

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<b>Institution:</b> University of York
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 29 English Language and Literature
<b>Title of case study:</b> Dickens in Public
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>John Bowen’s research discoveries and arguments about the interaction of autobiography and fictionality in Dickens’s writing challenge and extend scholarly perceptions of this major culturally iconic figure and provide the basis for bringing a new Dickens to 21<sup>st</sup>-century publics. He has used his research deliberately to shape the way Dickens is presented by key cultural institutions. Direct beneficiaries of his research have included the Dickens Universe, the British Library, the Museum of London and the media. He has worked with these institutions to ensure the wide UK, European and American reach of the impact of his research.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>John Bowen joined HEI January 2005 as professor; research was carried out from 2005-present.</p> <p>Bowen’s work is distinguished by re-thinking the relation of ‘autobiographical’ and fictional in Dickens’s work, challenging reductive appropriations of Dickens’s writing and simple-minded biographical inferences from sophisticated fictional texts and fractured historical evidence. The research, which underpinned the impact, specifically includes biographical discoveries about Dickens’s life and work which have led to arguments stressing the writer’s internationalism and social radicalism. In addition, Bowen has opened up the importance both of Dickens’s less canonical works and of their disturbing, uncanny and Gothic dimensions. These have been underpinned by a strong interest in the fundamental theoretical and interpretive questions raised by the competing demands of biographical and literary evidence and method. Bowen’s research is unique in deploying the insights of sophisticated literary theory, particularly the work of Walter Benjamin and Jacques Derrida, to explore the relation of the biographical and fictional in Dickens’s life and writing.</p> <p>Bowen’s non-reductive approach shapes his understanding of Dickens’s relationships with his siblings and with the woman likely to have been his mistress Ellen Ternan. His research on Ternan has thrown new light on her important but difficult-to-document relationship with Dickens and the effect that it has on our sense of the shape of his later career. Bowen also presents new evidence about Dickens’s particular position among his female siblings (<i>Dickensian</i>, see below, #3.i) and synthesises this and earlier work in <i>Dickens in Context</i> (#3.ii) to emphasise how decisive the beginning of his relationship with Ternan was to Dickens’s life and writing. The relations between fictional and autobiographical explorations of memory and memorialisation lie at the heart of Bowen’s long-term interest in both Dickens’s self-projections and their subsequent appropriations. He analyses both memory and memorialisation in Dickens’s letters and fiction (#3.iii) and in the seminal 1848 text <i>The Haunted Man</i> (#3.iv). Both articles emphasise the often dark and haunted ways Dickens projected himself in fiction, and the difficulty of assimilating them to conventionally biographical accounts of creativity and subjective life.</p> <p>Bowen also works to open up the European and international dimensions of Dickens’s writing, and his status as a figure that cannot intelligently be appropriated as simply a national one. In so doing, Bowen has revised influential readings of Dickens’s work (by e.g. Peter Ackroyd and Phillip Collins) that overemphasise its essentially ‘national’ and ‘English’ qualities. Bowen’s findings include the discovery of a hitherto unknown book which Ternan translated from French into English (#3.i), another possible translation by Ternan from French (#3.i) and the exploration of Dickens’s important transatlantic relationship with the Californian writer Bret Harte. The French material is synthesised and the argument extended in the <i>Cambridge Companion to European Novelists</i> (#3.v).</p> <p>In short, Bowen’s rigorously evidence-based understanding of the early and mid-nineteenth century has led him to emphasize the social radicalism, internationalism and unsettling aspects of Dickens’s life and writings, and the complex conceptual challenges of thinking about the relationship between them.</p>

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

All items: single-authored by Bowen.

**3.i** Number of shorter pieces reporting biographical discoveries: 'John Dickens's birth announcements and Charles Dickens's sisters', *Dickensian* 105.3 (2009), 197-201; 'Dickens, Bret Harte and the Santa Cruz connection', *Dickensian* 103.3 (2007), 203-5; 'Ellen Ternan: Traductrice?' *Dickens Quarterly* 29.1 (2012), 81-3; 'Acts of Translation', *Times Literary Supplement* 5457 (2 November 2007) (research article, revealing Ternan's hitherto-unknown only book publication). Items supplied by HEI on request.

**3.ii** 'The Life of Dickens: Before Ellen Ternan' (dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511975493.003) and 'The Life of Dickens: After Ellen Ternan', two chapters in *Dickens in Context* eds. Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux (CUP, 2011) 3-10 (dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511975493.004).

**3.iii** 'Dickens's Umbrellas', *Dickens's Style* ed. Daniel Tyler (CUP, 2013) 26-45. (Submitted in REF2)

**3.iv** 'Uncanny Gifts, Strange Contagion: Allegory in Dickens's *The Haunted Man*' in *Contemporary Dickens* eds. Deirdre David and Eilleen Gillooly (Ohio State University Press, 2008) 75-92. Invited chapter in leading collection. Reviews include: 'right on target ... fresh, alive, and interesting' (Shale Preston, *Studies in the Novel*); 'Bowen's subtle analysis ... high seriousness and a light touch' (Cora Kaplan, *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*). (Submitted in REF2)

**3.v** 'Charles Dickens: Englishman and European' in *Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*, ed. Michael Bell (CUP, 2012) 422-458 (dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL9780521515047.014).

**Evidence of the quality of the research:** Publications 3.ii-v listed above were placed in leading journals or collections published by major university presses (all peer-reviewed); *Dickensian* is not a refereed journal but the prime location for new biographical material concerning Dickens.

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

Throughout his career, Bowen has been concerned both with transforming the understanding of Dickens, an iconic national figure, and in reaching the widest possible range of audiences and institutions in communicating that understanding. Dickens has huge popular appeal but presenting his work to a popular audience risks representing him as a more conventional and conservative figure than the literary and historical evidence supports, thus allowing him to be appropriated in compromised, limited or misleading ways. Bowen's work has been strongly committed simultaneously to affirming Dickens's status as a popular author, to transmitting that understanding to new wide-ranging audiences, in the UK and overseas, and to maintaining the unsettling qualities of Dickens's work. His research has impacted on the work of three key cultural institutions.

**Beneficiaries** include a unique and pioneering **cultural institution** (University of California Dickens Project), **major museums** (British Library and Museum of London) and the **media**, (particularly BBC radio, many appearances). Evidence of **reach** includes *La Corriere della Serra* (Milan) (30.1.2012) which describes Bowen as 'uno dei massimi studiosi di Dickens' and 'Dickens at 200', *Charlie Rose*, US TV programme (PBS, syndicated over 200 affiliates, 17.1. 2012) in which his research on Dickens and America is quoted and he is described as 'the great Dickensian critic'.

**i. An Innovative Cultural Institution: The Dickens Universe**

The Dickens Project is a Multi-Campus Research Unit of the University of California. Since 1981, a central focus of the Project's research impact has been the creation and sustaining of the annual week-long 'Dickens Universe', which brings together hundreds of members of the general public from the USA, Japan and Europe with undergraduates, graduates and leading academics. A substantial cohort of faculty and students from leading US, European and Australian universities engage closely in academic exchange with teachers, educators, film-makers, TV producers, authors (e.g. Pulitzer-prize winning novelist Jane Smiley and biographer Lucinda Hawkesley), leading performers (e.g. Miriam Margolyes) and other lovers of Dickens. From its inception, the 'Universe' has been designed to bring research directly to public audiences through lectures, performances, seminars, book panels, teachers' workshops and many other events. It is a model of how research can be transmitted to, engage with and transform popular understandings of

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literary texts and iconic figures of modern culture, such as Dickens. Bowen has been at the centre of this unique, pioneering blend of scholarly gathering and outreach to multiple publics throughout the period of assessment, as lecturer, teacher, executive committee member and now co-Director.

The 'Universe', which celebrated its 30th year in 2012, has had considerable public impact. Praised by Smiley on Oprah Winfrey's 'Oprah's Book Club' webcast (24.2.11; audience 2m+), it was also the subject of a major feature by Professor Jill Lepore (Harvard) in *The New Yorker* (pre-eminent Anglophone forum for serious journalism and literature; audited circulation 1.04m per issue; readership 3.7m). Lepore articulates the exemplary model the 'Universe' offers for the impact of research, writing: 'precious few humanities initiatives have brought together students and readers, scholars and teachers as the Dickens Project has done'. The central mission of the Dickens Project is to bring cutting-edge research findings about 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature and culture and Dickens in particular to broadly-based audiences, and to engage in active dialogue with them about that research. Bowen has been at the heart of this work, presenting his own research in lectures in 2009, 2011 and 2012. The 2011 lecture drew on his research on questions of literary style in biographical and fictional writing, later published in 3.ii; the 2009 and 2012 lectures together with seminars in 2010 and 2013 drew directly on 3.i, 3.ii and 3.iv. He has taken a leading role, both administratively and intellectually, in shaping this highly innovative structure and model of research impact. The integral place of Bowen's work to the 'Universe' is evident in Lepore's focus on his research and teaching, which drew directly on conversations with Bowen and on his published research (3.i). Dickens 'Universe' enrolment increased from 257 in 2011 to 320 in 2012. 55% of these were first-timers, and the article played a key part in this success.

## ii. Museums and Libraries

Bowen's research led to an invitation to be a member of the Advisory Committee of the major 2012 Dickens Bicentenary exhibition, 'Dickens and London', Museum of London. Drawing on his research, he played an active role in shaping the exhibition, working closely to advise the curator. As the only academic invited to be a media spokesman for 'Dickens and London', he had a direct influence on media reporting. The strong attendance figures (94,785) and widespread coverage in print and broadcast media attest to the reach of the impact of this exhibition. Bowen was cited in newspapers around the world, e.g. *El Universal* (Venezuela), *Excelsior* (Mexico), *Terra Brasil* (Brazil), *Corriere della Serra* (Italy), *El Nuevo Día* (Puerto Rico) and *Heraldo de Aragon* (Spain), opening up to view the attractiveness of Bowen's 'international Dickens' whose fiction includes extended cultural comparisons and soundings of national difference, and whose depiction of English life is regularly tested against those of other nations in his fiction, journalism and travel books. Bowen also worked with the media to bring the exhibition to the notice of UK public audiences, discussing it (with Claire Armitstead, the *Guardian*) on BBC Radio 4 'Today' programme: 07.12.11 (RAJAR average weekly audience 7 million+).

Bowen has also drawn on his research in working with the British Library. He appeared 'in conversation' with Claire Tomalin, award-winning biographer of Dickens and Ternan (5.1.12), discussing the interpretive challenges that biographical knowledge of Dickens's life, particularly his relationship with Ternan, presents to criticism (event was widely publicised and sold out) and public lectures for the BL exhibitions, 'Dickens and Gothic' ('Dickens: Haunted by the Gothic', 21.2.12) and 'Writing Britain' (18.9.12).

Bowen's work with the British Library has expanded and deepened. He has played a leading role in the development of their new 'Literature Online' project, a major resource to widen access to the BL's unparalleled manuscript and print collections. As a founding member of the Advisory Board and in close collaboration with library staff, he has 'played a fundamental part in shaping the project' (Anna Lobbenberg, BL e-learning manager). His theoretically sophisticated approach to the complexity of autobiography and fiction in the life and writing of Dickens has informed not only how this and other 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers were represented in 'Literature Online' but also more broadly how the resource attends to the relation of historical and biographical evidence and literary interpretation across all periods. The content also specifically illustrates the impact of his research on the library. He has contributed many video and written entries based on his research on Dickens and other major 19<sup>th</sup>-century authors and topics, e.g. Gothic fiction and the works of the Brontes. Bowen has taken an active role in publicizing 'Literature Online' which was previewed at the 2013 York Festival of Ideas (29.6.13), with a presentation by Bowen and BL colleagues and concurrent exhibition at the 3Sixty Creative Technology Centre display space. All survey responses from members of the general public described the event as 'very good' or 'excellent'.

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When it launches in 2014, beneficiaries will include sixth formers, teachers, undergraduates and lifelong learners (NB the beneficiary claimed in this case study is the British Library.)

**iii. Media**

A regular broadcast media commentator and interviewee for many years, Bowen has had a leading role in the media's presentation of Dickens. His research on the relation of biography to fiction, as seen in the deep concern with questions of memory and the shaping power of childhood experience and suffering in Dickens's oeuvre, led to particular demand before and during the Bicentenary. Bowen was a major contributor to the innovative Channel 4 drama/documentary 'Dickens's Secret Lover' (Sarah Aspinall, Flame TV, 2008) which drew on Bowen's research on the Dickens/Ternan relationship. He wrote the supporting article 'Dickens's Secret Life' for the Channel 4 website. A clip featuring Bowen was heavily trailed before transmission; the primetime programme had an audience of 1.5 million and was widely and positively reviewed in *Daily Telegraph*, *Guardian* and *Independent*. He has worked extensively with BBC Radio. A number of items were shaped around his particular research expertise, including a scripted item on 'dark' Dickens on Radio 4's 'Open Book' (14.10.12, RAJAR listening figures average 1.1m) and a discussion on Radio 4's 'World at 1' to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dickens's birth (7.2.12, RAJAR listening figures average 1.4m). Bowen's research on the darker and haunted side of Dickens strongly influenced media producer Cathy Fitzgerald who produced the innovative Rockethouse production for BBC World Service, 'Dreaming Dickens' (2012). For Fitzgerald, Bowen's work was 'the beginnings of my own re-imaginings of Dickens.... I don't think influence goes deeper'. This programme won the prestigious international Prix Marulić.

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

1. Jill Lepore, 'Dickens in Eden', *New Yorker* magazine, 29.8.2011, 52-61. Corroborates claim 4i.
2. [archiviostorico.corriere.it/2012/gennaio/30/Dickens\\_caccia\\_fantasmico\\_10\\_120130040.shtml](http://archiviostorico.corriere.it/2012/gennaio/30/Dickens_caccia_fantasmico_10_120130040.shtml) 'Dickens: a caccia di fantasmi', *Corriere della Sera* on Bowen and bicentenary impact in Italy. Evidence of reach.

**Radio 4**

3. [www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/openbook/all](http://www.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/series/openbook/all): links to podcasts of 14.8.2012 edition of Radio 4 Open Book with item scripted by Bowen and 6.5.2011 discussion with Bowen of Dickens/Wilkie Collins collaboration. Corroborates claim 4iii.
4. [news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/10120130.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/10120130.stm) Bowen discussing Museum of London exhibition on Today programme 7.12.2011. Corroborates claim 4ii and 4iii.
5. 'Dreaming Dickens'. Letter from producer and [www.rockethouse.co.uk/InProduction/](http://www.rockethouse.co.uk/InProduction/) and [www.hrt.hr/prixmarulic/index.php?lang=en](http://www.hrt.hr/prixmarulic/index.php?lang=en). Corroborates claim 4iii.

**Television**

6. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wg6BquzIP6A&list=PLB2DDC5C3FBC7DB32&index=2](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wg6BquzIP6A&list=PLB2DDC5C3FBC7DB32&index=2) 'Charles Dickens at 200', *Charlie Rose* show (PBS, widely syndicated) 17.2.2012. Evidence of reach.
7. [www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/The-Complete-Webcast-of-Charles-Dickens-Oprahs-Book-Club-Video](http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/The-Complete-Webcast-of-Charles-Dickens-Oprahs-Book-Club-Video): 'Oprah's Book Club' webcast (24.2.11). Corroborates 4i.

**Museums**

8. [www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Explore-online/Past/Dickens-London/Default.htm](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Explore-online/Past/Dickens-London/Default.htm) Museum of London 'Dickens and London' official website. Corroborates claim 4ii and 4iii.  
[www.museumoflondon.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/57D058CF-C38C-4061-95C4-5511AF5DAF9F/0/Dickenspresspack.pdf](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/57D058CF-C38C-4061-95C4-5511AF5DAF9F/0/Dickenspresspack.pdf) Press pack for 'Dickens and London' exhibition. Corroborates claim 4ii and 4iii.
9. British Library: Literature Online. Letter from e-learning manager. Corroborates claim 4ii.