Programme specification
MA in Contemporary Literature

Faculty: Faculty of Arts
Entry in: September 2016
Awarding Institution: York St John University
Teaching Institution: York St John University
Delivery Location: York St John University
Programme/s Accredited by: Not applicable
Exit Awards: Postgraduate Diploma in Contemporary Literature
Postgraduate Certificate in Contemporary Literature
UCAS Code / GTTR / Other: Not applicable
Joint Honours Combinations: Not applicable
QAA Benchmark Group(s): Not applicable
Mode/s of Study: Full-time over 1 year
Part-time over 2 years
Language of Study: English

Introduction and Special Features

This successful programme has existed since 1995. It meets a continuing demand for postgraduate study in Contemporary Writing on a full and part-time basis and is taught in evening seminar/workshop sessions with occasional day schools and special events. It provides the following skills which are both transferable and specific to the study of the subject:

- To develop independent research skills.
- The ability to communicate effectively in written and verbal forms.
- To work effectively in a team in supporting and collaborating with others.
- To manage time effectively in relation to successfully completing an extended piece of critical writing.
- To develop editing and drafting skills.
- To research and produce an engaging presentation.
- The critically evaluate a range of texts.
- To express complex arguments and ideas in written form.
- To formulate new ideas through the process of research.

Special features of the programme:

The MA Contemporary Literature (a proposed title-change from Literature Studies) offers a distinctive opportunity to focus on contemporary writing, an emphasis which not only draws upon the Programme team’s considerable research and teaching expertise in contemporary British, American and postcolonial Literatures, but which is highly attractive to a market of new graduates and more regionally based returning learners.

- Research-led teaching from lecturers with specialisms in the area of contemporary literature, including British, Postcolonial and American.
- The Literature Series is a considerable strength of the programme. Its primary aim is to enhance student experience and events are designed to complement their courses. The events contribute to the creation of a ‘literary’ and creative community. At the same
time, they are open to the public and are an effective way of marketing the BA and MA programmes and signposting YSJ’s place in the community. Recent visiting speakers include novelist Fiona Shaw; graphic novelist Graham Rawle; poet Daljit Nagra; short story writer and editor Nicholas Royle and a visit from a literary agent from Peters, Fraser and Dunlop. The Programme also involves the current Royal Literary Fund fellow who has given talks and readings. These opportunities constitute part of the learning and teaching strategy, in that they contextualise the production and creation of contemporary writing and lead to vibrant debate; inspiration; greater awareness of contemporary literature and the opportunity to engage with possible routes outside of academia in wider regional and international contexts.

- **Regional provider** for returning learners and life-long learners as well as those wishing to take an MA as a route to further postgraduate study
- **Flexibility and modular progression.** The MA can be taken part-time or full-time which allows for flexibility. At the same time, modules build upon a reinforce key skills, and apart from the foundational, introductory module, can be taken in any order.
- **Evening teaching.**
- **Termly teaching** provides clarity of provision and space for student reflection on learning and assessment. It also provides a sense of continuity.
- **Focus on the Contemporary.** This is supported by the Literature Series which invites practising writers to share their expertise (above).

**Admissions Criteria**

In addition to the University’s general entry criteria for undergraduate/postgraduate study, you must have:

- A first degree or above in a related subject at 2:2 Honours level (or international equivalent)

If your first language is not English, you need to take an IELTS test or an equivalent qualification accepted by the University (see [https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/international/how-to-apply/english-language-requirements/](https://www.yorksj.ac.uk/international/how-to-apply/english-language-requirements/)).

If you do not have traditional qualifications, for example, applicants may have a professional background in a related area, you may be eligible for entry on the basis of **Accredited Prior (Experiential) Learning (APL/APEL)**. We also consider applications for entry with advanced standing.

**Programme Aims**

1. To provide opportunities to encounter a range of contemporary texts and to discuss them in relation to current cultural debates.
2. To enhance and develop verbal and written communication skills.
3. To develop confidence and critical thinking through reflective practice.
4. To provide a supportive learning environment which meets the needs of a diverse set of learners.
5. To promote and develop a vibrant postgraduate and creative community in the university through events, workshops and visiting speakers, including partnerships with local arts events such as the York Literature Festival.
6. To encourage critical as well as creative thinking and practice.
7. To equip students with transferable skills relevant to a range of jobs or to pursue further postgraduate study.
8. To enhance student development as independent learners and practitioners.
9. To develop appropriate skills in communication, collaboration and self-management.
Programme Learning Outcomes

Level M / FHEQ L7
Upon successful completion of a Master of Arts in Contemporary Literature students will be able to

1. Critically explore issues and insights pertaining to current theory and practice in contemporary writing.
2. Demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of techniques of collating, organising and applying relevant insights from a broad range of both primary and secondary sources.
3. Demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the relationship between the contemporary and key theoretical concepts.
4. Demonstrate a critical understanding of social, cultural and historical contexts relevant to contemporary literary texts.
5. Proactively formulate ideas and develop, implement and execute plans by which to evaluate these when researching, planning and writing assignments.
6. Communicate clearly and effectively in writing, using advanced concepts and terminology appropriate to the Master’s Level study of Contemporary Literature.
7. Take a proactive and self-reflective role in organising and managing own learning in order to achieve successful outcomes.
8. Engage in effective and constructive group interaction and develop professional relationships with others.
9. Demonstrate effective verbal communication and presentation skills.
10. Critically reflect on own scholarly practice.
11. Demonstrate professional standards of referencing and excellent presentation of written material. In addition, Master of Arts Contemporary Literature graduates only will:
12. Demonstrate comprehensive understanding of research methodologies in undertaking and successfully executing an extended piece of independent research and critical writing.

[Outcomes are informed by the QAA Quality Code for Higher Education at level 7: Master’s Degree http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Documents/Quality-Code-Chapter-A1.pdf And by York St John’s ‘Qualifications Descriptors’ document for M-Level (Registry 2011)]

Programme Structure

Modules for the Programme

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Status of Module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEN060</td>
<td>Critical Perspectives On Contemporary Literature</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C C C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN172</td>
<td>British Literature: The State Of The Art</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>C C O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN042</td>
<td>Postcolonial Literatures</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>C C O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN072</td>
<td>Contemporary American Literature</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>C C O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEN993</td>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>C</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The pedagogic approach to Contemporary Literatures involves a variety of methods for encouraging understanding of the critical, cultural and literary debates relevant to contemporary literature. Reading lists are reviewed regularly to ensure currency and students are encouraged to extrapolate from the work of critics and thinkers to produce original views on the texts studied. The group seminar offers an essential space for analysis, debate and discussion. Critical dialogue is considered to be at the core of the MA. Students are prepared, through a variety of formative and summative assessment strategies, to consolidate and effectively express their views. The introductory module Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Literature (MEN060) is designed to equip students with high-level scholarly research skills and to introduce them to a range of contemporary approaches to texts, which then enables them to progress through the other modules with confidence. It also introduces them to a variety of methodologies in English Studies, which may raise awareness as to the variety of approaches that may be taken. An assessed annotated bibliography (on the introductory module) forms part of this scholarly training. The critical essay is an important form for exploring and consolidating critical views, but there is also a presentation assessment on MEN172 (British Literature) which hones live, verbal discursive skills and provides practice for employability, or further postgraduate work. Whilst modules have broad cultural themes, focussing on contemporary writing from Britain, America and in Post-colonial contexts, these foci allow for a range of choices to be made when producing the assessed work. Having completed the Programme, students have a wealth of experience in literatures from across the world and may choose to follow their own interests, culminating in the Dissertation – a sustained, researched and structured piece of writing which allows for development of high-level independent scholarly skills.

The study and teaching of literature is discussed by Prof. Ben Knights (HEA Academy) in Teaching and Learning in English Literature (2006). Whilst this discussion refers more generally to the subject at HE level, taken with the QAA Benchmarks for MA study, his insights are pertinent to the MA Contemporary Literature:

“…students are learning what kind of discipline Literature is, coming to understand that our knowledge is constituted in its very discursive process...Students of Literature do not learn the skills involved – of analysis, interpretation, evaluation, synthesis, argumentation, written and verbal communication – as ‘skills’, in a vacuum, but in the course of their literary study and as mutually influencing and informing abilities that are necessarily bound up in the very process of that study.” (Source: Knights, B. Teaching and Learning in English Literature, Sage: 2006)

The MA aims to teach independent, critical thinking by developing awareness of the above and introducing a range of perspectives and skills to enable that thinking. During the course of the MA Contemporary Literature, the following areas are encountered by students through supportive frameworks provided by lecturers: critical and theoretical approaches to texts, for example post-colonialism, postmodernism, considerations of gender, psychoanalysis, phenomenology and deconstruction. Students develop the ability to engage critically with material, through close reading and analysis and attention to historical, social and cultural contexts. Through discussion, written and verbal assignments, they develop skills in exploration, persuasion, and creativity, contributing to intellectual and personal development.

Although there is strong emphasis on developing independent researching and writing skills, the seminar discussion group is a key element of the MA programme. With relatively small groups (6-12), this teaching environment provides a rich pedagogic space. Jonathan Gibson, in his guide to small group teaching, lists the following advantages of this space:
• Seminar discussion can expose students to a wide range of opinions, heightening their sense of the ambiguities and complexity of the topic in hand. Many topics in our subject do not have an obvious ‘right answer’, and small group discussion can bring this fact home to students in a very vivid way.
• Seminars can help students become aware of their own assumptions and unpick them. Students can find that they can reframe their ideas by taking into account the ideas of others in the session.
• Seminars can help students develop the skill of thinking ‘on their feet’ as well as skills of argumentation, presentation and expression.
• Small groups can provide students with a ‘safe space’ for the expression and development of their own ideas, building up their confidence in their own ability.
• Seminars can help induct students into the values and worldview of the discipline.

(Source: Gibson, J. Small Group Teaching: a Good Practice Guide, HEA Academy, English Subject Centre: 2010)

Teaching on the MA is based upon the premise that the building of knowledge and skill is fundamentally dialogic rather than transmissive; that the teacher/learner relationship is not one between one who possesses something and one who does not (Bruner, J. S. Towards a Theory of Instruction, 1988) but rather that as part of a dialogic and analytical approach students will critique and revise their own writing in response to group discussion and advice from tutors and visiting practitioners. Contemporary Literature tutors employ:

• small group discussions and projects to enable group interaction and group learning through discussion and debate.
• a multi-media approach which utilises written materials, film, visual material and online for a to encourage critical modes of thinking.
• handouts, worksheets, course booklets, study packs and/or web sites in order to encourage careful preparation for seminar discussion and effective independent learning. Increasingly, these are web-based and make full use of the Moodle VLE.
• lectures, readings, performances, film screenings, theatre visits and excursions.
• talks and workshops by professionals in the field, providing insights and advice on writing and publishing.
• digital communication tools via Moodle to provide students with peer-support and independent learning outside of teaching contact time. These can be particularly helpful to mature, returning, and part-time and distance learners
• individual and/or small group tutorials to offer structured, regular feedback on work in progress and after assessment.
• assessment which allows students opportunities to evaluate and critique their own praxis as well as their finished writing.

Assessments:

Assessment strategies include Annotated bibliographies (MEN060), assessed presentations (MEN172) and critical essays (MEN072, MEN042). Students are encouraged, through these strategies, to develop independent research skills; high level verbal communication skills; the ability to structure and write a critical essay and to pursue their own intellectual interests within each module’s thematic.

Level M modules are taught on a termly basis to ensure clarity of provision and space for (especially part-time) students to reflect on their learning and to complete assessment requirements alongside their other commitments. Indeed, the programme was originally designed with a community of regionally based returning, mature and life-long learners in mind. In this respect, the programme meets the University objectives to ‘provide educational opportunity to those who would not otherwise enjoy the benefits of an HE experience’ and to
provide opportunities to enhance cultural and intellectual life of ‘local, regional and international communities.’ (University Strategy 2012-2015)

The course is divided into 15-week terms, and these terms follow one another. Teaching is for 10 weeks and involves continual peer and tutor formative feedback, as well as the opportunity to generate new work. The 5 weeks of independent work allows the final pieces to be researched and honed for assessment.

Modules are 30 credits and require a 5,000-6,000 word assessment (or assessments totalling this equivalent word-count). The Dissertation module (MEN993) is the exception: it totals 60 credits and is, accordingly, 10-12,000 words. This module is a sustained, independent piece supported by one to one tuition, in which the culminated learning and development from the course is consolidated and demonstrated. Independent practice, research, writing, drafting and editing skills are honed during this module. A sustained piece of critical writing is produced, a task designed to be consistent with the work required by a postgraduate scholar.

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<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>MODULE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annotated bibliography</td>
<td>MEN060</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>MEN172, MEN042, MEN072</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation and reflection</td>
<td>MEN172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissertation</td>
<td>MEN993</td>
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</tbody>
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**Progression and Graduation Requirements**

The University's [general regulations for postgraduate awards](#) apply to this programme.

Any modules that must be passed for progression or award are indicated in the Programme Structure section.

In addition, the following programme-specific regulations apply in respect of progression and graduation:

- MEN993 cannot contribute towards exit awards;
- To exit with a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma students must attempt: MEN060;
- The award of Master of Arts will be dependent on the successful accumulation of 180 credits.

**Internal and External Reference Points**

This programme specification was formulated with reference to:

- University Mission Statement [see page two]
- Strategic Plan 2015-20 [see page four]
- York St John University Key Objectives 2012-2015
- York St John M-Level descriptors, Registry 2012
- Faculty of Arts Assessment Handbook 2011
- The HEA
- Knights, B. *Teaching and Learning in English Literature*, Sage: 2006
Further Information

Further information on the programme of study may be obtained from:

- Admissions entry profile (Admissions)
- Programme validation document (Registry – Academic Quality Support)
- Regulations (Registry – Academic Quality Support)
- Student programme handbook (faculty)
- Module handbooks (faculty)

Date written / revised: Nov 2013. Reviewed October 2014 (no change)