

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution: University of Bristol</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 29 — English Language and Literature</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transforming the teaching of literary theory in higher education across the world
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)

Wide-ranging research undertaken by Andrew Bennett from 1994 onwards has had a profound and sustained impact on the teaching of literary theory at higher education institutions (HEIs) across the world. Bennett co-authored the first edition of *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory (ILCT)* with Nicholas Royle (University of Sussex) in 1995. The reception of the book has been remarkable for its enthusiasm and international reach: *ILCT* has become a key text in literary theory, literature and language courses in HEIs in the UK and elsewhere (including in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, India, China, Poland, Hungary, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and elsewhere). The book, which has sold c. 73,000 copies, has materially influenced how literary theory is taught, making the subject more accessible to students by presenting key critical concepts in the context of readings of individual literary texts. The success of *ILCT* has led to the commissioning of a second, more general book directed at beginning undergraduates, *Studying Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing*, which will be published by Pearson in 2014.

<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)
--

Bennett took up the post of Lecturer in English at the University of Bristol on 1 August 1994. He was promoted to a Readership in 1998 and to a Personal Chair in 2000. He was Head of English from 1994 to 2003 and from 2006 to 2009.

*ILCT* was written, revised and completed in the summer and autumn of 1994. Since its first publication in 1995, *ILCT* has gone through three subsequent editions (1999, 2004, 2009) and is due to come out in the fifth edition in 2014. Between 1999 and 2009, ten extra chapters were added to the book's original twenty-four, and in subsequent editions existing chapters were augmented and updated. These revisions and additions to the original book increased the wordcount by almost 60%, adding an extra 140 pages to the first edition's original 238 pages.

Bennett's wide-ranging research has fed into the first and successive editions of *ILCT* both directly and indirectly. In the first and subsequent editions, each chapter was drafted by one of the contributors and carefully revised and reworked by the two authors in collaboration. In addition to revising and updating all chapters to take account of developments in criticism and theory since 1995, Bennett has drafted new chapters on eco-criticism, queer theory, the human/monstrosity, and war, in each case building on research undertaken for books, scholarly essays, and book chapters on literary theory [2] [4] [6], on Romanticism [3] [5], and on individual authors, including Elizabeth Bowen, Richard Ford, Robert Graves, Katherine Mansfield, Ian McEwan, William Shakespeare and David Foster Wallace.

The impact of Bennett's wider research on the new editions of *ILCT* can be seen in both general and quite specific terms. His work on reception and canonicity in *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (1999) [3], for example, directly fed into his drafting of a chapter on 'Monuments' for the second edition (1999); a 2002 essay on 'monstrism' and melancholia ([4] and subsequently a chapter in [6]) fed into the 'Mutant' chapter on the monster/human in the third edition of *ILCT* (2004); while his work on Wordsworth for his 2007 book *Wordsworth Writing* [5] informed a discussion of Wordsworth's ecological concerns in the chapter headed 'Eco' (on the 'ecological turn' in recent criticism) in the fourth edition of *ILCT* (2009).

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

More generally, Bennett's Routledge 'Critical Idiom' volume on *The Author* [2] informed revisions to chapters on 'The Author', 'Voice' and others, while the thinking-through of the question of exemplarity and literary singularity that has been a concern in a number of Bennett's research outputs (including especially [2] and [6]) informed the direction of part of the argument in the chapter on 'War' added to the third edition of *ILCT*.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

The results of Bennett's research in literary criticism and theory are in the following books:

- [1] Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory: Key Critical Concepts* (London: Prentice Hall, 1995) (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 1999; 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 2004; 4<sup>th</sup> edn., 2009). Can be supplied on request.
- [2] Andrew Bennett, *The Author* (London: Routledge, 2005). ISBN 0415 281636. Can be supplied on request.
- [3] Andrew Bennett, *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). ISBN 0521641446. Can be supplied on request.
- [4] Andrew Bennett, 'Dendritic', *Oxford Literary Review*, 23 (2001) 71-97. DOI 10.3366/olr.2001.005.
- [5] Andrew Bennett, *Wordsworth Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). ISBN 052187419X. Can be supplied on request.
- [6] Andrew Bennett, *Ignorance: Literature and Agnology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). Submitted to REF2.

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

*ILCT* is based on an entirely novel approach to thinking about and teaching critical theory and this approach has influenced the form and content of such teaching at HEIs worldwide. Instead of a traditional 'schools'-based approach (structuralism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, feminism, etc), the book offers brief but incisive chapters on familiar critical concepts such as the author, narrative, character, tragedy and so on alongside rather more surprising topics, such as laughter, ghosts, animals, the mutant, and so on. Each chapter seeks to explore an individual critical word or 'concept' by attending closely to the nature of one or more literary text. This enables students to understand how critical and theoretical questions can be productively applied to literary texts themselves: in effect, it transforms their relationship with literary theory. The book has led, in some cases, to courses themselves being redesigned to allow for this more direct and intuitive way of introducing students to what are often difficult and even forbidding concepts and theories.

*ILCT* has had considerable reach, appearing in reading lists internationally, at a number of levels and in a number of disciplines. A recent survey of university websites conducted by a researcher for the Bristol School of Humanities found that *ILCT* was on the reading lists for diploma, undergraduate and master's degree courses at over a hundred HEIs across the world, including at the University of Oxford, where it is compulsory for first-year English students. The reach of *ILCT* in teaching is apparent from the remarkable range of disciplines in which it is used as a textbook (including English Literature, Classics, Modern Languages and Cultural Studies). [a]

**Sales figures and geographic reach**

The reach of *ILCT* is in part evidenced by the sales figures. Worldwide sales of all editions total c.73,000 (as of June 2013) [b], and the book has been translated into Chinese (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2007) and is currently being translated into Polish; a chapter has been reprinted in Gupta and Johnson, eds., *A Twentieth-Century Literature Reader* (Routledge, 2005). As of 2012, the Chinese translation of *ILCT* had sold 4,067 copies [c]. An Indian edition of the third edition was published in 2008 by Dorling Kindersley, and from January 2011 to December 2011, 424 copies of the Indian version of *ILCT* were sold [d]. The last three editions of *ILCT* have sold over 48,000 copies in 41 countries (not including the Chinese and Indian editions, which are licensed separately) [d]. An assistant editor for Pearson (the publisher of *ILCT*) characterised these

### Impact case study (REF3b)

sales figures as 'exceptional when it comes to sales figures of this sort' [d]; they compare favourably with, for example, sales of *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, another text designed to introduce the reader to the key concepts of critical theory: the three editions of the latter text totalled sales of 28,000 as of September 2012. [e]

### Impact on teaching

A number of external critical reviews attest to the significance of *ILCT* in terms of introducing students to critical theory in an accessible way. For example, J. Hillis Miller describes the fourth edition of *ILCT* as 'by far the best introduction we have, bar none. This unmatched book is for everyone: from those beginning literary study, through advanced students, and up to teachers; even those who, like me, have been professing literature for years and years.' [f]

The University of Bristol conducted a survey with academics in the UK and abroad who posted reading lists online that included *ILCT*. The responses revealed that it is used as a set text by 78% of respondents and that 29% of those who use it as a set text set the whole book. One hundred per cent of respondents to the survey would recommend its use in teaching to others. [a] Respondents to the survey indicated precisely how the book had changed their teaching practice. For example, a Professor of English Literature based in the US noted, 'This text provides the best and most accessible introduction to literary criticism of any book on the market. I've used it consistently over the past few years, and students always respond well to it – I enjoy watching it turn on the light bulbs over their heads.' [a]

Other respondents indicated the extent to which *ILCT* made challenging concepts readily accessible, and helped students to pursue their own approach to the area of study. A Teaching Fellow in English Literature, working in Higher Education in New Zealand, commented, 'We previously used *Critical Terms for Literary Study* by Lentricchia but found that the Bennett and Royle was far more 'user-friendly', that is, it didn't intimidate students to the point that they froze in its presence. Instead the Bennett and Royle asked the kinds of questions they'd toyed with in their more relaxed moments of discussion but the text posited the questions in such a way that they actually led somewhere.' [a]

Respondents also commented on how the move away from the traditional schools-based focus allowed students to engage with the subject matter. For example, Associate Professor of English Literature working in Higher Education in Australia noted: 'I like the approach through conventional and then more current topics rather than, or in advance of, 'isms', the abstractions which I find have a destructive effect on students' confidence that what interests them is also interesting to the academy. The book presents a very sophisticated account of key contemporary ideas, but engages with students in ways which suggest that literary theory is attempting to deal with the problems that they themselves ask. It really is an excellent high-level introduction to theoretical issues.' [a]

This impact on teaching is also corroborated by student reviews and feedback. For example, a student review of *ILCT* noted: 'The authors make a conscious effort to refrain from 'giving potted summaries of isms', instead offering a number of concise essays that explore the key theoretical methodologies in a manner both accessible and stimulating.' [g]

Another student (based in the UK) wrote, 'I just finished my first year at university on an English Literature course and because of Bennett and Royle's book I not only got to understand complex theories made understandable, but the breath of the content allowed me to open up my own ideas and arguments within my work. This book both allows you to understand and apply theory and helps you become a critic yourself, creating an individual and original response.' [h]

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

- [a] Survey conducted by School of Humanities, University of Bristol, July – September 2012. Corroborates the reach and significance of the impact on teaching.
- [b] Royalty Statements, Pearson Education Ltd. Corroborates figures for world wide sales.
- [c] Royalty Report, Guangxi Normal University Press. Corroborates Chinese sales figures.
- [d] Assistant Editor, Pearson Education Ltd. Corroborates claim that the last three editions of *ILCT* have sold over 48,000 copies in 41 countries (not including the Chinese and Indian editions, which are licensed separately), and the exceptional nature of these sales figures.
- [e] Sales figures for *Modern Criticism and Theory*, third edition, edited by David Lodge and Nigel Wood, Pearson Education Ltd.
- [f] Review of four edition of *ILCT* from J. Hillis Miller, UCI Distinguished Research Professor of Comparative Literature and English the University of California, Irvine. Corroborates significance of ILCT for students and teachers. Appears for example on AbeBooks website at: <http://www.abebooks.co.uk/book-search/title/an-introduction-to-literature-criticism-andtheory/author/andrew-bennett/free-shipping/sortby/3/>
- [g] Times Higher Education Supplement, 25 February 2010. Student Review: *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Corroborates significance of ILCT for students.
- [h] Customer Review, [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk) 2 June 2012. [http://www.amazon.co.uk/productreviews/1405859148/ref=cm\\_crdp\\_see\\_all\\_btm?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending](http://www.amazon.co.uk/productreviews/1405859148/ref=cm_crdp_see_all_btm?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending)>. Corroborates significance of ILCT for students.