

Institution: Durham University
Unit of Assessment: English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Consultancies on Medicinal Cannibalism to Promote Documentary Film-making (CS1)
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Dr Richard Sugg has applied his research on the cultural history of medicinal cannibalism in a series of consultancies for makers of television and radio documentaries. International media coverage of his research led to collaborations with independent documentary companies. He provided decisive contributions to programme scripting, filming strategy and content, all derived directly from his research findings. These programmes were screened by national and international broadcasters, helping the programme-makers to develop their companies and the broadcasters to secure audiences and revenue. This research therefore had creative and commercial impacts in the documentary film-making industry, in which the UK is a world-leader.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Sugg joined Durham's Department of English Studies as Academic Fellow in Literature and Medicine in August 2005, becoming Lecturer in September 2010. His research, undertaken from 2004 to 2013, has focused on the cultural history of what Sugg calls 'medicinal cannibalism', including vampirical practices and theories of the soul. Medicinal cannibalism is the consumption of body parts such as human blood and skulls for supposed health benefits, and in the composition of medicines. The central research publication is 3.4 (2011).</p> <p>The primary insight of this research is that the practice of medicinal cannibalism was much more extensive in early-modern Europe, c.1500–1800, than had previously been supposed. Sugg has provided the most thorough documentation of how widespread the practice was; he has explained how a shift in attitude came about with the rise of professional medical culture, and demonstrated that forms of medicinal cannibalism persisted into the late nineteenth century. His research has unearthed a wealth of data showing which body parts or substances were used in medicinal cannibalism; how human bodies were obtained and used for these purposes, and by whom; and the extent to which they were used by doctors and patients. In exploring how European physicians and patients overcame the taboo against cannibalism, Sugg found that corpse medicine was often implicitly coded as 'cooked' rather than 'raw'; and that beliefs about the physiology of the soul were important for many people. His more recent research has traced a cultural and intellectual history of the soul (see 3.5 and 3.6)</p> <p>Sugg has demonstrated that cannibalistic medicines were in widespread use among educated and privileged men and women for over two centuries: notable aristocratic users included Francis I of France, and, in England, the Countess of Kent, Charles II, and William and Mary. Medicinal cannibalism was so widespread in early-modern Europe that fraudulent substitutes were made in Egypt to supply the European demand, and through much of the eighteenth century Britain levied a customs' tax on skulls imported from Ireland. Sugg has contextualised and helped explain the extent and persistence of medicinal cannibalism by pointing to the use of other seemingly repugnant substances used in the period's medicine, such as human and animal excrement and urine, as well as the relatively habitual exposure of populations to levels of filth which most Europeans would now consider intolerable. This context helps in understandings of the very different 'disgust thresholds' of different periods and cultures.</p> <p>Until around 1750 there was very little overt opposition to medicinal cannibalism. A particular feature of Sugg's research has been his analysis of literary sources, such as the drama of John Webster, to show that earlier imaginative works had often implied that corpse medicine was alien or discomfoting. In discussing this more nuanced hostility, Sugg drew on literary-critical skills in order to read 'against the grain' in interpreting the implied significance of allusions to corpse medicine. He argues that when corpse medicine was gradually abandoned by educated practitioners and patients due to a changed sense of the numinous vitality of the body, a new attitude toward hygiene and disgust emerged, along with a desire to establish a newly authoritative and respectable medical profession. Nonetheless forms of corpse medicine persisted amongst the poor and uneducated in Scandinavia, Germany and Britain until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research

The following publications are all sole-authored by Richard Sugg:

1. "Good Physic but Bad Food": Early-Modern Attitudes to Medicinal Cannibalism and its Suppliers', *Social History of Medicine* 19:2 (2006): 225-240. doi:10.1093/shm/hkl001.
2. 'Corpse Medicine: Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires', *The Lancet* 371: 9630 (21 June 2008): 2078-9. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(08)60907-1.
3. 'Prescientific Death Rites, Vampires and the Human Soul', *The Lancet* 377: 9767 (26 February 2011): 712-713. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60259-6.
4. *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires: the History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (Routledge, 2011).
5. *The Smoke of the Soul: Medicine, Physiology and Religion in Early Modern England* (Palgrave, 2013).
6. *The Secret History of the Soul: Physiology, Magic and Spirit Forces from Homer to St. Paul* (Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013).

Markers of Quality: Items 1, 2 and 3 are published in peer-reviewed journals. Items 4, 5 and 6 were peer-reviewed and are available in REF 2. The key publication, item 4, was very favourably reviewed in the *London Review of Books* (Dec. 2011) and *Social History of Medicine* (Nov. 2012).

4. Details of the impact

The following narrative describes how the underpinning research was disseminated through academic publications and serious public journals, with a range of results: these varied from an initial consultation with a pathologist to extensive global media interest, and, then, most significantly, collaboration with five documentary film-makers.

The research was initially targeted at academics and medical professionals. Following publication of Sugg's first article in *The Lancet* [3.2], he was consulted in November 2008 by a Consultant Forensic Pathologist to the Home Office, who had read what he describes as Sugg's 'very useful' article and drew on his advice in preparing a presentation to the British Association in Forensic Medicine (21 November 2008) on a recent cannibalistic murder. The research assisted the clinical pathologist to assess contemporary cases within a fuller historical and cultural context. [5.1]

The underpinning research was targeted at a popular history readership through articles by Sugg in journals such as *BBC History* (March 2007; circulation over 60,000). An article titled 'The Healing Power of Death' on 26 January 2009 in *Der Spiegel* was dedicated to Sugg's research and based on an interview with him. This piece, in the biggest-selling news magazine in Europe, was translated into over a dozen languages including Chinese and Catalan, and led to a feature on Sugg on German national television. A German playwright and documentary-maker read the article in *Der Spiegel*, and approached Sugg on 9 March 2009 with the idea of creating a programme on medicinal cannibalism. He travelled to the UK to interview Sugg, and this interview was central to the eventual radio programme which Weiser sold to WDR in Cologne (broadcast October 2009) and then to the national network Deutschlandradio Kultur (broadcast July 2010). It was heard by an estimated collective audience of over 250,000. Weiser is an individual programme-maker whose career has been helped by this work – he is currently filming a second documentary based on Sugg's work, this time for television. [5.2]

Sugg's second essay in *The Lancet* [3.3] and his book *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires* [3.4], both published in early 2011, created still more extensive media interest and resulted in most of his consultancies with documentary-makers. Print and online media worldwide quickly focused on Sugg's finding that King Charles II and Queen Mary II and other members of British royalty and European aristocracy had used forms of corpse medicine. From early summer to winter 2011, this aspect of the research was featured, sometimes sensationally, in over 20 mainstream national newspapers in North America, Europe, Australasia, India, Pakistan and Iran, as well as in Britain and Ireland. An article by Sugg in *History Ireland* (May/June 2011), which addressed the sourcing of English corpse medicine from Irish bodies, prompted several radio interviews in Ireland, an article in *The Irish Independent* weekend supplement (16 July 2011), and a substantial (front page and page 7) article in *The Irish Examiner* (25 May 2011). In Britain, in May 2011, *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* ran versions derived from the *Lancet* essay: 'British Royals Dined on Human Flesh (but don't worry it was 300 years ago)'. [5.3] Although the influence of newspaper coverage on several

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million readers is impossible to gauge, a review of online responses shows that the research contributed to two areas of public debate. (1) Medical ethics. Commentators on online popular science resources, notably Greg Laden's well-respected blog, used the story to assess the contents of modern medicines and ethical practice in medical history. (2) The myth of European cultural supremacy. In discussions on both an American Republican blog and an African Rastafarian blog, respondents were prompted by Sugg's work to challenge the extent to which European cultural values were wholly 'civilised'. That the research was referenced in online discussions from 2011 to 2013 is evidence of its persistent interest for, and influence on, a wide range of readers. [5.4]

The most significant effect of this research was that the second *Lancet* article, and the 2011 book, led directly to consultancy for five television documentaries. It decisively influenced the strategic planning of programming, including location shoots, research methods, scriptwriting and presentation. Sugg is credited on all programmes. The main, but not the only, consultancies have been:

(1) 'Dark Matters'. Wide-Eyed Entertainment. Discovery Science Channel (USA), 28 September, 2011, and shown across Discovery network including UK, Australia and Japan within next 24 hours. The UK audience for the whole programme was 184,000.

Sugg's contribution arose when researchers from Wide-Eyed Entertainment read his discussion of 'weighing the soul' in *The Lancet* (2011). He gave an interview on camera which explained the source of a popular belief that the soul weighs exactly 21 grammes (*cf.* the 2003 film *21 Grams*). Sugg explained that this misleading figure had been arrived at from the 'soul-weighing' experiments of a Massachusetts doctor, Duncan MacDougall, in 1901. Sugg linked the idea of the soul's materiality to older beliefs in educated and popular Christian culture. He also contributed filmed interviews on Galvani and Frankenstein. The UK broadcast achieved nearly double Discovery's expected audience and had the second-highest rating of the series. [5.5]

(2) 'Human Harvest'. The Active Channel, 5 Sept 2011. Audience unknown.

In early 2011, the Head of Factual Production at Sky's The Active Channel consulted Sugg over a documentary he was making on 'alternative therapies'. Owing to Sugg's input, he 'came to understand the importance of cannibalistic issues within the narrative'. In particular, Sugg's work enabled him 'to develop a balanced narrative on the use of Placenta Encapsulation as a method for combatting Postpartum Depression.' 'Human Harvest' was sold to 'various international broadcasters'. Since then he has set up a small independent factual production company that aims to make and sell high-quality television documentaries. He did this in part with a view to making a second film with Sugg: 'the findings of [Sugg's book] *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires*' led Greenstein to 'create a brief treatment' which 'received extremely positive feedback' from broadcasters. This second programme is currently in production; it uses Sugg's work as a basis for the script and includes on-screen interviews with Sugg. It will be sold to broadcasters in 2014. [5.6]

(3) 'Mysteries of the Vampire Skeletons'. Quickfire Media. Channel 5 'Revealed' series, 20 September 2011. Audience 1.1 million.

In April–May 2011, Sugg held two discussions with the director and his assistant about the anthropology of vampirism and related customs. Sugg's report on recent vampire-killing in Marotinu de Sus, Romania, led to the company's decision to film there rather than at its originally planned location. The director states that 'Sugg's advice on the cultural impact of vampire legends and beliefs, including the archaeological discovery of skeletons which appear to have been treated as potential "revenants", was extremely helpful to us in shaping the overall content of the film'. The Romanian aspect of the programme was emphasised by *The Radio Times*; for the *Daily Express* it was 'Pick of the Day'. The commissioning editor at Channel 5 praised its '4.9% share [of the viewing public] – way up on the series average'. A further measure of its success, noted by the director, is that the production company sold the programme to American, Australian and European channels, including broadcasters in France and Germany. These sales contributed to the company's financial turnover and further established it as a serious documentary production company. The Director reports that the film generated £100,000 for Quickfire, plus £25,000 in foreign sales. This small Bristol-based company, led by a BAFTA-nominated writer and director, reported that 'as a result of the success of this film, it was able to make another two films' in the same series, and is negotiating a third, with a total gross value 'in the region of £400,000'. [5.7]

Impact case study (REF3b)

(4) 'Tony Robinson's Gods and Monsters'. Wildfire Television. Channel 4, 26 November 2011. Numerous repeats on More4 and National Geographic. Audience 1.15 million for initial broadcast, excluding repeats.

The making of this programme involved several hours of face-to-face discussions between Sugg and its director and his assistant. One result of these was the filming of Sugg and Tony Robinson using a pig to replicate the production of cannibalistic medicine in a hospital laboratory. Wildfire was very pleased with the result. The editor described Sugg's contribution as 'extremely helpful' in 'unlocking a little known area to a wide audience'; his 'academic knowledge was hugely valuable' as was his 'televisual' skill in 'communicating the results of research ... to a wider audience'. [5.8] The programme was 'pick of the week' in *The Observer* and *Sunday Times*. Wildfire is based in London and makes high quality documentaries specialising in science and current affairs. This series generated £125,000 profit, 'helping keep the company going', in the words of the Managing Director. It was sold to television channels in Australia and New Zealand. [5.9]

(5) 'Bloody Tales: Dark Arts'. True North. National Geographic, April 2013. Subsequent broadcasts on National Geographic Europe. UK audience 81,000.

Researchers from a Leeds-based production company, True North, read about Sugg's research in online sources and then in his book *Mummies, Cannibals and Vampires*, which they used to tell one of three stories featured on the programme – that of grave-diggers accused of spreading plague by making powder from corpses. The assistant producer states 'we had never heard of corpse medicine before'. Sugg's book was 'of great value during pre-production stage', significantly influencing the content of film of the programme. It was sold to National Geographic and broadcast across Europe. As the UK broadcast attracted 'over double our usual prime time average', it contributed towards the success of the company: True North is the fastest-growing independent production company outside London with an increase in revenue of 65% in 2013. [5.10]

Through extensive coverage in newspapers, online resources and radio and television broadcasts, this research has reached an audience of more than 30 million in over 20 nations, ranging from the clinical readership of *The Lancet* to viewers of vampire programming. Its impact can be seen in four areas: (a) contributions to public debates over medical ethics and European cultural values; (b) entrepreneurial activity through direct influence on the creative and commercial practices of documentary-makers; (c) economic benefit for small, independent film-makers, mainstream national broadcasters, and national newspapers; and (d) the entertainment and education of television audiences. As one director states: 'The UK is a dominant world leader in documentary film-making, partly because of the academic expertise we have access to ... Richard's work is an excellent example of that. These docs make our industry a multi-billion pound exporter which is both culturally and economically important.' [5.5]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Testimony from a forensic pathologist, now at Ottawa University and Hospital, Canada.

5.2 Testimony from German documentary-maker includes estimated audience figures.

5.3 A report on newspaper and online coverage is available from the HEI. For *The Sun* and *Daily Mail*, see: <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3592794/British-royalty-consumed-human-body-parts-to-treat-illness-a-book-reveals.html> and <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1389142/British-royalty-dined-human-flesh-dont-worry-300-years-ago.html>.

5.4 Smithsonian: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/The-Gruesome-History-of-Eating-Corpses-as-Medicine.html?c=y&page=2> and Rasta Livewire: <http://www.africaresource.com/rasta/articles/mummies-cannibals-and-vampires-of-europe/>

5.5 Testimony from the director of 'Dark Matters'. Audience figures from Discovery. **5.6** Testimony from the producer of 'Human Harvest'. **5.7** Testimony from the director of 'Mysteries of the Vampire Skeletons', quoting audience figure and market share from Channel 5 commissioning editor. The *Daily Express* and *Radio Times* comments can be see here:

<http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/270879> and <http://www.radiotimes.com/episode/mv2d8/mysteries-of-the-vampire-skeletons-revealed>

5.8 Testimony from the editor of 'Tony Robinson's Gods and Monsters'. **5.9** Testimony from the Managing Director of Wildfire Television. Audience figure from Channel 4. **5.10** Testimony from an assistant producer at True North. Audience figure from Fox. <http://www.truenorth.tv/About+Us/>