

Institution: University of Sussex

Unit of Assessment: UoA 29 English

Title of case study: Transforming the teaching of literary theory with creativity in higher education, allowing students globally to engage with it in new ways

1. Summary of the impact

This study details the impact of Nicholas Royle's research on the teaching of literary theory and creativity in HEIs and beyond. Royle co-authored the textbook *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory (ILCT)* with Andrew Bennett (Bristol). The book has achieved significant international reach, changing the way in which literary theory is taught in HEIs. Central to this project is a concern with how literary theory can be taught creatively and with new ways of linking theory and creative writing in the academy and beyond, approaches furthered by Royle's development of Quick Fictions events and a web-based app with Myriad Editions.

2. Underpinning research

Since being appointed as Professor at Sussex in 1999, Royle has published seven books, three of which, *The Uncanny* (2003) [see Section 3, R1], *Quilt* (written 2005–09) [R2] and *Veering: A Theory of Literature* (written 2004–10) [R3], directly underpin the impact of the 2009 edition of *ILCT*. Running through all this material is a concern with the ways in which literary theory and creativity belong together. Royle's study *The Uncanny* is about 'a crisis of the natural'. It is not just a theory of what is unsettling, distinctive or strange about literature, but a performative investigation of how critical writing can be haunted and inspired by the creative, and *vice versa*. The 'Creative Writing' chapter in *ILCT* (added 2004) is a condensed account of the critical and creative writing practice that is most expansively articulated in *Veering* and is developed in the 2009 edition of *ILCT*. *Veering* explores distinctions between creative and critical writing, interweaving Royle's own quick fictions (e.g. 'Today the Dentist's' and 'The Slide') with critical discourse. *Veering* is concerned with questions of the environment and eco-criticism (the word 'environment' has *veering*, the French *vireur*, at its heart) and animals. The book shows how 'creative writing is not simply opposed to critical writing' (*ILCT*): despite tensions and conflicts, it is a symbiotic relationship. The concerns of *Veering* in the context of the environment (climate change, human waywardness, the end of 'nature') directly feed into the 'Eco' chapter of *ILCT* (added 2009), while the thinking behind the novel *Quilt*, which explores human bereavement through different life forms, directly feeds into the 'Animals' chapter of *ILCT* (added 2009).

Challenging a widespread view that the end of the 1990s marked the end of 'theory' in the academy and that, in a seemingly discrete development, 'creative writing' has flourished in its wake, Royle's research shows that creativity and linguistic inventiveness are at the heart of both. The phrase 'reality literature' (the title of the Critical Afterword to *Quilt*) encapsulates a new conception of writing, moving beyond the traditional distinctions between the creative and the critical as well as beyond conventional forms of realism and 'the real'. Royle argues that the future of creative writing is inseparable from the legacies of theory, an insight that has led Royle to develop what he calls 'quick fiction', alongside his more formal academic work [R4]. 'Quick fiction' entails something living and fictive, theoretically inflected and creative at the same time.

Quilt and *Veering* have been recognised as exhibiting creative and critical practice in innovative ways: *Quilt* has been called 'a stirring manifesto addressing the future of the novel itself' [R5]; *Veering* as a 'brilliantly provocative ... literary theory that emerges from the kinetic activities of the literary text, rather than a model to be imposed on it' [R6]. Quick Fictions has extended this work, using technology to create a new vehicle for theoretically informed ways of perceiving the world.

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research

Academic research outputs:

- R1** Royle, N. (2003) *The Uncanny*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- R2** Royle, N. (2010) *Quilt*. Brighton: Myriad Editions.
- R3** Royle, N. (2011) *Veering: A Theory of Literature*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- R4** Royle, N. (2013) 'Reader's Block', *Times Higher Education*, 28 March–3 April, 46–9.

Reviews:

- R5** Black, P. (2010) *Booksquawk*: <http://www.booksquawk.com/2010/08/quilt.html>
- R6** Jordan, J. (2012) 'Turn again – a review of *Veering*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 July.

Outputs can be supplied by the University on request.

4. Details of the impact

Impact is through the textbook *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory (ILCT)*, which has been available throughout the REF period (editions in 1999, 2004, 2009). The 2009 *ILCT* edition is over half as long again as the original edition (378 to 238 pages) as a result of new chapters, revisions and updating. The reach and influence on teaching, achieved by Bennett and Royle's textbook [see Section 5, C1], is demonstrated by its extensive use in HEIs and through reviews and comments by those who use it in teaching and learning. The development of the Quick Fictions (*QF*) public readings and web-based app builds on the approach to creativity espoused in *ILCT*, to extend impacts through events and interactivity.

In linking theory and creativity, *ILCT* has changed the form and content of literary-theory teaching in Higher Education worldwide, demonstrated by its presence on reading lists at over 100 HEIs, including Oxford, where it is compulsory for 350 English students annually. *ILCT* is used as a textbook in a range of disciplines – e.g. Classics, Modern Languages and Cultural Studies – as well as English. External reviews [C2] attest to *ILCT*'s impact on teaching. J. Hillis Miller describes the 2009 edition thus:

This unmatched book is for everyone: from those beginning literary study, through advanced students, and up to teachers.

Derek Attridge comments:

Bennett and Royle directly involves the reader in the problems and pleasures of thinking about literature.

Teachers have commented on its success in the classroom. Peggy Kamuf writes:

[*ILCT*] enables students to understand both the critical aspects of fiction or poetry and the creative, poetic aspects of critical discourse.

While Julian Patrick states:

[*ILCT*] alone among all the North American books in this field successfully introduces students to the truly creative reinvigoration of literary studies that the 'theory revolution' has inspired.

Impact case study (REF3b)

ILCT makes theory accessible by avoiding the familiar schools-based focus (structuralism, poststructuralism, feminism, etc.), presenting critical concepts through readings and creative exploration of individual literary texts. Comments from students demonstrate the effect the book had on their studies – e.g.

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 [C3].

Another writes:

Bennett and Royle's book ... [helped me to] understand complex theories ... the breadth of the content allowed me to open up my own ideas and arguments ... you become a critic yourself, creating an individual and original response' [C4].

The reach of *ILCT*'s 2009 edition is evidenced by its sales figures, selling over 25,000 copies in 41 countries. Worldwide sales of all editions totalled 78,555 as of July 2013 [C5] and the book has been translated into Chinese (2007), Farsi (2008) and Arabic (2012). The Chinese translation has sold 4,067 copies [C6]. A separately licensed Indian edition was published in 2008. A Polish translation will appear in 2015.

A 2008 *THE* article by Penny Hancock on teaching creative writing in higher education singles out Royle's innovative pedagogic practices in combining creative and critical writing [C7]. *QF* extends the work of *ILCT* in the field of creative writing. This started as a bi-annual public event at Sussex, where students and writers could develop crafted, theoretically informed but short (up to 300 words) pieces of fiction. Committed from the beginning to involving the wider community, Royle collaborated with local publisher Myriad Editions to expand the reach of this project. From 2010, the finest quick fictions were showcased on the Myriad website. In September 2012, *QF* was launched at the Brighton Digital Festival as an app. In this joint venture with Sussex, Myriad and Aimer Media, *QF* has used new technology to transform how theory and creative writing interact beyond the academy. Prefiguring the 2013 Man Booker judges' espousal of the art of 'crafting spare, philosophical and original works, however short' [C8], *QF* is a meticulously curated app with a significant number of quality writers from the UK and beyond (including Hélène Cixous, Alison Moore, Adam Roberts, Peter Manson, Scarlett Thomas, George Szirtes and Rebecca Giggs). It is leading the way as an innovative, high-quality forum for this new kind of writing with global ambition. In Version 1.4, it was celebrated as 'a nifty idea' in the *Guardian* (5 July 2012), welcomed in *The Literary Platform* and *Educreator*, voted one of the top ten in the *Sunday Times* best 500 apps (2013) and ranked No. 5 in the UK's best-paid-app chart [C9]. Sales to 31 July 2013 totalled 4,327.

Royle's synthesis of creative and critical work has improved the teaching and learning of literary theory and brought this to a new audience through novel aspects of creative output.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

C1 Bennett, A. and Royle, N. (2009) *An Introduction to Literary Criticism and Theory: Key Critical Concepts*. London: Prentice Hall.

C2 External reviews:

- UCI Distinguished Research Professor of Comparative Literature and English at the University of California, Irvine.
- Professor of English and Related Literature, University of York.
- Marion Frances Chevalier Professor of French and Professor of Comparative Literature,

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University of Southern California;

- Professor of English, University of Toronto.

C3 Student Review (2010) 'An introduction to literature, criticism and theory', *Times Higher Education*, 25 February.

C4 Customer Review, [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk/product-reviews/1405859148/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_btm?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending), 2 June 2012: http://www.amazon.co.uk/product-reviews/1405859148/ref=cm_cr_dp_see_all_btm?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1&sortBy=bySubmissionDateDescending

C5 Royalty Report, Pearson Education Ltd

C6 Royalty Report, Guangxi Normal University Press

C7 Hancock, P. (2008) 'Novel thinking', *Times Higher Education*, 10 July:
<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/novel-thinking/402673.article>

C8 <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/news/lydia-davis-wins-man-booker-international-prize-2013>

C9 <http://www.myriadeditions.com/quickfictions>