflammatory comments about the cultures, perspectives or attitudes of others in the class will not be tolerated.

**Academic Integrity:** A high level of responsibility and academic honesty is expected. Because the value of an academic course depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student, it is imperative that a student demonstrates a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work and class behavior. Plagiarism and cheating will result in dismissal from the program. See the Handbook of CAPA Academic Policies for more information and resources on plagiarism.

**Use of electronic equipment in class:** All devices such as laptops, i-pods, i-pads, netbooks, notebooks and tablets, smartphones, cell phones, etc. are **NOT** allowed unless you have express permission from the faculty or you have been instructed to do so. If you require an accommodation to use any type of electronic equipment, inform the Associate Director of Academic Affairs at the beginning of Term.

**Use of Electronic Translators:** In Language courses students are NOT allowed to use electronic translators for writing texts in the target language: those submitting compositions and texts of whatever kind translated in such a fashion will receive a final F grade for the course.

**Late Submission:** Late submission of papers, projects, journal entries, pieces of homework and portfolios is only permitted with prior approval. A request must be made to the relevant Faculty member no later than two days prior to the due date. Late submission without prior approval will result in a full alpha grade penalty. In either case, work cannot be submitted after feedback has been provided to the rest of the class on the relevant assessment or one week after the due date whichever comes first, after which point a grade of F will be given for the assessment.

**Behaviour during Examinations:** During examinations, you must do your own work. Unless specifically instructed by the lecturer or instructor, talking during an exam is not permitted, nor may you compare papers, copy from others, or collaborate in any way. Any failure to abide by examination rules will result in failure of the exam, and may lead to failure of the course and disciplinary action.