

Institution: De Montfort University
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Peter Davison: The legacy of George Orwell
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Peter Davison's research has been instrumental in securing and re-evaluating the literary legacy of George Orwell. Davison's editorial scholarship and investigative research on Orwell's fiction, journalism and diaries, including the breakthrough discovery of missing material, has provided new perspectives on one of the most significant political and literary figures of twentieth-century culture. Via Davison's new, definitive editions, journalistic and biographical publications, broadcasts, online forums and public lectures, Orwell's writings have reached new global audiences and through their reconfigured insights have changed public understanding of politics and culture.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Peter Davison's research on Orwell spans his entire period of employment at DMU (1993–2001; emeritus 2001-present) and covers two main areas: (i) the scholarly editing of Orwell's writings; (ii) investigation of Orwell's life and correspondence, including the discovery of previously unknown texts. Davison was the first scholar to give Orwell's often ephemeral productions the level of attention they deserve and to consolidate Orwell's importance as one of the seminal intellectual forces of twentieth century culture. The significance of Orwell's writing reaches well beyond the literary sphere into questions of political and social organisation, national identity and the role of the intellectual, and Davison's work highlights Orwell's importance in each of these spheres.</p> <p>The most sustained research programme undertaken by Davison at DMU was the completion of <i>The Complete Works of George Orwell</i>, published as a whole in 1998. This 20-volume, 8543 page set, with individual volume indexes and a cumulative 400-column index, based on a scrupulous re-examination of primary materials and a full contextualisation of Orwell's achievement, includes all of Orwell's published fiction, plus his copious journalistic output. Each novel is given in its first-edition text and checked against surviving proofs, enabling readers to see the works in the form which corresponds most closely with the social and material contexts of their production. The journalistic output is arranged chronologically with his correspondence, allowing readers to see for the first time the ways in which Orwell's reportage changed and developed throughout his life, and to trace connections between his life, his journalism and his fiction. In addition to the <i>Complete Works</i>, the research generated four collections of essays for Penguin (2001); a supplementary volume included unseen files and family papers (2003), while the biographical insights accumulated during the research process resulted in Davison's <i>George Orwell: A Literary Life</i> (1996), which provided a complete overview of Orwell's professional life, including his period as a BBC wartime broadcaster, helping to place into context many of his most famous and influential literary texts. Continuing research, as new material was uncovered from archives across the world, brought together all the fugitive pieces and fragments which had not found a place in the original volumes, including previously unseen photographs, correspondence with comrades in Russia and Spain, and with his European translators, the notorious 1947 list of 'Crypto-Communists' Orwell compiled for the Foreign Office, and other recently recovered items. This material appeared in 2006 as <i>The Lost Orwell</i>.</p> <p>Davison continues to issue work derived from the research undertaken at DMU. In 2009, he published the complete <i>Diaries</i> (528 pages) and in 2010, the 560 selected <i>Letters</i>, and he has overseen the translation of his work into a number of different languages. Davison's research into Orwell's life and work continues to transform understanding of this major cultural figure.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>Outputs</p> <p>1. Peter Davison ed., <i>The Complete Works of George Orwell</i>. London: Secker and Warburg, 1998 (20 vols).</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

2. Peter Davison, *George Orwell: A Literary Life*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996.
3. Peter Davison ed., *Orwell in Spain*. Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin Classics, 2001.
4. Peter Davison ed., *George Orwell: Diaries*, London: Harvill Secker, 2009.
5. Peter Davison ed., *The Lost Orwell: Being a Supplement to The Complete Works of George Orwell*. London: Timewell, 2006.
6. Peter Davison ed., *Orwell: A Life in Letters*. London: Harvill Secker, 2010.

Evidence of Quality

1. Award of OBE for Services to Literature, 1999.
2. Award of Gold Medal by the Bibliographical Society, 2003.
3. Award of Honorary Founding Life Membership, Orwell Society, 2011.
4. Reviews immediately following publication of 1 (above) in *The Guardian* (Stefan Collini, 4/7/98) <http://home.planet.nl/~boe00905/OrwellGuardian040798.html> *The Times Higher* (Scott Bradfield, 27/07/98) <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/162699.article> *London Review of Books* (Ian Hamilton, 07/98) <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v20/n21/ian-hamilton/eric-the-nerd> *The New York Review of Books* (Timothy Garton-Ash, 22/10/98) <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1998/oct/22/orwell-in-1998/?pagination=false> *The New Statesman* (Bernard Crick, 17/07/98) <http://www.netcharles.com/orwell/ctc/docs/complete.htm#NewStatesman> *The New Yorker* (Clive James, 18/01/99) <http://www.netcharles.com/orwell/ctc/docs/complete.htm#NewYorker> *The Financial Times* (Craig Raine, 1/08/98) <http://www.netcharles.com/orwell/ctc/docs/complete.htm#FinancialTimes> *The Independent* (D.J. Taylor, 4/7/98) <http://www.netcharles.com/orwell/ctc/docs/complete.htm#Independent> and *The Sunday Times* (John Carey, 05/07/98) <http://www.netcharles.com/orwell/ctc/docs/complete.htm#SundayTimes>
A collection of reviews is at: <http://www.netcharles.com/orwell/ctc/docs/complete.htm>

All links in 4 were accessed 13/08/13.

5. Reviews following publication of 6 (above) include:

(From “Orwell; the Sage of the Century” by William Gibaldi in *New Republic*, 11/8/13) “Every Orwell scholar owes a tremendous debt to Peter Davison, the editor not just of this new volume, but also a 20-volume *Complete Works*: His massive, decades-long editorial undertaking on Orwell stands with Leon Edel’s sublime achievement on Henry James and Joseph Frank’s on Dostoevsky—Hitchens called *Complete Works* “a Boswellian tribute”

<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/114254/george-orwell-life-letters-reviewed-william-gibaldi>

And

(From Michael O’Donnell’s review in *Barnes and Noble Review*, 13/08/13) ‘He has done more than any other scholar to illuminate Orwell’s life and works’

<http://bnreview.barnesandnoble.com/t5/Reviews-Essays/George-Orwell-A-Life-in-Letters/ba-p/11094>

All links in 5 were accessed 25/10/13

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Davison’s research has changed the Orwellian landscape. Its **impact** is in two broad overlapping areas: (i) **preserving and transmitting an important aspect of UK cultural heritage and maximising its export ‘value’**; (ii) **expanding the range and quality of public discourse through enhancing public understanding** of Orwell’s influence as a writer and its wider

implications for comprehending historical processes.

(i) Davison's work has met with universal acclaim from non-academic readers, with reviews in national and international non-scholarly newspapers confirming its wider **significance**. D J Taylor observed, 'in any other country, Professor Peter Davison would have been given a knighthood' (*New Statesman* 26/04/10), and the *New York Review of Books* described the work as 'monumental' (26/05/11).¹ Sales figures and translations substantiate the work's **international dissemination** and **reach** – [text removed for publication]

two offshoots of *The Complete Works*, *The Diaries* (2009) and *A Life in Letters* (2010), are available in French, Russian, Japanese, Polish, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese (including publication in Brazil), simultaneously opening up the US market to Orwell material that had never before been available to American readers.

A direct result of Davison's work and its **sustainability** is the establishment of the Orwell Society in 2011, with Orwell's son, Richard Blair as Patron. The Society aims to 'create a means by which anyone can be better informed about and share appreciation for Orwell's life and work'. It operates a members' online discussion forum, conducts Orwell Walks around London and other venues, and publishes a Society Newsletter, which features regular articles by Davison and airs the resulting discussion across an **international general readership**. In its first months, over 20 articles, including four by Davison, appeared on the 'Eric and Us' website, available for downloading in PDF format. Davison noted that his essay on Orwell and Sport was read by more people in Russia and the Ukraine in a fortnight than was possible in a year in an academic journal with a print run of 1000 copies distributed worldwide (8/11/2011).³

Davison's many public appearances include literary festivals, most recently Marlborough Litfest 2011 and the Times Cheltenham Literary Festival 2010 (typically 120,000+ visitors).⁴ The renewed general interest is reflected in the scale of media coverage. The 2013 BBC Radio 4 season of over 32 programmes, *The Real George Orwell*, was informed by Davison's research and its revelatory insights. The season included dramatisations of all the major novels plus *Down and Out in Paris and London* as the Book at Bedtime over two weeks (Jan–Feb 2013), Orwell's essays and journalism as Book of the Week (18–24 Feb 2013), and a discussion of Orwell on political language on *Start the Week* (28/01/13). Davison himself discussed Orwell's intellectual journey and position at the BBC in *The Road to Nineteen-Eighty-Four* (8/2/13), reviewed as 'meticulously researched' in *The Guardian* (09/02/13).⁵

(ii) Post-1989 Orwell's writings had lost some of their urgency. Davison's work is **key to the reassessment** of Orwell's **continuing political significance**. As *The Telegraph* noted, publication of the full text of the 'List of Crypto-Communists', which damaged Orwell's reputation on first appearance, looks markedly different in the context provided by Davison (26/02/06). Britain's most prestigious award for political writing, the Orwell Prize, has posted an online video of Davison, 'Nightmare in Poland Street', on its website (7/10/12), plus frequent contributions by Davison. Davison also makes media appearances worldwide discussing political topics ranging from Orwell's likely position on the demise of *The News of the World* (*Minority Thought*, 2011) to cuts in the NHS and the Iraq War (*Camden New Journal*, 6/5/2010) to political surveillance on Radio New Zealand's, *Sunday Morning* (7/10/12).⁶

The publication of Davison's work in Spanish has helped fuel the ongoing debate about the legacy of Spain's Fascist past. In 2011, the translation of the *Complete Works* was heralded in *Babelia*, the literary supplement to *El Pais* under the heading 'Compromiso con la verdad' ('Commitment to the truth') (20/09/2011), following Davison's broadcasts on Spanish Talk Radio (April 2010).⁷ His edition of *Burmese Days*, demonstrating how Orwell's experience of British imperial rule shaped his political outlook, led to Hendrick Willemyns' Dutch television documentary, broadcast 24/01/2011, with Davison's active participation.⁸ Finally, sales of Davison's Penguin Classics edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* have soared in the wake of the Edward Snowden spying scandal, as sales of the novel rocketed by just under 6,000% to 5th place on the Amazon Movers and Shakers List (11/06/2013),⁹ confirming the novel's immediate, contemporary political relevance.

Impact case study (REF3b)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

¹Reviews corroborating the international and continuing significance of Davison's work to audiences outside of academia:

D.J. Taylor, 'Pushing the Envelope', *New Statesman*, 26 April 2010, see <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P3-2022112051.html> – however, this is a subscription service and a hard copy of the full article can be made available upon request.

Simon Leys review of *Diaries* and *A Life in Letters*, *New York Review of Books*, 26 May 2011, see <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2011/may/26/intimate-orwell/?pagination=false> for the review.

[text removed for publication]

³For The Orwell Society, see <http://www.orwellsociety.com>. The Chair of the Orwell Society has verified claims about the importance of Davison's work to the Society 'a crucial founding member' who helped 'inspire the very formation of the society' – this quotation is taken from email correspondence which can be made available upon request.

⁴A video of Davison's presentation to the Cheltenham Literary Festival, 8 October 2010, can be seen here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oawpyZaf9_w Evidence for Davison's attendance at Marlborough Litfest 2011 can be seen at <http://aldbourne.net/diary/archived/marlborough-litfest-2011>.

⁵Radio 4's 'The Road to Nineteen Eighty-Four' – for full episode listings please see <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01pyz0z/episodes/guide>
The cited review can be accessed here: <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2013/feb/09/real-george-orwell-down-out-review>.

⁶ See <http://theorwellprize.co.uk/george-orwell/about-orwell/peter-davison-nightmare-in-poland-street/>

Davison's accounts of Orwell's likely position on current affairs are available on the BBC website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-14106031>, the *Camden New Journal*

<http://www.camdennewjournal.com/reviews/books/2010/may/books-orwell-life-letters-selected-peter-davison> The New Zealand radio programme can be listened to here:

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/sunday/audio/2534803/counterpoint>

See also <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/3653512/Off-cuts-of-Orwell.html>.

⁷Fernando Savater's comments on Orwell's impact in Spain, inspired by the translation of Davison's edition, are from 'Compromiso con la Verdad' (*El Pais* 20 August 2011) and can be accessed via; http://elpais.com/diario/2011/08/20/babelia/1313799161_850215.html.

⁸The cited documentary was *Paper Trails, 4, Burmese Days*. A DVD can be made available upon request

⁹Evidence for the renewed interest in 1994 can be found via this link: <http://www.dailyfinance.com/on/nsa-scandal-1984-george-orwell-sales-soar/>

All links in section 5 accessed 16/08/13.