

Institution: University College London
Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Increasing readers' appreciation and understanding of English fiction
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study focuses on the impact of the research of one member of the UCL English Department, John Mullan. It describes the impact of his introduction of techniques of narrative analysis to the general reader and to secondary school teachers and students. This has involved making accessible to the general public an informed historical understanding of the development of English fiction, communicating techniques of critical reading that assist the appreciation of both canonical and contemporary novels. This has meant acting as a bridge between contemporary writers and readers, and communicating via print, radio and television the history of the genre. It has also meant delivering the benefits of a specialised critical vocabulary to teachers teaching fiction at secondary school level.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The underpinning research constitutes an enquiry into the development of the novel in English, and the relationship of contemporary literary fiction to the formal experiments of the leading British novelists of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This has been explored through four connected research projects.</p> <p>Mullan's 2006 book, <i>How Novels Work</i> [a], examined the forms and conventions of the novel in English. It analysed some of the central techniques of recent literary fiction, such as inadequate narrators, framing devices, and multiple narrators, in relation to the innovations of canonical fiction since the eighteenth century. The purpose of this comparison was to explore the deep historical roots of narrative techniques that might seem peculiar to fiction of the last few decades.</p> <p>In his 2007 book <i>Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature</i> [b], Mullan examined the motives for and uses of anonymity in literary texts from the sixteenth century to the present. Several chapters dealt with prose fiction, examining the importance of anonymity to authors such as Defoe, Burney, Scott, Austen, Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë. In these chapters he argued that, by disguising their identities, such novelists deliberately opened their narratives to interpretative uncertainty.</p> <p>Thirdly, Mullan's work on the novels of Jane Austen culminated in <i>What Matters in Jane Austen?</i> [c]. Addressed to both an academic audience and the general reader, this is an exploration of Austen's technical virtuosity that examines formal patterns and puzzles in her novels (from uses of the weather or blushing, to manipulation of point of view or the introduction of characters who are denied direct speech). It culminates in showing how experimental and innovative a novelist she was in comparison with contemporaries and predecessors, paying particular attention to her development of free indirect style.</p> <p>Finally, his impact also derives from research undertaken for his forthcoming volume of the <i>Oxford English Literary History: The Eighteenth Century, 1709–1784</i>. Divided between sections on 'Inheritance' and 'Innovations', this academic study pays close attention to the development of genres new to the period. A lengthy introductory section concentrates on the development of the commerce for books in the eighteenth century, and the growth of the novel as one aspect of this.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>[a] <i>How Novels Work</i> (Oxford University Press, 2006), available on request.</p> <p>[b] <i>Anonymity: A Secret History of English Literature</i> (Faber and Faber, 2007), available on request. This book was the product of research funded by a Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship (2003–5).</p> <p>[c] <i>What Matters in Jane Austen?</i> (Bloomsbury, 2012), submitted to REF 2014.</p> <p>[d] Daniel Defoe, <i>A Journal of the Plague Year</i> (Pickering & Chatto, 2009), submitted to REF 2014.</p> <p><u>Key research grant:</u></p>

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Leverhulme Trust Major Research Fellowship (Ref F07134AB), October 2003 to September 2005, total value c. £70,000. Led to [b] above.

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

John Mullan's research has introduced a vast national and international public to new ways of reading and understanding the novel. This has been achieved through large-scale media and public engagement activities that have reached a wide range and large number of beneficiaries, engaging a substantial sub-set intensively through the long-running Guardian Book Club. He has also provided secondary school teachers with professional training based on his research expertise, and developed reusable educational resources in the form of recorded talks for sixth-form students and teachers, made available through the British Library.

These activities have brought to a large audience beyond academia an expanded literary critical vocabulary, and a means of appreciating the ways in which literary history can illuminate present habits of reading. Mullan's research has focused on 'how novels work', to use his own title, highlighting aspects of the craft of fiction that often go unnoticed; his media work has then made available his understanding of the novelist's craft to a large constituency of readers. The *reach* of the impact of Mullan's research is demonstrated by the examples which follow.

Public engagement with literary history and criticism

Mullan's influential analysis of the elements of literary fiction, *How Novels Work* [a] was first published in 2006; the paperback edition sold more than 12,000 copies between 2008 and 2013 [1]. This book led to the making of *Twelve of the Best*, an hour-long BBC2 programme about the state of British fiction that he scripted and presented in 2011. This was screened on World Book Day (3 March 2011) with 783,000 viewers [2]. The programme focused on 12 first-time novelists, chosen by a panel of critics and writers chaired by Mullan himself. This followed on the heels of a 2,000-word feature by Mullan in *The Guardian*, in which he wrote about the choice of writers and the recent development of British literary fiction, which attracted 102 comments from readers [3]. The programme brought to public attention some lesser-known novelists, four of whom were later long-listed for the Man Booker Prize.

Mullan's research into the eighteenth-century novel for *Anonymity* [b] and for his edition of Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* [d], as well as his ongoing research for his forthcoming volume of the *Oxford English Literary History, The Eighteenth Century, 1709–1784*, largely informed 'How Reading Made Us Modern', a 60-minute programme for BBC 4 that he scripted and presented. This described how reading and how literary production (including printing, publishing, and the circulating of books) changed during the eighteenth century. It described the eighteenth-century invention of a reading public, and the emergence of new genres such as periodical journalism and the novel. It was broadcast in February 2009 (and repeated 3 times) in a BBC season on reading.

In November/December 2011, he composed and presented a series of five half-hour programmes on comic writing for Radio 4's *Open Book*. Following a chronological progression, these explored the continuities between comedy in Chaucer or Elizabethan drama, on the one hand, and the British comic novel since the eighteenth century, on the other. He determined the texts and established the themes and readings for all of the programmes, each of which involved discussion with a notable enthusiast for the comedy of the period (for instance Terry Jones on Chaucer, Jenny Uglow on Fielding).

Other media activities included:

- For BBC2's the *Culture Show*, features on the novelists Alan Hollinghurst (May 2011) and A. S. Byatt (July 2011).
- Frequent appearances as a panellist on BBC 2's *Newsnight Review* and (since 2009) BBC2's *Review Show* (on topics such as the Man Booker Shortlist of 2010 and 2012).
- Further appearances on *Open Book*, including for discussions of Sibling Rivalry in Fiction, December 2010, and Funerals in Fiction, July 2012.
- Appearances on Radio 4's *Today* programme, including for discussions of George Orwell's *1984*, the role of the Booker Prize, and the history of literary anonymity.

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The *significance* of Mullan's research is demonstrated by the popularity of the Guardian Book Club, a weekly *Guardian* column on contemporary fiction that he has written since June 2002. This addresses the needs of the growing constituency of readers interested in the analysis of literary fiction, to whom it makes available a specialised critical vocabulary, and the tools for analysis that Mullan developed in his research. The column examines a recent novel, focusing on particular formal and technical features. It uses parallels with fiction of previous centuries to show that narrative devices have a history, and that contemporary novelists learn from earlier writers.

The success and longevity of the Guardian Book Club illustrates both the impact of Mullan's research, and the growing interest of non-academic readers in sophisticated analysis of literary fiction of the kind that he provides. The depth of the engagement of readers with this research is demonstrated by the Book Club blog, where readers reply to the discussions and to the arguments presented in Mullan's weekly columns. These articles often engender a significant amount of debate: a typical example would be a December 2012 piece on Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* which received 40 comments, while a recent column on Zadie Smith's *NW* attracted more than 50 comments, was shared on Facebook by 219 people, and tweeted 93 times [4].

From 2008–13 Mullan's column was linked to a monthly interview that he conducted with a leading novelist before a paying audience of up to 500 people. Over 7,000 readers are signed up to *The Guardian* newsletter established to publicise these events. During the REF period more than 60 events were held, many of which were sold out: Ian McEwan, Margaret Atwood and Zadie Smith all filled venues of more than 400 people. So far over 15,000 people have attended Mullan's interviews with novelists, for which tickets are £9–£12. Other interviewees have included Salman Rushdie, Martin Amis, Hilary Mantel, Philip Pullman, Jonathan Franzen, Brett Easton Ellis and Richard Ford. At these live events the novelists respond to Mullan's column, and afterwards contribute a matching column, offering their own account of the construction of the novel in question.

The Guardian Book Club archive has made all interviews since 2008 available as podcasts, expanding the reach of this impact. The Guardian Books podcast, which includes the Book Club, has 362,000 followers on SoundCloud. There have been c. 40,000 iTunes downloads [5].

Mullan's Guardian Book Club feature on Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* was read by members of the Nobel Organisation, who then commissioned him to undertake a filmed interview with Doris Lessing that has been available since 2009 on the Nobel Prize website.

Public engagement with the works of Jane Austen

Between its release in 2012 and 31 July 2013, *What Matters in Jane Austen?* [c] sold, in the UK alone, 8,000 copies in hardback and 17,000 copies in paperback and Kindle. Mullan wrote a 4,500-word article on Jane Austen in *The Guardian* in May 2012 that generated significant interest in the book's research. On publication it was widely covered in both broadsheet and tabloid papers, garnering laudatory reviews in *The Lady*, *The Guardian* (net and print readership of 2,211,000), *The Independent* (net and print readership of 743,000), *The Telegraph* (net and print readership of 2,106,000), and the *Daily Mail* (net and print readership of 6,062,000) [6].

In the wake of its publication Mullan gave lectures on his Jane Austen research at literary festivals in Hay-on-Wye, Edinburgh, Cheltenham (the Annual Cheltenham Lecture), Dartington, Sheffield, Keswick, Cambridge, Buxton and Bath.

He also strengthened an ongoing engagement with the Jane Austen Society in the UK, giving invited lectures at its meetings in London, York, Kent and Hampshire, all on topics based on the research that informed *What Matters in Jane Austen?* His engagement with Jane Austen societies also extends overseas: in September 2009 he was the guest lecturer at the annual general meeting of the world's largest and most influential Jane Austen Society, the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA), in Philadelphia. His talk was entitled 'Sisterly Chat' and was based on the research for a chapter ('Do Sisters Sleep Together?') of *What Matters in Jane Austen?* He was then invited to deliver the plenary lecture at the JASNA annual general meeting in Minneapolis in September 2013.

Mullan's research made an important contribution to the bicentenary celebrations of the publication of *Pride and Prejudice* in 2013. Prominent in this was his role as a consultant and interviewee for

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'Pride and Prejudice: Having a Ball', BBC 2's restaging of the Netherfield Ball in *Pride and Prejudice*, transmitted 10 May 2013 to 1.6m viewers [7]. His role was to keep the reconstruction true to the narrative uses of balls and of dancing in Jane Austen's writing, and to insert into the programme a commentary on *Pride and Prejudice*. The programme was widely discussed in Jane Austen blogs, and on Jane Austen message boards [8].

In addition, in January 2013, he presented a feature on *Pride and Prejudice* for BBC 2's *Culture Show*. He was interviewed about the novel on Radio 4's *Today* programme, and was a panel member for discussion of its impact on Radio 4's *Open Book* and on Radio 3's *Nightwaves*. Prior to this, Mullan was interviewed about Jane Austen's 'Sanditon' for *Unfinished Masterpieces*, BBC2 (November 2011), and contributed to *The Many Lovers of Miss Austen*, BBC 2 (December 2011), on the history of Jane Austen's reputation.

Outreach to schools and impacts on secondary education

Another aspect of the impact of this research derives from the ideas and guidance he has provided to secondary school teachers in their efforts to help pupils appreciate the formal features and patterns of narrative fiction. For instance, in February 2008 *How Novels Work* led to an invitation to speak on contemporary fiction at a day conference for secondary school teachers given by the Prince's Teaching Institute at RIBA, London [9]. 23 teachers attended this event, which impacted 2,070 students, with one delegate commenting: 'The talk by John Mullan in particular really provided me with some useful ways into texts. Excellent food for thought'.

The *significance* of this impact is demonstrated by the fact that the positive reception of these lectures led to an ongoing engagement with the Institute: in November 2008 he was again guest lecturer at a residential course for teachers at Crewe Hall, Cheshire. 40 teachers attended this event, which impacted approximately 3,600 pupils. Delegate evaluation results from the 3-day course showed that 100% agreed that they had 'found attending the Summer School a valuable experience,' while 93% agreed that they had 'come out of this experience reinvigorated and more excited about teaching and the teaching profession'. 96% believed 'that within six months this approach will be having an impact on my pupils'. He lectured again on contemporary fiction in July 2009 to a Prince's Teaching Institute day conference, and has been invited to speak again at another conference for teachers in January 2014.

Mullan also provided filmed talks on Dickens, presented at the Dickens House Museum in London, for the British Library. Aimed at teachers and sixth formers studying Dickens at A level, they are available via the British Library website [10].

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

[1] Sales figures for *How Novels Work* provided by the Commissioning Editor, Literature, Oxford University Press.

[2] Viewing figures provided by Producer of BBC's *Culture Show*.

[3] 'Twelve of the Best New Novelists', *The Guardian*, 26/2/11 (print), and 25/2/11 (online) (<http://bit.ly/1enbkzf>).

[4] Example of the Guardian Book Club: Hilary Mantel (7/12/12) <http://bit.ly/1cUGf26>.

[5] Attendance, download, and reader figures were provided by the Guardian Review.

[6] Media reviews included: *The Lady*, Friday 20/7/12 (<http://bit.ly/1dP7ImR>); *The Guardian*, Friday 15/6/12 (<http://bit.ly/17OhaFR>); *The Independent*, 10/2/13 (<http://ind.pn/1iOfOMU>); *The Telegraph*, Thursday 7/6/12 (<http://bit.ly/HyVsLS>); *The Daily Mail*, 22/6/12, (<http://dailym.ai/16l0clC>). Data for online and print reader available at <http://www.nrs.co.uk/nrs-data-tables/>.

[7] Viewing figures provided by Producer at Optomen productions.

[8] Examples of online discussion of the Netherfield Ball: <http://bit.ly/19Fmpls>.

[9] All data provided by Schools Leadership Programme and Schools Programme Manager, at the Prince's Teaching Institute.

[10] British Library Dickens resource: <http://www.bl.uk/learning/langlit/dickens/dickenshome.html>.