

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Cambridge</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA29</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Writing, Nature and the Environment</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words) Robert Macfarlane's research focuses on interrelations between landscape, nature and culture. As a writer, essayist, broadcaster and public speaker, Macfarlane communicates his research far beyond academic audiences to reach a general public through his engagement with the traditions of nature writing. His work has led to enhanced public awareness of the natural world and engagement with issues including habitat loss, climate change and place-consciousness. His work has also led to new artistic ventures and to new courses at HEIs. A significant dimension to such impact has been its extensive presence in the broadcast and print media, which have devoted considerable space and attention to the agenda represented by Macfarlane's work.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words) Macfarlane has been a staff member at the University of Cambridge since 2002, initially as a Fellow in English at Emmanuel College. Since 2006 he has also held a University Lectureship in Post-WWII Literature. His research and writing interests include the relations of ecology and literature, and environmental consciousness, activism and literature. His work has particularly focused on the tradition commonly known as 'nature writing' in Britain, Ireland and the US. Macfarlane has published three books on the relationships of landscape, memory and literature. His first book <i>Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination</i> (Granta, 2003) [1] is an account of mountain landscapes in the European imagination. The book was organised around the natural features encountered in mountaineering (glaciers, summits, unknown ranges) and addressed the scientific, artistic and cultural discoveries and fashions that have accompanied exploration. It combined first-person narrative with the contributions of geologists, romantic poets, landscape artists, entrepreneurs, amateurs and military personnel. In it, Macfarlane considered why people are drawn to mountains despite their obvious dangers, and examined the powerful and sometimes fatal hold that mountains can come to have over the imagination. The book included Macfarlane's own accounts of climbs in the Alps, the Cairngorms and the Tian Shan mountains (between China and Kazakhstan), and climaxed with an analysis of Mallory's fateful ascent on Everest in 1924, one of the most famous instances of an obsessive pursuit.</p> <p><i>Mountains of the Mind</i> was followed by <i>The Wild Places</i> (Granta, 2007) [2] a travelogue exploring the histories and landscapes of 'the wild' in Britain and Ireland. The book explored 'wildness' both geographically and intellectually, testing competing ideas of the wild (literary, philosophical and ecological) against different landscapes, and described Macfarlane's own explorations of forests, moors, salt marshes, mudflats, islands, sea-caves and city fringes. In the book MacFarlane argued for a contemporary understanding of wildness as existing in collaboration with, rather than segregation from, human activity: as seen, for example, in the complex terrain of coastal Essex.</p> <p><i>The Old Ways: A Journey On Foot</i> (Penguin, 2012) [3] described the investigation over several years of the 'old ways' that criss-cross the British landscape and its waters, and connect them to the continents beyond. Again, Macfarlane had himself sought out and followed these pilgrimage paths, sea-roads, prehistoric trackways, and ancient rights of way, in south-east England, north-west Scotland, Spain, Sichuan and Palestine. In the book MacFarlane argued for the reciprocal shaping of people and place, and for walking as a 'reconnoitre inwards'. The poet Edward Thomas (1878-1917) was used throughout the book as a case-study of a person whose imagination and behaviour were keenly influenced by his landscapes. Macfarlane has also published (with Faber and Faber on May 15th 2013) the collaborative volume <i>Holloway</i>, with the writer Dan Richards, and the artist Stanley Donwood, arising out of a chapter called 'Holloway' in <i>The Wild Places</i>, which has also become a Sunday Times hardback bestseller.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>[1] Robert Macfarlane, <i>Mountains of the mind: a history of a fascination</i> (London: Granta, 2003).</p>

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[2] —————, *The Wild Places* (London: Granta, 2007).

[3] —————, *The Old Ways: a journey on foot* (London: Penguin, 2012).

The quality of Macfarlane's research to date was amply attested by the award in 2011 of a prestigious Philip Leverhulme Prize for his work in the field of cultural environmentalism: "Robert Macfarlane is the most eloquent of the young voices that are enabling literary study to make a contribution to our urgent modern debates about environmental crisis." Source: <http://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/news/awards/plp.cfm> (PDF for 2011) The PLP is awarded 'to outstanding scholars who have made a substantial and recognised contribution to their particular field of study at an international level'.

The peer-reviewed journal *Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*, carried a positive review of *the Old ways*, referring to 'Macfarlane's latest masterpiece' see: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14688417.2012.753329>, and in the subsequent issue, an article about all three books, inter alia, entitled 'An Archipelagic Literature: re-framing "The New Nature Writing"' – 'Macfarlane's 'new logics' are geological, arboreal, fluvial and coastal, but they are also distinctly human at the same time.' [http://journals2.scholarsportal.info/details.xqy?uri=/14688417/v17i0001/5\\_aalrnnw.xml](http://journals2.scholarsportal.info/details.xqy?uri=/14688417/v17i0001/5_aalrnnw.xml)

The 2013 edition of the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* made Macfarlane's work prominent in its discussion of 'Nature Writing': "In the 21st century, a campaigning environmentalist stance, arising from close engagement with nature, has been evident in the work of both younger writers and their mentors, particularly Robert Macfarlane (*Mountains of the Mind*, 2003; *The Wild Places*, 2007) and Roger Deakin (*Waterlog*, 1999; *Wildwood*, 2007)" <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199608218.001.0001/acref-9780199608218-e-9578>The standing of Macfarlane's research is also attested by the widespread presence of his books on reading lists for Masters' courses in the field (see section 4 below).

All outputs can be supplied by the University of Cambridge on request.

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

The main beneficiaries of Macfarlane's work have been (1) the public who have benefited from improved cultural life, (2) the publishing and broadcasting sectors who have benefited from the economic prosperity associated with the sale of his books, (3) artists inspired by his research to new forms of creative practice, and (4) students of higher education who have either been inspired to develop new creative forms based on Macfarlane's writings or to attend newly established courses.

The primary means by which Macfarlane's research has reached these beneficiaries has been through his published books, which have also been adopted onto university courses. All three have been converted into BBC productions, the latter two in the impact period: *The Wild Places* was adapted as 'The Wild Places of Essex' by the Natural History Unit for BBC2 (Feb 2010, re-screened March 2013). An abridged version of *The Old Ways* was broadcast as Book of the Week on BBC Radio 4 (July 2012), and the book and its author featured on 'Ramblings' with Clare Balding on Radio 4 (June 2013) [1]. During the impact period Macfarlane was invited to give more than fifty public lectures at venues including schools, bookshops and literary festivals, amounting to a total audience of c.5000 members of the public. Particularly notable audiences have included the Hay Literary Festival in 2012 and 2013 (total audience numbers c.1400) and the Edinburgh Book Festival 2012 (320).

Macfarlane's research has resulted in the enrichment of cultural life. Sales figures at April 2013 for example stand at c.107,000 copies of his *Mountains of the Mind* (2003) in the UK, US and Commonwealth to date ; c.88,000 copies of *The Wild Places* (2007) in the UK, US and Commonwealth to date [2]. Although published less than a year ago, *The Old Ways* has had similar success, selling c. 65,000 copies in hardback in UK, US and Commonwealth to date [3]. It entered the Sunday Times Bestseller Chart for non-fiction at number 3, and stayed in the top 10 for twelve weeks. The paperback of *The Old Ways* was published on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2013, and has been in

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the *Sunday Times* bestseller chart for paperback non-fiction for eight weeks at time of writing. Between them the books have been translated into ten languages

The significance of the research to readers is clear in their positive responses to all three books, conveyed in the form of letters to the author (of which he has received more than 1000) and public reader testimonials. For example, one reader of all three books wrote to say that Macfarlane's writing had "opened my eyes to the surrounding landscape more than [any other writer]. I can honestly say you have changed my outlook and my reading habits" [4]. Another commended "the impact of the work you put in and the ripples from it ...By work I mean all your travelling, all your experiencing, all the cold you felt, all your wonder, all your muscle effort, all your emotions and so on, worded in the pages you wrote, that ripples out into others, like myself and creates awarenesses [we] didn't know existed" [5].

The books have made popular television and radio. In September 2009 *The Wild Places* was the subject of a half-hour programme with estimated audience 1.3 million [6]. The book was also adapted into an hour-long film, screened on BBC 2 on 10 February 2010 with an estimated audience of 1.5 million (source, BBC). Viewers were enthusiastic. One commented, "[What] a visually stunning, lyrically beautiful and unexpectedly emotional, wonderful film" [7]. Another stated that the film was "one of the most beautiful and thought-provoking wildlife films I have ever seen" [8].

The impact of Macfarlane's books in the publishing industry and on the wider culture is shown in the exceptional number of awards they have received. *Mountains of the Mind* (2003) won the Guardian First Book Award, the Somerset Maugham Award, and the Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award. It was shortlisted for the Boardman Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature and the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize. *The Wild Places* (2007) won the Boardman Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature in 2007 and the Scottish Arts Council Non-Fiction Book Of The Year Award 2008. In November 2008, it was joint winner of the Grand Prize at the Banff Mountain Festival, North America's equivalent of the Boardman Tasker Prize. It was shortlisted for six further prizes, including the Dolman Best Travel Book Award, the Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award, the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize, and North America's Orion Book Award, a prize founded "to recognize books that deepen our connection to the natural world, present new ideas about our relationship with nature, and achieve excellence in writing." *The Old Ways* (2012) was shortlisted for The Samuel Johnson Prize (the 'non-fiction Booker'), the Duff-Cooper Prize for Non-Fiction, the Waterstones Book of the Year Award, the Foyles Best Book of Ideas Prize, the Dolman Prize for Travel Literature, and longlisted for The Jan Michalski Prize for World Literature and the Warwick Prize for Writing. In the US it was shortlisted for the Orion Book Award.

Macfarlane's work has generated new ways of thinking that influence creative practice beyond the academy. His work on Orford Ness in *The Wild Places* led to a joint commission by the National Trust and Arts Council for a site-specific performance on the Ness, with jazz musician Arnie Somogyi and visual artists Jane and Louise Wilson, 'Untrue Island', 8-30 July 2012, adopted as a regional event in the Cultural Olympiad [9]. Visual artist Bethan Lloyd Worthington was inspired by *The Wild Places* to drawings for a one-off selection of fine bone china tableware [10] and *The Old Ways* has inspired the photographer David Quentin to mount a commercial exhibition of photography, 'Silt', with text by Macfarlane, at 4 Windmill Street Gallery [11]. Furthermore, the research has inspired students to develop new creative forms, as for example the students at Colchester School of Art in 2013 who put together an exhibition of 'works that respond creatively to the physical space of the Minorities building and to the students' readings of Robert MacFarlane's book *Mountains of the Mind* [12].

Students of higher education have benefited from Macfarlane's research, as it has influenced the establishment and structuring of new Masters courses in various kinds of 'cultural environmentalism'/'writing nature' at Bath Spa, UEA, Essex and Exeter; at Essex and Exeter his books are set texts [13]. Numbers on the course at Bath Spa were 4 last year; 8-12 are expected next year. Students on the MA course at Essex are 3-6 p.a.

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

- [1] All information from TRILT <http://bufvc.ac.uk/tvandradio/trilt/> database of TV and Radio recordings.
- [2] Sales figures available for *Mountains of the Mind* and for *The Wild Places* from Editorial, Granta Books, 12 Addison Avenue, London, W11 4QR;
- [3] Sales figures available for *The Old Ways* from Editorial, Penguin UK Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL.
- [4] Email from person 1, 3.7.2012
- [5] Email from person 2, 21.7.2012.
- [6] Email from person 3 (Assistant Producer, BBC) 11 Feb 2010
- [7] Email from person 4, 12 Feb 2010
- [8] Email from person 5, 11 Feb 2010
- [9] <http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/orford-ness/our-work/view-page/item938359/>
- [10] [http://www.bethanlloydworthington.com/work/table/wild\\_places/7.html](http://www.bethanlloydworthington.com/work/table/wild_places/7.html)
- [11] <http://4windmillstreet.com/exhibitions-2/david-quentin/>
- [12] <http://www.colchester.ac.uk/art/minories/exhibitions/mountains-mind>
- [13] [http://www.essex.ac.uk/lifts/pg/MA\\_WildWriting\\_Student\\_experience.aspx](http://www.essex.ac.uk/lifts/pg/MA_WildWriting_Student_experience.aspx)  
PDFs of courses and evidence on reading lists at Bath Spa, Exeter and Essex available.