

Title of case study: Spectral Visions: Engaging the public with Gothic Literature.

1. Summary of the impact

This impact emerges from the Sunderland English team's longstanding reputation for civic engagement. Research for this was initiated by North East Irish Culture Network (NEICN), and the Spectral Visions project developed in response to demand from local schools, colleges (AQA syllabus) and the wider community. The impact includes educational benefits to non-university students whose grades were enhanced due to the research disseminated. Follow-up educational packs were circulated to interested schools and have been used to augment pre-university work on Gothic literature and culture. Several attending colleges have been inspired to set up a network for Gothic studies.

2. Underpinning research

The Sunderland English team's longstanding civic engagement is most publicly and productively found in the research that underpins this case study, as initiated by the North East Irish Culture Network (NEICN) which fosters collaborative and interdisciplinary investigation leading to knowledge exchange and public engagement. The Spectral Visions project developed from the team's developing research interests in the Gothic, and in response to demand from local schools, colleges (AQA syllabus) and the wider community. The international success of contemporary vampire books and films in the 21st century aimed particularly at teen audiences, shows how pertinent academic research of this genre now is.

A.Younger has a scholarly interest in the genre of Gothic and its manifestations as a popular cultural form in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This has resulted in the publication of articles in the field, the most recent of which are on Dion Boucicault and Sean de Burca, (see 3.5), Monster Theory (see 3.3) and Robert Louis Stevenson's Gothic short stories (see 3.4). Her interest in this field and in popular culture and its impact on cultural identity arose from her role as Co-Director of a Leverhulme project (2008-11): 'Consumer Culture, Advertising and Literature in Ireland: 1848–1921'. Her specific remit here (to investigate popular cultural forms) resulted in her publishing articles on areas such as freak shows, peep shows and melodrama (eg 3.3) and led directly to the development of Spectral Visions.

As a result of cognate research interests in the field of Gothic abhumanity and the abject, A.Younger has been working closely with Mandala and C.Younger to develop the Spectral Visions initiative, which was originally designed in response to requests from schools and colleges to aid them in the delivery of the Gothic strand of the AQA syllabus.

Mandala's research on the intersection of language, the abhuman and the monstrous has resulted in the publication of several scholarly articles (see 3.1 and 3.2).

C.Younger's research into the Supernatural Ballads, and the Gothic works of James Hogg and Walter Scott through the lens of liminality and regional identities has resulted in the publication of an edited volume which includes research on the Gothic Borderland, and the connections and dislocations therein (see 3.6).

3. References to the research

3.1. Mandala, S. (2006) 'Solidarity and the Scoobies: An Analysis of the –y Suffix in the Television Series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*', *Language and Literature* (16 [1]: 53-73.

3.2. Mandala, S. 'Star Trek Voyager's *Seven of Nine*: A Case Study of Language and Character in a Televisual Text'. Piazza, R. *et al.* 2011 [eds.]. *Telecinematic Discourse: Approaches to the Language of Films and Television Series*. Pragmatics and Beyond New Series. John Benjamins, Amsterdam ; Philadelphia, pp. 205-223.

3.3. Younger, A. 'A Parliament of Monsters: Commodity Spectacle in Nineteenth Century Popular Entertainment', in *Ireland in Drama, Film and Popular Culture*. Eds. Julia Novak, Sandra Mayer and M.Rubik. (Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2012, pp. 119-29).

3.4. Younger, Alison (2013) 'Doctors and Devils: Diagnosing Racial Degeneracy in Stevenson's Gothic Fiction.' In A. Younger and W. Maley (eds) *Celtic Connections: Irish-Scottish Relations and the Politics of Culture. Reimagining Ireland* (38). Peter Lang

International Academic Publishers, Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New

York, Wien, pp. 61-88. ISBN 978-3-0343-0214-2

3.5. Younger, A. 'Morbid Anatomy: De'crypt'ing the Monstrous: Burke and Hare' in *Border Crossings: Narration, Nation and Imagination in Scots and Irish Literature and Culture*. Ed. Colin Younger, Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013 pp. 186-214.

3.6. Younger, C. (ed.) *Border Crossings*, Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013.

Grants.

The Leverhulme Trust: Consumer Culture, Advertising and Literature in Ireland: 1848-1921. (2008-2011). Value £258,000. This hosted a series of public readings, exhibitions and events beyond the academic community.

HEFCE Research Development Funding: Between 2007 and 2009 Alison Younger was the recipient of three separate research awards: Values: £11,911, £23,399, £12,200.

4. Details of the impact

The Spectral Visions initiative was originally designed in response to requests from schools and colleges to aid them in the delivery of the Gothic strand of the AQA syllabus. The decision was made to host a free, one-day event in June 2012 for around 100 people: in the end, 370 people (tutors, A-level students and members of the general public) attended. The purpose was to deliver workshops and papers based on the team's research strengths in order to make a direct contribution to professional development and practice among teachers and tutors outside academia. In 2013, the event attracted around 500 people (again, teachers, A-level students and members of the public). A significant number of responses were received which indicate the impact this research has had, not only on those present, (see 5.8) but also on intermediaries such as the wider community in the north and beyond. In exploiting the collaborative research strengths, diverse strategies have been encouraged which enhance public understanding of the Gothic, including broadcast and internet dissemination, publishing ventures, readings, performances and conventional lectures (see 5.8). Engaging the public thus with the research underpinning Spectral Visions offers demonstrable benefits to the wider economy and society (see 5.6).

The impact of these events is primarily cultural in that they: enrich public appreciation of the 'Gothic' as a cultural form; enhance the role of academic research to strengthen links and consensus between the wider community and the academic community. Specifically in a school setting, they: enable teachers to review and improve the way 'Gothic' is integrated as a topic in their teaching; enhance engagement with Gothic texts, and boost A-level grades (see 5.4); improve teaching methods, particularly by demonstrating the effectiveness of embedding language and literacy in work related to the Gothic; work in a consultancy role to advise teachers on how to create a 'Gothic Collective' and share good practice among schools (see 5.3, 5.7).

The events received numerous press acknowledgements in various publications including the regional press and websites (see 5.1). Resources from the events have been viewed on YouTube and the neicn.com website (see 5.2 and 5.8). Cultural benefits are not in themselves quantifiable, but the events, directly and indirectly, reached a large section of the public. These benefits include:

- new markets/audiences such as the schools, colleges and wider public attending the events (5.8);
- new networks/relationships such as the teaching cooperative inspired and facilitated by the Spectral Visions team (see 5.3);
- new collaborations (eg setting up the 'Gothic Collective', a student mentoring system between Sunderland University and Prior Pursglove College – see 5.7).

Both of these events were a direct result of the team's research and the research undertaken by post-graduate students to inform their individual workshops. Their published work and other activities led to developing the contacts with schools and colleges. The interpretation of Gothic texts in schools and colleges in the areas of Regionalism and Monster Theory is in a large part a direct result of the contours of the Spectral Visions team's achievement, worked out in their primary research. Collaboratively and jointly, the underpinning research has had a transformative effect on the burgeoning area of Gothic studies in numerous schools and

colleges across the north of England, and, due to the high visibility of the 'Spectral Visions' project, has inspired an increased interest in Gothic studies in the general public. The team's publications and other activities mean that they are emerging as recognised authorities worldwide (see 5.1; 5.2 and 5.8).

Key researchers:

Susan Mandala: Senior Lecturer in Literary Stylistics

Alison Younger: Senior Lecturer in English, NEICN co-director

Colin Younger: Lecturer in English and Creative Writing, NEICN manager

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Spectral Visions was discussed enthusiastically in the press, including the Sunderland Echo of

27/06/2012 <http://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/education/gothic-scholars-host-ghoulish-gathering-in-sunderland-1-4682301> and

23/05/2013 <http://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/education/sunderland-university-hosts-gothic-conference-1-5698432>

5.2 For 'Spectral Visions: The Revenge' (2013) Introduction and the lectures given by Prof John Strachan and Dr Alison Younger see: <http://neicn.com/conference2013gothic.html>

5.3 Head of English, Prior Pursglove College REDACTED

Email sent to Schools & Colleges attending SVII

Subject: Spectral Visions collaboration

After the overwhelming success of the 'Spectral Visions: The Revenge' conference, our department would like to build upon it and develop links with other schools and colleges teaching Gothic literature (AQA English Literature B).

We currently have over 60 students progressing on to the A2 course and would like to collaborate with other institutions to develop our provision, share good practice, and ultimately improve student outcomes. We have so far attended both conferences with our students and have found them tremendously useful in introducing students to the genre and in some cases, improving student retention. We would really like to build on this and develop our delivery of the course with you and with the support of the University of Sunderland we think that this is the perfect opportunity to do so.

As a sixth form college, we are building links with other NORVIC centres that teach this specification and believe that such sharing of ideas and resources across the different academic institutions (e.g. sixth forms, FE colleges, academies, secondary schools with sixth forms etc) that attended the conference would be a tremendous benefit to us all.

At this point, we haven't worked out the logistics of such a collaborative venture, but we believe that the idea is worth investigating, and so at this point would like to offer our support to you and ask if any of you would like to be involved in such a venture? Currently we are looking at focusing on A2 English Literature, in particular LITB3, but envisage this extending to AS level and indeed AS and A2 English Language (we currently teach AQA B).

If any of you would like to work with us and establish such a group then we would love to hear from you. Any suggestions would be much appreciated at this point.

Thanks,

Prior Pursglove College

5.4 Former Head of English, Northallerton College.

Email sent to Colin Younger

We've attended for 2 years with our AS level class who have to produce a comparative essay on 3 texts of their choice so we steer them towards Gothic. SV has been invaluable to us as it provides context and literary criticism which are both assessed in the essay.

The day last year was inspirational and we actually achieved record A grades for the c/w on the Gothic which we are hoping will produce record A/A*s for our college.

As I am leaving in July it may be more beneficial for you to contact my replacement

REDACTED

All the best for the future and keep up the great work!

5.6 Project Management - PRINCE2 (High Security & Govmnt)

E-mail: REDACTED

Email sent to Colin Younger

Just a quick note to firstly thank you for inviting me along to the Spectral Visions Conference recently in a photographic capacity and secondly for asking me to be involved creatively in a minor capacity regarding the cover of "Border Crossings".

I found the conference very enlightening and it opened my eyes to an area of literature and aspects of it that I had not fully appreciated previously. The lectures given by the notable guests, I found to be extremely interesting and absorbing to the extent that I nearly forgot to take my photos. In fact it motivated me to re-purchase two novels I first read when in my teens and am now enjoying again on another level, those being Mary Shelley's Frankenstein and Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.

Besides that I so enjoyed the experience of covering the event from a photography perspective that it finally made my mind up to turn my amateur interest into a commercial business now listed as 'PhotoHumph'.

I look forward to more events in the future and would ask that you keep me informed of such please.

Snr Project Manager EngD, MSc

5.7 Head of English, Sunderland College REDACTED

Email sent to Colin Younger

On behalf of the staff and students of Sunderland College I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone involved in the Spectral Visions extravaganza. As was expected, it was a success from start to finish!

From a professional point of view I was able to communicate effectively with other A Level specialists and despite already having strong links with South Tyneside College I have been able to initiate a possible student mentoring scheme with Dean MacDonald from Prior Purslove College.

Many thanks for this opportunity and we can't wait for next year

5.8 For further corroborating comments and photographic evidence of the Spectral Visions conferences please see: <http://neicn.com/spectralvisions.html>