

Module Title:

London: Cultural Capital — Reading, Writing and Exploring the City

Subject Area: Creative Writing, Literature, Cultural Studies, Interdisciplinary Arts

Level: BA (Hons), Level 6 (UK QAA)

Credits: 20

Semester: 12 weeks

Course Designer: Tim Atkins (this version 18 Feb 2026)

Overall Module Aim

London has long been imagined as both a living text and a crucible of cultural modernity — a city of contradictions, reinvention, and multiplicity. *London: Cultural Capital* invites foreign exchange students to read, write, and critically explore the metropolis as a space of narrative, identity, creativity, and resistance. The module situates creative writing within the city's literary and cultural histories, from the flâneur and psycho geographer to migrant voices, musicians, street poetry, and digital subcultures.

Students will examine representations of London across fiction, poetry, life-writing, music, and visual media, analysing how class, race, gender, and power shape urban experience. Through workshops, field-based observation, and interdisciplinary study, they will develop both analytical and creative responses to the city.

The module encourages students to see themselves as researcher-writers who move between theory and practice: collecting sensory data, reflecting on place, and transforming it into original creative work. By the end, students will have built a portfolio that demonstrates deep engagement with London as a site of imagination, tension, and creative possibility. They will return home having had a memorable, immersive and intellectually-stimulating experience of creative, intellectual, and cultural life in London.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the module students will be able to:

1. **Analyse** literary and cultural representations of London across periods and genres.
2. **Evaluate** theoretical and historical perspectives on urban space, identity, and capital.
3. **Create** original creative writing that responds to the city's environments, voices, and histories.
4. **Synthesize** interdisciplinary research (textual, visual, spatial) into both creative and critical practice.
5. **Reflect** critically on their own creative processes within scholarly and cultural frameworks.

Module Structure (12 Weeks)

Week	Title & Focus	Key Readings / Texts	In-Class Activities	Learning Focus
1	<i>Mapping the Metropolis: London as Text</i>	Italo Calvino – <i>Invisible Cities</i> (extract) Iain Sinclair – <i>Lights Out for the Territory</i> Laura Oldfield Ford – <i>Savage Messiah</i>	Lecture on urban imagination; creative mapping exercise	Understanding the city as narrative and structure
2	<i>Flâneurs, Walkers & Psychogeographers</i>	Charles Baudelaire -- <i>Paris Spleen</i> Walter Benjamin – <i>Arcades Project</i> (extract) Will Self – <i>Psychogeography</i>	Guided city walk; reflective journal start	Observation, movement, dérive as method
3	<i>Victorian London & the Birth of the Modern City</i>	Charles Dickens – <i>Bleak House</i> (extracts) Henry Mayhew – <i>London Labour and the London Poor</i> John Seed – <i>Letters from Mayhew</i>	Close reading and erasure exercise	Realism, class, and visibility
4	<i>Modernism & the Fragmented City</i>	T. S. Eliot – <i>The Waste Land</i> Allen Fisher – <i>Brixton Fractals</i> Bruce Andrews – <i>Shut Up!</i>	Text analysis; rewriting/collage exercise	Time, perception, interiority
5	<i>Post-War & Multicultural London</i>	Sam Selvon – <i>The Lonely Londoners</i> Hanif Kureishi – <i>The Buddha of Suburbia</i>	Seminar; voice and dialect writing workshop	Migration, hybridity, identity
6	<i>Feminist & Queer Geographies</i>	Jeanette Winterson – <i>Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit</i> (extract) Zadie Smith – <i>NW</i> Nell Dunn – <i>Up the Junction</i>	Group discussion; creative monologue	Gendered and queer mapping of space
7	<i>Margins, Music & Street Culture</i> Guest Lecture ? Mary Shannon	Linton Kwesi Johnson – <i>Selected Poems and Recordings</i>	Performance analysis; spoken-word workshop	Rhythm, performance, politics

Week	Title & Focus	Key Readings / Texts	In-Class Activities	Learning Focus
8	<i>London Gothic & the Uncanny City</i>	Mary Shannon – <i>Billy Waters</i> Peter Ackroyd – <i>Hawksmoor</i> ; Sarah Waters – <i>The Little Stranger</i> Michael Moorcock – <i>Mother London</i> Michael Moorcock -- <i>Gloriana</i>	Mini-lecture; creative horror exercise	Memory, haunting, architecture
9	<i>Digital London & Surveillance</i>	China Miéville – <i>The City & the City</i> (extract) J. G. Ballard – <i>Millennium People</i>	Seminar on technology; collaborative speculative writing	The city and control systems
10	<i>Poetics of Place: Ecology & Regeneration</i>	Kathleen Jamie – <i>Findings</i> (extract) Daljit Nagra – <i>Look We Have Coming to Dover!</i>	Outdoor writing; eco-critical discussion	Environment, sustainability, belonging
11	<i>Research, Reflection & Portfolio Development</i>	Workshop; no new readings	Peer feedback; workshop on reflective commentary	Integrating creative and critical components
12	<i>Presenting London: Readings & Round-table</i>	Reading each other's work in class	Student presentations; reflective discussion	Synthesis, performance, reflection

Assessment

Component	Description	Weighting	Word Count / Equivalent	Learning Outcomes Assessed
Creative Portfolio	Portfolio of original writing (prose, poetry, or hybrid forms) responding to London's spaces, voices, and cultures, accompanied by a 300-word artist's statement.	60 %	2000 words (creative equivalent)	1, 3, 4
Critical Essay	Analytical essay linking the student's creative work to literary, theoretical, or cultural contexts studied in the module.	40 %	1000 words	1, 2, 5

3 Formative Tasks:

- Weekly creative journal based on field observations, posted to Moodle Forum.
- 500-word mid-semester creative draft with peer feedback.
- Seminar presentation on one chosen text.

Pedagogical Approach

Teaching combines **short lectures, seminars, and creative writing workshops**, supported by **fieldwork walks, peer feedback sessions, and online reflective journals**.

The module is designed through **inclusive and decolonial practice**, foregrounding diverse London voices and experiences. It encourages multiple literacies — textual, spatial, visual, digital — and values experiential learning through movement, observation, and collaboration.

Reading List

Primary Texts (Core)

1. Laura Oldfield Ford – *Savage Messiah* — hybrid texts exploring London's changing neighborhoods
2. Sam Selvon – *The Lonely Londoners* — migration, race, and post-colonial identity.
3. John Seed – *Letters From Mayhew* — Poems using 19th Century reportage by Mayhew.
4. Linton Kwesi Johnson – *Selected Poems* — performance, music, activism.
5. Iain Sinclair – *Lights Out for the Territory* — psychogeography and urban myth.
6. Hanif Kureishi – *The Buddha of Suburbia* — hybridity and suburban rebellion.
7. Peter Ackroyd – *Hawksmoor* — London Gothic and temporal layering.
8. Nell Dunn – *Up The Junction* — Working Class short stories
9. Michael Moorcock – *Jerry Cornelius Novels* – Counter-cultural London

Secondary / Theoretical Readings (Mostly extracts)

1. Walter Benjamin – *The Arcades Project* (extracts) — modernity and flânerie.
2. Michel de Certeau – *The Practice of Everyday Life* — walking as writing.
3. Doreen Massey – *For Space* — geography and relational place.
4. Paul Gilroy – *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* — race and national identity.
5. Reviews of Laura Oldfield Ford – *Savage Messiah* — psychogeography and class.

6. bell hooks – *Belonging: A Culture of Place* — decolonial belonging.
 7. Andrew Humphreys – *Raving On Thames* – music and South-West London (I would invite Andrew Humphreys to give a guest lecture)
 8. Iain Borden – *Skateboarding, Space and the City* — performance and urban play.
 9. Sarah Upstone – *Narratives of the Postcolonial City* — postcolonial readings.
 10. Lloyd Bradley -- *Sounds Like London: 100 Years of Black Music in the Capital* – Black Music in London
 11. *Mary Shannon – *Billy Waters* – Mary is a lecturer at Roehampton so could also give a guest talk on this 19th Century Black London Street Musician
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Interdisciplinary / Contemporary Dimension

The module intersects with **music** (grime, reggae, rock, jazz), **visual art** (Ford, Ackroyd, Hogarth), and **digital culture** (urban mapping, Instagram poetry, AI visualisations of space). Students are encouraged to experiment with **multimodal creative responses** — combining text, sound, and image — and to consider the city as a living archive of social change, protest, and imagination.

How This Module Fits the Programme

London: Cultural Capital consolidates Level 6 learning by synthesising creative practice and cultural analysis. It advertises London (and Roehampton) as both global and local sites of innovation and creativity, and it develops an internationally aimed series of themes and modules designed to inspire and attract foreign revenue streams.

It prepares students for independent projects, dissertations, and professional creative work that engage critically with place, identity, and society. The module strengthens skills in research, reflection, and interdisciplinary creative writing — key outcomes for final-year Creative Writing and Literature students. It draws on departmental talents and publications and locates students not just in the capital itself, but also brings a great deal of focus to Roehampton itself and the surrounding districts.