

Programme Specification

MA Contemporary Literature

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| <i>School:</i> | Humanities |
| <i>Subject area:</i> | English Literature |
| <i>Entry from academic year:</i> | 2024-25 |
| <i>in the month(s) of:</i> | September |
| <i>Awarding institution:</i> | York St John University |
| <i>Teaching institution:</i> | York St John University |
| <i>Delivery location:</i> | York St John University |
| <i>Programme/s accredited by:</i> | Not applicable |
| <i>Exit awards:</i> | Postgraduate Certificate in Contemporary Literature Postgraduate Diploma in Contemporary Literature |
| <i>UCAS code / GTTR / other:</i> | Not applicable |
| <i>Joint Honours combinations:</i> | Not applicable |
| <i>QAA subject benchmark statement(s):</i> | Not applicable |
| <i>Mode/s of study:</i> | Postgraduate periods of study for full-time / part-time |
| <i>Language of study:</i> | English |
| <i>Paired with foundation year</i> | No |
| <i>Study abroad opportunities:</i> | No |
| <i>Placement year opportunity:</i> | No |

Introduction and special features

Contemporary literature is an exciting and innovative area of study. This is the next step in your journey as a literary critic for those who have already completed an undergraduate degree and wish to focus their studies on the present and very recent past. At YSJU, we are a dynamic, engaged, and research-active team who are committed to providing our students with a cutting-edge education. Our MA is one of the very few postgraduate courses in the UK to allow students to specialise in new and current forms of writing and associated debates and conversations. Overall, this degree will enable you to develop your existing expertise as a sophisticated reader and critic of a range of literary materials, whilst also supporting you in the development of a growing portfolio of professional skills which will aid you in the wider postgraduate job market.

With a focus on some of the theoretical, political, social and cultural currents in contemporary literature, our programme will encourage you to pursue your research interests through a range of innovative assessments. Our suite of bespoke modules will provide a distinctive and exciting opportunity to develop specialisms in the areas of contemporary writing which interest you. Our diverse and inclusive syllabi champion the voices of writers who have been culturally marginalised. Students will often have the opportunity to study radical poetry, prison narratives, speculative fiction, LGBTQ+ rights literature, Black Lives Matter literature, experimental writing, graphic novels, and contemporary drama and memoir, as well as a range of prize-winning recent writing as part of their postgraduate experience.

For the purposes of the programme, 'contemporary' is broadly defined as the twenty-first century. The programme is specifically designed so that you are supported and encouraged to develop as a literary critic throughout your postgraduate experience. The introductory module 'Theorising the Contemporary: Critical

Perspectives' works to introduce you to a range of advanced theoretical concepts as well as helping you to transition to the new demands of a postgraduate degree. The following five week module 'Genre Now' develops the themes of the introductory module and works to ensure that you have a sufficiently informed understanding of genre theory while introducing you to some established and emerging genres of the current moment.

The programme is led by our staff team of internationally recognised scholars, who combine their research excellence with innovative teaching practice. As a postgraduate student, you will engage in a highly stimulating learning environment with a focus on small group discussion and one-to-one tutorials with staff. Our approach is student-centred and the whole programme is designed to support and inspire you on your postgraduate journey. For example, you will start with two five week modules that are focused on helping you to develop a theoretical knowledge and understanding of contemporary writing, and will help you transition to the MA environment as you become more accustomed to postgraduate study. Don't worry if you have been out of education for several years as we will work to support throughout your time with us. You will be joining a subject area with an established record of high levels of student satisfaction and a reputation for being student-focused.

We use a variety of assessment methods to help you develop different types of learning. In addition to more traditional assessments such as the essay, you might be asked to research an annotated bibliography, write a short abstract for an intended research project, or take place in a roundtable discussion. We also provide a supportive learning environment which meets the needs of a diverse set of learners, where you will be invited to contribute to a vibrant postgraduate community, as well as make a significant contribution to the development of a strong research culture within the University.

Taking our programme philosophy of 'words matter' as a starting point, our MA in Contemporary Literature will enable you to become an independent and confident scholar. Having an MA is an asset on the contemporary job market, and shows that you can demonstrate high levels of specialism and postgraduate-level proficiencies through the development of a range of transferable skills including advanced research, writing, and presentations. These skills will enable you to progress to employment in a wide variety of sectors, including, for example, journalism, marketing, the arts and heritage industry, and communication services. The MA will also prepare you if you decide that you wish to stay in academia and progress to doctoral study by joining our cohort of PhD students.

In addition, York is a fantastic place to be if you love books and reading. There is a rich literary history in the city, and each year, the city celebrates its literary heritage with the York Literature Festival, for which our department organises several events. We are also instrumental in the annual York Big City Read with our partner institution York Explore, and academics from the programme have led a number of events associated with this yearly celebration of reading. In recent years, our students have had the chance to attend talks and readings by Margaret Atwood, Germaine Greer, Will Self, Carol Ann Duffy, Mark Gatiss, Polly Toynbee, Roger McGough, Ian McMillan, and Michel Faber. As part of the YSJU Literature department, you will have the chance to get involved in a wide range of similar activities, as well as the opportunity to attend free workshops, writing sessions, and readings as part of your postgraduate degree experience. In recent years we have also been able to offer bespoke field trips for our MA cohort (at additional cost to the student), such as the trip to watch the award-winning play *The Ferryman* in the West End last year.

Special features

The Contemporary Literature MA at YSJU is distinguished by:

- A focus on contemporary writing and theory
- A student-led, research-informed teaching environment with opportunities for stimulating discussions within small groups
- A diverse and inclusive syllabus that incorporates a range of current types of writing
- Invaluable professional experience from the range of assessments (essay, annotated bibliography, abstract, reflective writing)
- Access to a wide range of visiting speakers and events
- A flexible part-time route that allows for returning learners as well as those wishing to take an MA as a route to further postgraduate study
- Opportunities to take an active role in the postgraduate academic community at YSJU (including attending School research events, offering a paper at the HRP research conference, attending special events for Black History Month, LGBTQ+ History Month and International Women's Day, or writing for the *Words Matter* blog)

Admissions criteria

You must meet the University's general entry criteria for [postgraduate](#) study. In addition, you must have:

- An upper second-class or first-class honours degree (or equivalent). This would normally be in English Literature but might also be in a cognate subject (for example, Creative Writing, Film Studies or History). If you have any questions about your eligibility for the MA programme, it is advised that you contact the Subject Director for an informal discussion.
- Applicants with a lower second-class degree and knowledge of English Literature may be accepted onto the programme following an interview and/or submission of a sample of work.

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/>).

If you do not have traditional qualifications, you may be eligible for entry on the basis of [Recognition of prior learning \(RPL\)](#). We also consider applications for entry with advanced standing.

Programme aim(s)

1. To offer students the opportunity to gain advanced knowledge and critical understanding of a range of issues in contemporary literature and current cultural debates
2. To enhance students' academic and professional skills through further postgraduate study
3. To provide a supportive learning environment which meets the needs of a diverse set of learners
4. To promote and develop a vibrant postgraduate community and a supportive and inclusive research environment in the university
5. To equip students with transferable skills relevant to a range of careers or the pursuit of further postgraduate study
6. To develop appropriate skills in independent learning and research, communication, collaboration and self-management

Programme learning outcomes

Upon successful completion of the programme students will be able to:

Level 7

- 7.1 Recognise and define the 'contemporary' and be able to critically appraise current problems and new insights
- 7.2 Evaluate current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline of Literary Studies
- 7.3 Find and interpret a range of theoretical frameworks and where appropriate, propose new syntheses
- 7.4 Independently source, analyse and evaluate a range of scholarly information in order to construct an argument
- 7.5 Communicate complex ideas and critical arguments clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- 7.6 Independently plan and produce critical work at a professional or equivalent level
- 7.7 Independently design and carry out an extended piece of research that demonstrates an advanced knowledge of a specific area of Contemporary Literature

Programme structure

| Code | Level | Term | Title | Credits | Module status | |
|----------|-------|------|--|---------|---|--|
| | | | | | compulsory or optional to take C or O | non-compensatable or compensatable NC or X |
| LIT7001M | 7 | 1 | Theorising the Contemporary: Critical Perspectives | 15 | C | X |
| LIT7002M | 7 | 1 | Form and Genre Now | 15 | C | X |
| LIT7003M | 7 | 1 | Historicising the Contemporary | 30 | C | X |
| LIT7004M | 7 | 2 | World, Globe, Literature | 30 | C | X |
| LIT7005M | 7 | 2 | Speculative Bodies | 15 | C | X |
| LIT7006M | 7 | 2 | Reflections on the Contemporary | 15 | C | X |
| LIT7007M | 7 | 3 | Dissertation (Full-time) | 60 | C Full-time | NC |
| LIT7008M | 7 | 3 | Dissertation (Part-time) | 60 | C Part-time | NC |

Learning, teaching and assessment

The aim of all our teaching is to help you to continue to become a better writer and literary critic, to challenge you to consider new ideas and concepts, and to support you in understanding the complex connections between literature and contemporary society. Literature is a dialogic discipline and informed discussions and debates are a crucial part of the learning process.

The Contemporary Literature MA demands wide, critical reading and intelligent synthesis of ideas and information. You will be analysing and engaging with complex ideas in written form. Formative support and feedback will be provided throughout the programme's delivery, which will produce a dialogue between you and your tutors, in order to help shape the development of your ideas.

At postgraduate level, the year is split into three ten week terms which run from September to the summer. Your first term with us is about supporting you in making the transition to postgraduate-level study. You will be assigned your own Academic Tutor – this is usually the MA Coordinator – who will help you to adjust to postgraduate life. Modules such as 'Theorising the Contemporary: Critical Perspectives' have been specially designed to help you adapt to the MA environment and the requirements of the subject. As you

progress to your second and third terms, you will be able to study a diverse range of modules that focus on a range of contemporary issues, and you will have lots of opportunities to study types of literature that you might not have experienced previously (such as, for example, neo-narratives, contemporary memoir, and creative non-fiction). We offer an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature, and you might find yourself studying a film or media adaptation of a text, or considering a specific performance of a play, as well as reading the original source material.

We use a range of teaching styles and settings to help support you during your MA. Our approach to learning and teaching is always student-centred, and the focus is on enabling you to do your very best. Most of your teaching will be in the form of small group seminar discussions, and you will also have the opportunity to attend tutorials (one-to-one meetings with a tutor), advanced writing workshops, and experience collaborative learning (working with your fellow students) throughout the year. We also have a range of events to which our whole YSJU Literature community are invited (the annual Words Matter lecture, the Research Showcase) as well as lots of chances to attend sessions for the York Literature Festival and the Big City Read. At postgraduate level, there is also an increased focus on independent study, and there will be times when you will need to use online resources through Moodle, the University's virtual learning environment software.

You will start the year with shorter pieces of assessment on the five week introductory modules to help you acclimatise to postgraduate work. The ten week modules offer you the chance to work on longer pieces of work, and this will help you prepare for the dissertation module in the final term. The dissertation is the intellectual culmination of your MA and allows you to explore a contemporary literature topic of your choice, and working closely with an academic supervisor. You will take charge of your learning, and will be supported throughout the dissertation by a series of specialist writing workshops. During the degree, you will have the chance to work with published and professional writers, as our resident Royal Literary Fellow is available for additional tutorials and writing support.

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 as non-compensatable.

Internal and external reference points

This programme specification was formulated with reference to:

- [University mission and values](#)
- [University 2026 Strategy](#)
- [QAA subject benchmark statements](#)
- [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications](#)

Date written / revised: 23/08/19

Programme originally approved: 23/05/19