

Institution: University of East Anglia
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Creative Writing at UEA – Shaping, Preserving and Enriching Contemporary British Literary Culture.
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The present case study describes the considerable influence over time of a core team of creative writers at the University of East Anglia (UEA) on the practice of creative writing as a discipline, both within the academy and beyond, and on the landscape of contemporary literature, the novel in particular. Our practice-based research and pedagogy represents a considerable contribution to economic prosperity in the publishing industries. UEA creative writing has local, national and international cultural impact through its partnership with the Writers Centre, Norwich and its extensive presence in the media, and through links with workshops in India, Australia and America. The transformative influence of UEA on the character of creative writing was recognized in 2012 with the award of the Queen’s Anniversary Prize.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research described here comprises variously aspects of creative-writing pedagogy, practice-based theory and self-reflection, and cultural history, together with perhaps the most influential and innovative example from recent decades of the possibilities of a synthesis of creative and critical practice. We include examples of the team-based research that underpins the wide influence of UEA creative writing.</p> <p>Between 1999 and 2000, Paul Magrs (UEA: 1997-2004) and Julia Bell (UEA: 1996-2004) undertook an extensive investigation of the methods and processes of writing by interviewing forty of the most influential contemporary authors regarding matters of editing, sentence structure, plotting and characterization. Their findings were collated in the form of a series of exercises intended to serve as the basis for classroom creative-writing practice.</p> <p>Between 2003 and 2004, and drawing on extensive experience in the University, Jon Cook (UEA 1972 - present) undertook research into the ways in which creative writing constitutes practice-based research. As the first work to argue this case in detail, the resulting publication transformed the ways in which creative writers conceptualized their work in relation to the work of their academic colleagues at a time when creative writing was rapidly, and highly successfully, being incorporated into the academy. The work in question also facilitated the RAE/REF process for practice-based research in English and had substantial influence on public policy. Cook’s work in transforming the status and understanding of practice-based research in this sphere has been enhanced and developed by the later collaborative work of Cowan.</p> <p>Between 2008 and 2010, and drawing on six years of experience at UEA, Andrew Cowan (UEA 2004 - present), investigated the complex processes of editing prose. Cowan sought ways of disseminating the UEA method to users beyond the academy by formulating a series of stand-alone exercises designed for individual writers or groups.</p> <p>Between 2011 and 2012 Giles Foden (UEA: 2007- present) undertook research into the impact and value of the UEA creative writing workshop method. He commissioned 50 essays written by graduates and tutors from the UEA programme, asking them to reflect on UEA-taught writing practices and techniques. He analysed the resulting essays and drew out common perceptions and insights with a view to disseminating the methods and insights of the course to a broad audience. The volume in question also offers an account of the growth of creative writing in UK outside the academy over the past forty years.</p> <p>Between the years 1993 and 2008 Professor Chris Bigsby (UEA 1969 - present) and Professor</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

Jon **Cook** (UEA 1972 - present) programmed, researched and interviewed around 200 writers from around the world for the UEA International Literary Festival and the UEA Spring Literary Festival, events which consistently drew audiences from the East Anglia region of between 300 and 500 per weekly gathering. These interviews are unique in their depth and range, each writer being questioned carefully and at length on method and process. Selected interviews have been made available on-line through the UEA library archive (<http://www.uea.ac.uk/is/archives/creativewriting>), and transcriptions of a representative sample have been edited into the four volume series *Writers in Conversation*.

Between 1993 and 1995 the critic and writer W.G. **Sebald** (UEA: 1987-2001), founder of the UEA British Centre for Literary Translation and lecturer in German literature, undertook a period of highly personal research into the history and landscape of East Anglia. The resulting work, translated into English as *The Rings of Saturn*, is one of the most influential literary texts of recent decades, a singular fusion of aspects of the novel, travel writing, memoir, meditation and history.

3. References to the research

Bell, Julia and Magrs, Paul (2001), *The Creative Writing Coursebook*. Macmillan

Bigsby, Chris ed. (2001-2011), *Writers in Conversation*, vols 1-4. Unthank Books

Cook, Jon (2005), 'Creative Writing as a Research Method', in *Research Methods for English Studies*, edited by Gabriele Griffin. Edinburgh University Press, 195-212

Cowan, Andrew (2011), *The Art of Writing Fiction*. Pearson

Foden, Giles ed. (2011), *Body of Work*. Full Circle

Sebald, W.G. (1998), *The Rings of Saturn*, translated by Michael Hulse. Harvill Press. (originally published as *Die Ringe des Saturn*, Vito von Eichborn Verlag, 1995)

Grants and Awards

2010 Andrew Cowan was awarded a Knowledge Catalyst project supported by AHRC funding of £30,000 for his work on the digital writing platform (details in section 4).

The Spring and International Literary Festivals are sponsored by local and national bodies, including currently Premier Inn and Waterstones.

Evidence of Quality

The Creative Writing Coursebook has sold more than 70,000 copies to date and is widely used as the basis for creative writing workshops outside the academy.

Andrew Cowan's *The Art of Writing Fiction* has sold over 10,000 copies since its publication two years ago. Richard Beard of the National Academy of Writing described it as 'The best coursebook on Creative Writing that I have ever read. Everything is here... writer/teachers will be stealing from this book for years to come.'

The BBC's *Today* programme marked the publication of Foden's *Body of Work* with a discussion on the subject of creative writing which drew an audience of 3 million. The *Guardian* described the book as 'rife with examples of valuable craft and life lessons'.

Sebald's *Rings of Saturn* has sold over a million copies. It has been the subject and inspiration of countless works by writers, film-makers and photographers since its publication in 1995, including the 2011 film *Patience (After Sebald)* directed by Grant Lee. '[A] book -- fiction, travel, biography, myth, and memoir -- that obliterates time and defies comparison' (*New York Times*). Robert McCrum says of Sebald: he influenced 'a whole generation of writers, in the best possible way, as a spirit and an example. Today, the influence of his work crops up all over the place, in the most surprising quarters.'

4. Details of the impact

The relationship between research and impact here is best understood as a process: our writers reflect on and analyse aspects of the practice of creative writing; this reflection and theorisation is taught and developed in the classroom; and the findings are disseminated as published research. The impact of the work in question on the landscape of creative writing is evident locally and nationally, and through international partnerships. Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, the students trained in our programmes are uniquely successful as published authors. Their award-winning books have significant economic impact.

Economic impact

a. by contributing to the publishing industry. The UEA Creative Writing MA is uniquely successful: whilst the average publication rate for graduates of MAs and MFAs in the UK and USA is around 1%, 27% of UEA creative writing graduates publish one or more books. Since 2008, this amounts to c.1,000 works produced by writers who have been trained at UEA. A large proportion of these have won prizes and awards. (Corroborating Evidence 2, 3, 4, 6 and 10)

b. by establishing profit-making creative writing workshops across the world. **Cook** established the *Guardian* masterclasses in 2010 (Corroborating Evidence 1), a series of courses accredited by UEA. These draw an average of 600 applicants a year. **Cook**, working with Amit **Chaudhuri** (UEA 2005 - present), launched UEA in India 2013, an initiative involving in the first instance a number of creative writing workshops modeled on those at UEA. (Corroborating Evidence 1)

Cultural impact

a. In 2004 **Cook** established The Writers' Centre, Norwich (WCN). The underlying intention was to use the UEA brand, reputation and method to promote creative writing projects locally, regionally, nationally and internationally (Corroborating Evidence 5). Since 2005, WCN, directed by Chris Gribble and with UEA, Norwich City Council, Norfolk County Council and the Arts Council as stakeholders, has run the annual Worlds Literature Festival at UEA (200 international delegates), and has helped to establish creative writing programmes based on the UEA method in China and Africa, as well as India. In 2012 WCN and UEA creative writing co-hosted the British Council Norwich Showcase. Through **Cook** WCN established the Escalator Programme which mentors emerging writers, and Well Versed, a national project that develops the teaching of poetry in UK schools. In 2010-11 **Cowan** worked with WCN to establish an innovative digital platform called Newwriting.net (Corroborating Evidence 7). In 2010, **Cowan**, **Cook** and **Foden** worked with WCN and other stakeholders to put together the successful bid to make Norwich England's first UNESCO City of Literature, an idea proposed by **Cook** and Gribble in 2009. In 2012, WCN was granted £3m from Arts Council England to establish the National Centre for Writing in Norwich. In 2012, UEA creative writing established the UNESCO City of Literature Visiting Chair of Creative Writing, held by Timberlake Wertenbaker in 2012, Ali Smith in 2013, and in spring 2014, Margaret Atwood.

b. through preserving and disseminating cultural heritage via the digitalization of rare archive recordings of interviews with international writers. Recordings available online of the annual literary festivals include hour-long interviews with c.100 international writers.

c. through the creation, interpretation and judging of national and international literature. The writing of UEA creative writing faculty members is published in more than 20 different countries and has won numerous awards. Since 2008, newspaper and magazines articles by creative writing faculty members have contributed to debates about the constitution of creative writing across the world. **Cowan** regularly addresses international fora about creative writing pedagogy. The success of the UEA programme continues to be the primary focus for media discussion about the value of creative writing. **Foden's** *Body of Work* was the subject of a BBC Radio Four *Today* programme entitled 'Can Creative Writing Be Taught?' (01/12/2010) which drew 3 million listeners. (Corroborating Evidence 2)

d. W.G. Sebald's work, *The Rings of Saturn* in particular, has been singularly influential in British

Impact case study (REF3b)

literary culture. In May 2013 Robert McCrum referred to his 'quietly potent legacy... a strange and deep response to the atrocities of history... a wonderful vindication of literary culture in all its subtle and entrancing complexity'. McCrum attests to the profound influence of Sebald on a whole generation of British writers. His work has been the subject of many monographs and conferences, and was the subject of a major film in 2011, *Patience (After Sebald)* dir. Grant Gee, shown and reviewed internationally. Sebald's innovative exploration of the relations between the creative and the critical, and between practice and research, continues to serve as a touchstone for UEA creative writing. (Corroborating Evidence 7)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. **UEA/Guardian Masterclasses and UEA India:** 'This is an exciting and timely initiative. UEA and the *Guardian* already make a significant contribution to the literary culture of this country. By working together they will provide a powerful focus and opportunity for people to discover what they can achieve at different stages of their writing lives.' (Ian McEwan)
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/guardian-masterclasses/uea-guardian-masterclasses>
2. **BBC Today programme on UEA's success:** 'one course beyond any question has a special aura and that is the one at the University of East Anglia... the list of writers who have been there is extraordinary.'
http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_9652000/9652677.stm
3. **Queen's Anniversary Prize** awarded to UEA for 'groundbreaking and innovative programmes in creative writing with wide international impact'. The prize announced: 'The University's Creative Writing programme is recognised internationally as a centre of excellence in the academic discipline and contemporary practice of literature. The programme has inspired and mentored many well-known international authors and developed ground breaking approaches to writing and to associated creative industries.'
4. 'The course not only helps them in their creative process but equally teaches them to be market aware, and to understand the evolution of the publishing business as it transforms in the digital era.' Letter from publisher about the importance of UEA in the current publishing world.
5. Letter from Writers Centre Norwich about the relationship between Creative Writing at UEA and WCN.
6. Letter from UEA MA and PhD students about the ways in which UEA helps its graduates into publication.
7. Sebald's legacy: article 13th May, 2013 from the *Guardian* plus selected comments from *Guardian* readers.
8. Creative Writing prize judging by UEA faculty members.
9. Praise for Cowan's *The Art of Writing Fiction* (Amazon).
10. List of awards given to UEA student writers since 2008.