

Institution: University of the West of England (UWE), Bristol
Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Raising Awareness of Prisoners through Writing
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Through her research at UWE Bristol, Marie Mulvey-Roberts has enhanced public understanding of imprisonment and political contributions made by prisoners from the nineteenth century to the present day. The underpinning research covers cases such as an inmate from a Victorian asylum through to an imprisoned Suffragette and contemporary prisoners facing capital punishment in America. By showing through writing how prisoners have exposed conditions and other aspects of their ordeal, she has raised the quality of public debate and wider understanding of basic standards of wellbeing and conceptions of human rights. The research has stimulated events at which members of the public have engaged with the issues raised and benefited the school curriculum.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Mulvey-Roberts’s interest in prisoners stems from her experiences as a prison teacher, literary historian on women prisoners and death penalty abolitionist. Her research focuses on how prisoners and ex-prisoners are empowered through writing, giving them a political voice and escapist creative outlet.</p> <p>In 1994, as a Senior Lecturer at UWE, Mulvey-Roberts re-discovered and edited a neglected memoir, <i>A Blighted Life</i> (1880) written by Victorian novelist Rosina Bulwer Lytton, detailing her wrongful confinement in a lunatic asylum. A Leverhulme Research Fellowship supported Mulvey-Roberts’s archival research into Lytton’s alleged insanity. This included generating an electronic resource on the history of madness, making available 128 primary sources from the Hunter Collection at Cambridge University library. For protesting over the lack of rights for married women, Rosina was incarcerated by her husband Edward Bulwer Lytton, a subject of Mulvey-Roberts’s earlier monograph, which drew attention to his role as a Gothic novelist. From 1994-2010, Mulvey-Roberts, who became a Reader (2003) and Associate Professor (2011), produced numerous publications [1-4], conference papers, several keynotes and guest lectures to demonstrate that Rosina has been unfairly dismissed as the “mad wife” of Edward Bulwer Lytton. She has reassessed her life and writing to show that she was a significant anarchic political force.</p> <p>Mulvey-Roberts has brought several of her forgotten works back into print, most notably her first novel, <i>Cheveley</i> (1839) [2]. In her scholarly introduction she reveals, through new research, the innovative ways in which Rosina fictionalised her troubled marriage. Funding from the British Academy and the Knebworth Educational and Preservation Trust provided her with a research assistant to transcribe nearly 1,000 of Lytton’s letters located around the world, which Mulvey-Roberts gathered, collated and annotated for her 2008 three-volume Pickering and Chatto Master’s series edition [3]. Research discoveries inform the introduction and 70,000 words of annotations to provide new contexts for Rosina’s life, writing and incarceration. Mulvey-Roberts is the first person to make a link between Rosina, her mother Anna Wheeler, the largely unacknowledged co-author of a major treatise on women’s rights, and her Suffragette grand-daughter, Constance Lytton [4]. The findings, containing original insights into Constance Lytton’s imprisonment, hunger strike and force-feeding, have been published in the book <i>Votes for Women</i> (2000) [5]. Mulvey-Roberts has demonstrated how all three women contributed to changes in legislation furthering women’s rights, eventually leading to female suffrage.</p> <p>In addition, Mulvey-Roberts has edited two books on incarceration and the death penalty in the USA which draw attention to sub-standard prison conditions, the inequalities of the death penalty in regard to race and class and the violation of the right to life. Following <i>Out of the Night: Writing from Death Row</i> (1994) was her second book <i>Writing for their Lives: Death Row USA</i> (2007). This made an important intervention into the controversy of lethal injection as “a cruel and unusual punishment” by highlighting the then relatively little known fact that lethal cocktails of drugs were frequently administered incorrectly leaving prisoners fully conscious, while paralysed in a “chemical tomb” [6]. This research underpins chapters relating to execution written by prisoners and death row professionals. For the first time in this type of book, genres have been mixed. Creative writing,</p>

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including poems and biographical pieces, sit alongside more scholarly and academic work. The words of prisoners appear next to writings by a lawyer, psychiatric consultant on correctional facilities, spiritual advisor, prison chaplain, penitentiary officials and ex-governor of a US state. This arrangement was designed to present prisoner and professional, guards and the guarded on a more equal footing. Furthermore, the perspectives of the executioners, including members of a strap-down team, are adjacent to those of the condemned and witnesses to execution demonstrating how all participate, willingly or unwillingly, in human rights violations. Although classified as literary criticism, the book is cited in law books and journals.

3. References to the research**-All available through UWE-**

[1] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, "Writing for Revenge: The Battle of the Books of Edward and Rosina Bulwer Lytton" for *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*, ed. Allan Conrad Christensen (Newark: Delaware University Press, 2004), pp.159-174.

[2] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ed. Rosina Bulwer Lytton, *Cheveley: A Man of Honour in Silver Fork Novels 1826-1841* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2005).

[3] Mulvey-Roberts, ed. *The Collected Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton*, with the assistance of Steve Carpenter, 3 vols (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2008) in the Pickering Masters Series.

[4] Marie Mulvey-Roberts co-authored with Joanne Goldsworthy, "Revolutionary Mothers and Revolting Daughters", *Woman to Woman: Female Negotiations during the Long Eighteenth Century*, ed. Louise Duckling, Angela Escott and Carolyn D. Williams (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2010), pp. 63-78.

[5] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, "Militancy, Martyrdom or Masochism? The Public and Private Prisons of Constance Lytton", *Votes for Women*, ed. June Purvis and Sandra Holton (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.159-180.

[6] Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ed. *Writing for their Lives: Death Row USA* (Chicago & Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2007)

Awards granted to Marie Mulvey-Roberts (sole award holder)

"A History of Madness in Literature and Medicine during the 19th century", Leverhulme Research Fellowship, The Leverhulme Trust, 2000-1 (£11,256). "The Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton Project", Small Research Grant, The British Academy, 2001-2 (£2,400) and 2005-6 (£6,553). "The Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton Project", grant from the Knebworth House Educational and Preservation Trust, 2001-6 (£6,500).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)**Influencing public perceptions of imprisonment and capital punishment**

Marie Mulvey-Roberts has contributed to public discourse and perceptions of imprisonment and capital punishment. She was a member of the editorial board for the non-academic UK journal *Prison Writing* which published the work of prisoners. Mulvey-Roberts has organised and judged writing competitions for hundreds of prisoners in the UK and Ireland and on death row in the US and the Caribbean. Prisoners benefited by having a forum for complaint about abuses within the penal system and means of expressing their predicament through writing. Judges included Rt Hon. Michael Foot, Dr R.V. Bailey and poets U.A. Fanthorpe and Benjamin Zephaniah. These poets contributed poems to Mulvey-Roberts's *Writing for their Lives* which also included material from the writing competitions. Royalties continue to be donated to the charity Amicus, which helps train lawyers in capital defence by providing internships to the USA. Fanthorpe's contribution, "Death Row Poets", with its dedication to Mulvey-Roberts, appears on the English "A" level syllabus and was reprinted in the poet's 2010 collection, introduced by Poet Laureate, Carol Ann Duffy [1]. The importance of the book to the wider debate on capital punishment is expressed in the following statements in book reviews aimed at the general public: "Mulvey-Roberts . . . presents the viewpoint of the convicted and condemned...thus allowing the reader to grasp - accurately, forcefully, and often frighteningly - the plight, the grisly ritual, of the condemned, the executed, and the exonerated... Anyone seeking to make an informed, balanced decision on the issue should read this book... Essential"—*Choice*. "Nobody who reads this book will put it down unaffected... Mulvey-Roberts has drawn together an astonishing collection of writings and speeches which will shock, shake and warn." *Amicus Journal* (2008) [2]. In 2009, a reviewer for a Canadian law journal website recommended the book for "any penology classroom" insisting that without books like this

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the realities of death row “are likely not to surface within the public consciousness” [3]. In 2008, Mulvey-Roberts produced scripts for actors who gave performed readings from the book, which was nominated for an American human rights award. These were performed for the public at two Bristol venues, the Pierian Centre which hosts human rights events and Borders bookshop. Moazzam Begg, former Guantanamo Bay detainee, was the guest speaker.

Mulvey-Roberts introduced children from various local schools to prisoners’ writings from the book for an English GCSE master-class focusing on the death penalty in 2010. Many of her prisoner contributors have continued writing for the newsletter of LifeLines, an organisation whose members write to prisoners on death row. They have benefited from Mulvey-Roberts’s work in seeing their pen-friends’ work published and human rights issues publicised. Their founder Jan Arriens wrote the preface to *Writing for their Lives*. The empowerment and enthusiasm prisoners feel on seeing their work in print is summed up by contributor Hank Skinner (Texas death row) who wrote in his blog: “Buy this book! Promote it everywhere! Put it on Oprah! Tell the world!... Shout it in the streets!” As a result of his recommendations, Mulvey-Roberts was invited to speak in 2008 to Lifespark, an anti-death-penalty organisation in Switzerland. *Writing for their Lives* is currently cited on many death-penalty websites, and those associated with a number of condemned US prisoners [4-5].

Mulvey-Roberts’s death row books have provided crucial research for an original British radio drama *Washed by Tears* (2013) and take up half the list of “Useful Books” cited. Extracts from *Writing for their Lives* appear on the project’s web-site. Internet audiences are able to change the ending of the play by voting whether the death row protagonist is sane or insane [6]. Her book currently appears with only three others on the home page for *Justice Talking* “the public radio show about law and American life” [7]. The National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty website marks the anniversary of the publication of her book as an event in the chronology of the death penalty [8].

Mulvey-Roberts was invited to co-produce a forthcoming film on the death penalty and has visited and corresponded with her contributors on death row, some of whom have been killed. She has supported several in the run-up to execution which, as private letters from prisoners indicate, has been greatly appreciated. A testimonial documenting the emotional support the book has given a woman writing to a prisoner is on file [9].

Enabling public re-evaluation of the history of the Lyttons of Knebworth House

Mulvey-Roberts’s edition of Rosina Bulwer Lytton’s *Collected Letters* (reference [3] above) received a full page review in *The Times Literary Supplement* (2008), where it was described as “well edited” and making “an eloquent case for Rosina Bulwer Lytton transgressing public and private boundaries” [10]. Transcriptions of these letters were digitised for an electronic database and donated in 2009 to the Hertfordshire Archives and Local History centre, which houses many of the manuscript letters. The county archivist regarded this as positive impact as it has helped preserve the originals and provide easy public access to their content. Mulvey-Roberts encouraged the library to add to their Rosina Bulwer Lytton collection by purchasing additional material which she discovered. Her work prompted an extensive library cataloguing initiative of the Rosina Bulwer Lytton holdings. Mulvey-Roberts’s research on the family has been used by commercial writers such as Sarah Wise in her 2012 trade book on Victorian asylums [11].

After her case was publicised in newspapers, Rosina was freed from incarceration. This was because her husband, Edward who was a prominent politician, had her released to avoid further scandal. Mulvey-Roberts wrote about his Gothic writings informed by her research on a blog (April 2011) for the Gothic Imagination website, which is accessible to the public, having 7,000 unique visitors a year. Her work on the family is publicised in the annual Bulwer Lytton newsletter distributed throughout most countries by Edward’s descendent 2nd Earl of Lytton, Henry Lytton Cobbold. Mulvey-Roberts wrote the entry on Rosina Bulwer Lytton for the *Dictionary of National Biography* and section in the current guide book at Knebworth House, which has sold thousands of

copies thus demonstrating to visitors (including many on school trips) that there was more to Edward's supposedly "mad wife". Mulvey-Roberts initiated the provision of a gravestone for Rosina's unmarked grave, joining in a family service to mark the occasion on the anniversary of her death. This event is described on a discussion board for the blog Victorian Calendar "It was a dark and stormy marriage" started in June 2011 to which members of the public have responded. Until Mulvey-Roberts's research, Rosina's mother Anna Wheeler was unknown to the family. Now she is included in the permanent exhibition at Knebworth House, visited by well over half a million visitors during the past six years, where she is recognised as a pioneer of women's rights and co-author with William Thompson of *Appeal Against One Half the Human Race Women* (1825). As her co-authorship was largely unrecognised, Mulvey-Roberts with the politician Michael Foot edited an edition with her name on the cover for the very first time. Mulvey-Roberts located a first edition of the *Appeal* which Lord Cobbold purchased on her recommendation to display in a glass case. She enhanced the presence of these women in the exhibition by discovering additional artefacts which have subsequently been put on display. These include a lock of Edward's hair kept by Rosina and the rose he gave her during their courtship. Lord Cobbold sought her advice on identifying a possible portrait of Rosina. This was bought by the family at auction and is now on permanent display in Knebworth House which has been the recipient of the Sandford Award for excellence in heritage education since 2001. The family have recognised Mulvey-Roberts's contribution in highlighting the importance of these women by publicising her work on the Knebworth website and including her three paperback books on Anna Wheeler and Rosina Bulwer Lytton in the estate's book shop. She has increased public understanding of the importance of the current family's female ancestors who helped bring about changes benefitting women's lives today [12].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

-All available through UWE-

- [1] U.A. Fanthorpe, "Death Row Poets", *New and Collected Poems*, preface by Carol Ann Duffy (London: Enitharmon Press, 2010), p. 310.
- [2] Jon Yorke, book review of Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ed. *Writing for Their Lives: Death row USA*, *Amicus Journal* 19 (2008). <http://www.amicus-alj.org/CubeCore/uploads/Journals/AmicusJournalIssue19.pdf>, pp. 36-7.
- [3] Jennifer L. Schulenberg, book review of Marie Mulvey-Roberts, ed. *Writing for their Lives*, *Canadian Journal of Criminology and Criminal Justice* 51: 4 (2009). <http://www.ccja-acjp.ca/en/cjcr300/cjcr361.html>.
- [4] The Association of American University Presses cited *Writing for their Lives* in their selective list of "Books for Understanding Capital Punishment" (2010) [one of three books on their homepage] <http://www.booksforunderstanding.org/press/bfudeathpenalty.pdf>.
- [5] Cary Gee, "Love, life and death on Execution Row", *Tribune Magazine* (January 21st, 2009) <http://www.prisonetalk.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-391349.html>.
- [6] *Washed by Tears* (January 2013) Mastersound Productions <http://washedbytears.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/final-submission/>.
- [7] *Justice Talking*: The public radio show about law and American life <http://www.justicetalking.org/ShowPage.aspx?ShowID=628> (right-hand column).
- [8] "Today in Capital Punishment History" 2013, <http://64.209.230.125/todayInHistory.cfm#month10>.
- [9] Testimonial by a person who writes to a prisoner on Death Row in Florida, 24 June 2013. [1 on REF Portal]
- [10] Jonathan Keates, "A very Serpent", book review of *The Collected Letters of Rosina Bulwer Lytton*, ed. Marie Mulvey-Roberts, *Times Literary Supplement* (October 31 2008), p. 9.
- [11] Sarah Wise, *Inconvenient People: Lunacy, Liberty and the Mad-Doctors in Victorian England* (London: Bodley Head, 2012), pp. 425 and 443.
- [12] Testimonial by the person who runs Knebworth House, Hertfordshire, 3 July 2013. [2]