**Research-Informed Teaching Case Study:
English Literature undergraduate programmes, Humanities and Social Science.
‘Re-writing and Re-orientating the Curriculum: Embedding Current Staff Research in English Literature’**

The English Department comprises of: Kate Walchester (Subject Leader, Director of RILCH and Reader); James Whitehead (Programme Leader); Professor Joe Moran; Professor Gerry Smyth; Rachel Willie (Reader); Rebecca Bailey; Fiona Tolan (Reader); Michael Perfect (Reader); Filippo Menozzi; Nadine Leese (Reader); Jonathan Cranfield; Colin Harrison; Emily Cuming; Jude Piesse; Sonny Kandola (Reader); Deaglán O Donghaile (Reader).

**General Context**

English Literature comprises of a three– and four-year single-honours UG programme, with Joint honours programmes in English, Media and Communication Studies, History and English Literature, Creative Writing and English Literature, and English Literature and Drama. The Subject Area aligns with both the Research Institute for Literature and Culture (RILCH) and UoA 27. In REF 2021, 51.7% of our research outputs were graded at 4\*, 34.5% at 3\* and 13.8 at 2\*, with no outputs graded at 1\* or unclassified. Our impact case studies were graded 66.7% 4\* and 33.3% 3\* (two of our three case studies were graded 4\* and one was graded 3\*). Our research environment was graded 77.5% 3\* and 22.5 at 2\*. This was the best REF performance by a UoA in APSS. During the Periodic Programme Review process in Autumn 2021, the current research of all members of the department was a significant agent for changes to modules and the shape of the English Literature programme more broadly. This was a continuation of established good practice in the subject area, where the curriculum has had a long-standing reciprocal relationship with the research interests of its teaching staff.

**Specific Project Work**

**In addition to the existing research expertise, often connected to particular periods of literature, we recognised that staff had developed particular expertise in several new directions including race and de-colonized literatures, climate change and ecocritical approaches, and writing for non-academic audiences and publishing. These areas included all members of the team across their teaching profiles.** The impact from staff research can be seen in the modules of the new programme in two main ways:

1. Specialist modules tailored to the research area of one or more staff (largely option modules at level 5 and 6) in which there is often an exchange with student work and discussion informing staff research and vice versa;

2. Survey or theoretical modules which are broader in scope and taught by multiple staff who deliver one or more sessions which speak to their particular research expertise within that broader topic.

Examples will be given in the next section.

At programme level, changes to the shape of the curriculum were influenced by current research interests of staff. These include a much greater emphasis (across individual modules and within survey modules) on global literatures and a de-colonized curriculum (c.f. research by Menozzi, Tolan, Perfect); on the environment and climate change (c.f. research by Piesse, Smyth, Walchester); as well as on gender and sexuality (c.f. Kandola, Leese, Tolan). Postgraduate researchers, working on cognate topics, such as Leon Ramsey (contemporary and American Literature), Katie Taylor, (Black American writing) and Victoria Crozier (Ecocritical approaches to literature) have been offered teaching experience and have worked alongside staff in the delivery of modules relevant to their topics of study.

**Impact on curriculum**

**Exemplar Case Studies:**

The Level 5 module ‘Postcolonial Writing’ is both research-led and research-based. Filippo Menozzi’s research project ‘Postcolonial Historical Materialism’ informs the approach and content of the module. The project was recently funded by a 2023 Leverhulme Research Fellowship with an output forthcoming with Bloomsbury Publishing. Students are introduced to key postcolonial themes, authors, and literary forms through the prism of a renewed historical materialism. The assessment includes a short individual project that students complete during our module-related international trip to Venice (Italy). Students build on the contents of the module to research aspects of the social and literary history and material heritage of Venice through the prism of postcolonial theory.

The Level 6 option module ‘Developments in Contemporary Writing and Publishing’ is informed by the knowledge and experience of Jude Piesse gained from writing, researching, pitching, publishing, and promoting a non-fiction book for a general readership (*The Ghost in the Garden*, 2021) and from researching and writing a historical novel (currently under review). It draws on Jude’s knowledge of academic writing, and the processes, practices, and debates in contemporary publishing, introducing students to different types of publishing house and the role of literary agents and booksellers in the publishing process, and to debates about diversity and the challenges of new technologies.

The Level 5 option module ‘Writing Race in Britain’ focuses on post-1948 literature about ethnic diversity in Britain, and addresses topics such as multiculturalism, (anti-)racism, and the decolonial. It draws on Michael Perfect’s research into writing by and about post-colonial migrants to Britain and their British-born descendants, including a project focusing on the archive of Andrea Levy funded by a BA/Leverhulme grant. The module also draws on the research expertise of Fiona Tolan, who is a leading expert on Jackie Kay.

Gerry Smyth has designed two new undergraduate modules: a Level 4 Core module entitled ‘Environment, Culture and Technology’, and a Level 6 Option module entitled ‘Modern Fiction and Environmental Crisis’. These build on long-standing research interests in environmental and cultural history, including *Searching for the Green and Pleasant Land: Environment, Technology and National Identity in English Genre Fiction, 1890-1940* (forthcoming Bloomsbury, 2025). The key aim of this book and the modules is to reframe English Literature as a field formatively, intimately, and crucially related to contemporary debates relating to environmental crisis.

**Broader Change**

There has been a rise in module evaluation performance, most notably across levels 5 and 6, with ‘Gender Trouble’, ‘Feminist Fictions’, ‘Victorians’, Postcolonial Writing’, ‘Our House; Representing Domestic Space’ ‘Race in America’, Post-Millennial Fiction’, ‘Life-Stories: telling Tales and Keeping Secrets in Autobiographical Writing’ all achieving 100% student satisfaction in 2023-4.

Students have greatly appreciated the research-led teaching that they have received on this programme. In student evaluations, students stated that modules were ‘very well taught’, and stated that the modules ‘challenged’ them ‘to think more deeply’ to ‘a large extent’. Free-text comments from students included: ‘lectures and seminars were so engaging and interesting’; ‘lectures are engaging and the topics are relevant to today's society’; ‘there was always something interesting and unique about each [text]’; ‘I found this module interesting as a whole’; ‘I thoroughly enjoyed it’; ‘It is refreshing and different’.

Some outstanding student work has been produced, inspired by the new programme. For example, on the ‘Postcolonial Writing’ module, following the field trip to Venice, one student produced a video assignment which was marked (and agreed by external examiners) at 90%. This and others will be used as exemplars for prospective students at Open Days.

The impact of programme-level strands including those of environmental writing and global and post-colonial writing, give our graduate cutting-edge approaches to the central issues and debates in modern society. Involving them in classroom conversations, which both inform and stem from our highly-esteemed and internationally-recognised research, builds their skills in critical thinking and communicating with confidence about challenging subjects such as gender, sexuality, race, class and social justice. Many of our students go on to work in the creative industries or in teaching where they use these skills to inform wider audiences and contribute to future public debate. Modules such as the ‘English Work Experience’ module and ‘Approaches to Contemporary Writing and Publishing’ draw on staff research and professional experience in the fields of online writing, journalism, blogging, and the publishing sector to support students in gaining experience and access to career networks in these fields.

**Indicative References**

Bailey R.A. 2024. **‘“Noe dish whose tast, or dressing, is unknown / Unto oʳ natives” (ll. 54-55): an examination of local and global material cultures in the food rituals of Thomas Salusbury’s 1634 “Chirk Castle Entertainment”.’***English Literary Renaissance*, 54: 52-75.

Bailey R.A. 2022. **‘Sir Thomas Salusbury 2nd’s (1612-1643) manuscripts and fragments.’***Early Modern Literary Studies: a journal of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English literature*, 22, 2: 1-22.

Bailey RA. 2021. **‘”Your name shall liue / In the new yeare: as in the age of gold”: Sir Thomas Salusbury’s “Twelfth Night Masque, Performed at Knowsley Hall in 1641” and its Contexts.’***Shakespeare Bulletin: a journal of performance, criticism, and scholarship*, 38: 465-487.

Cranfield J. 2023. ***The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes***(scholarly edition). Edinburgh University Press.

**Cuming E**, O’Brien P. 2024. **‘Introduction: The Raymond Williams Centenary Issue.’***Key Words: A Journal of Cultural Materialism*, 21: 5-10.

Allen V, Bohata K, Braithwaite P, **Cuming E**, Von Rosenberg I, Woodward K. 2021.**‘On Working with Williams: Five Female Perspectives.’** *Coils of the Serpent*, 63-81.

Kandola S. 2022**. ‘Political Censorship on the late-Victorian Stage: Rereading Oscar Wilde’s Vera; or, the Nihilist[s].’***Journal of Victorian Culture*, 27, 4: 610-24.

Kandola S. **‘Maverick Modernists: Sapphic Trajectories from Vernon Lee to D.H. Lawrence.’ In**Sandy M, Boyiopoulos K, Patterson T., eds. *Literary and Cultural Alternatives to Modernism: Unsettling Presences*. CRC Press.

Menozzi F. 2024. **‘Variations on Time: Reading Paolo Virno Reading Ernst Bloch.’***Cultural Critique: an international journal of cultural studies*, 123: 1-25.

Menozzi F. 2023. **‘Totality in a Box: The Shipping Container from Commodity to Allegory.’***Qui Parle: critical humanities and social sciences*, 32: 163-197.

Bahri D., **Menozzi F.**, eds. 2021. ***Teaching Anglophone South Asian Women Writers.***Modern Language Association of America.

Moran J. 2022. **‘The Humanities and the University: A Brief History of the Present Crisis.’***Critical Quarterly*, 64: 5-28.

Moran J. 2023. **‘An Intimate History of Social Mobility in Postwar Britain.’***Cultural and Social History*, 20: 249-65.

Moran J. 2022. **‘Delivering the Undeliverable: Teaching English in a University Today.’***English: Journal of the English Association*, 71, 273: 140-60.

Muller N, ed., 2023. ***The War Widows Quilt*. War Widows Stories.**

Perfect MJ. 2022. ‘Some Unsung Songs: Andrea Levy’s Late, Unpublished Work.’ ARIEL, 53: 257-291.

Saroukhani H, Lawson Welsh S, Perfect MJ. 2022. **‘Afterlives, Aftermaths: Levy Studies in the Twenty-First Century.’**ARIEL, 53: 7-24.

Piesse J. 2024. ‘Done with Dickens,’ *Dickens Quarterly*, 41, 4: 35-42.

Piesse J. 2024. ‘Planting a Garden in Brontë Country: Gardens in the Brontës’ Lives, Art, and Legacy,’ in Wynne D, Regis A., eds. *The Edinburgh Companion to the Brontës and the Arts*. Edinburgh University Press.

Piesse, J. 2021. *The Ghost in the Garden*. Scribe

Smyth, Gerry. 2023*. Serpent, Siren, Maelstrom and Myth: Sea Stories and Folktales from Around the World.* British Library Publishing.

Carroll R., **Tolan F.,** eds. 2023. *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Feminism.*

Tolan, F. 2022. *The Fiction of Margaret Atwood*. Bloomsbury.

Tolan F. 2022. **‘Work, Gratitude and “the Good Immigrant’: rereading Andrea Levy’s *Every Light in the House Burnin’* (1994) and *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996) after the Windrush Scandal.’***ARIEL*, 53: 25-46.

Walchester K. 2021. **‘Many and Dreadful Disasters.’***Journeys*, 22: 21-38.

Forsdick C, Kinsley Z, **Walchester K.**, eds. 2023. ***Microtravel: Confinement, Deceleration, Microspection.*** Anthem.

Preedy CK, **Willie R.,** eds. 2024. ***Thomas Nashe and Literary Performance*.** Manchester University Press

Perfect MJ. 2022. ‘Some Unsung Songs: Andrea Levy’s Late, Unpublished Work.’ ARIEL, 53: 257-291.

Depledge E, **Willie R.** 2022. **‘Introduction: Performance and the Paper Stage, 1640-1700.’***Huntington Library Quarterly*, 85, 1: 1-10. [special issue on *Performance and the Paper Stage* ed. by Depledge and **Willie**.]