

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Swansea University
Unit of Assessment: 28a - Modern Languages and Linguistics
Title of case study: Mrs Peabody Investigates: Enhancing Public Understanding of German, European and International Crime Fiction
1. Summary of the impact

Dr Katharina Hall's blog [Mrs Peabody Investigates](http://mrspeabodyinvestigates.wordpress.com/) (<http://mrspeabodyinvestigates.wordpress.com/>; henceforth MPI) has been fostering public debate on German, European and international crime fiction since January 2011. Beneficiaries include readers, authors, translators, publishers, critics and bloggers in 130 countries. With over 220,000 hits and 2,500 comments, MPI has been featured on BBC Radio 4 and is linked to by BBC Online, crime blogs, and publisher/author websites (C10). Providing a distinctive service of academically-informed reviews of high-quality crime fiction, MPI is regarded in the industry as 'a ground-breaking blog that is transforming readers' understanding and appreciation of international crime' (*The Times* crime-fiction critic).

2. Underpinning research

The underpinning research is Dr Hall's current research project, '**Detecting the Past: Representations of National Socialism and its Legacies in Transnational Crime Fiction**', which emerged from work on Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (*The Reader*) in 2006 (see Section 3, **R1** and **R2**). The project comprises the first large-scale, comparative analysis of representations of National Socialism in post-1945 transnational crime fiction, including adaptations for television and film. Thus far, over **150** primary texts of 'Nazi-themed crime fiction' have been identified from over **25** countries (**R3**).

The project investigates three main aspects of **Nazi-themed crime fiction**: the texts' conceptualisations of history, memory, guilt and justice in the context of the dominant historical, political and cultural discourses of the post-war era; the ways in which texts seek to shape public perceptions of the Nazi era through the manipulation of generic conventions and claims to historical authenticity; and the cross-cultural traffic between German- and English-language texts and films. This research is highly interdisciplinary, with recent outputs in 2012 and 2013 examining representations of occupied Germany and German wartime suffering (**R4**); the intersections between Nazi-themed crime fiction and historiographical movements such as *Alltagsgeschichte* (**R4**); and representations of Nazi policing and the 'Nazi detective' since the 1990s (**R5**).

Dr Hall is also currently researching the emerging subgenre of '**European**' crime fiction thematising European identity, history, politics and policing. She gave a paper entitled 'Mapping European Crime Fiction since 1989' at Manchester Metropolitan University in April 2012, and submitted a Collaborative Research Project bid to HERA in May 2012 (referencing this impact case study), with colleagues from the UK, Ireland, Belgium and Sweden: Cardiff University's *Crime Narratives in Context* network; the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence at MMU; Cork and Lund Universities.

Dr Hall is Associate Professor of German in the Department of Languages, Translation and Communication (LTC) at Swansea University. Her research on transnational crime (2006 to the present) dovetails productively with work by other LTC colleagues (Dunnett (deceased October 2013) on crime fiction under Mussolini; Preece on 68er crime) and has been supported by Swansea University's Research Institute for Arts and Humanities as follows: funding to give keynote address at the academic crime-writing conference 'States of Crime: The State in Crime Fiction', Queen's University Belfast, June 2011; funding to interview crime authors and make contacts in the crime-writing community (Harrogate Crime Writing Festival 2012 and Bristol CrimeFest 2013; the former led to involvement in Mark Lawson's Radio 4 'Foreign Bodies' series); research grant to carry out archival research on East German crime fiction in Berlin (2012); research leave for monograph (January 2014).

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Dr Hall's outputs include a series of papers, articles and an online database (see below). Future outputs include an edited volume, *Crime Fiction in German* (European Crime Fiction Series, University of Wales Press), and the *Detecting the Past* monograph.

3. References to the research**R1. Katharina Hall, 'The Author, the Novel, the Reader and the Perils of *Neue Lesbarkeit*.'**

A Comparative Analysis of Bernhard Schlink's [crime novel] *Selbs Justiz* and *Der Vorleser*, *German Life and Letters*, 59/3 (2006), 72-88.

- DOI: 10.1111/j.0016-8777.2006.00360.x
- URL: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.0016-8777.2006.00360.x/abstract>

Quality: *GLL* is a refereed journal (two readers' reports). Submitted to RAE2008.

R2. Katharina Hall, 'Text Crimes in the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Case of Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser/The Reader*', in *German Text Crimes: Writers Accused, from the 1950s to the 2000s*, ed. Tom Cheesman (*German Monitor* 77) (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2013), 193-208.

- URL: see <http://www.rodopi.nl/senj.asp?BookId=GM+77>

Quality: two readers' reports. Article awarded 2 stars in internal/external research audits at Swansea University.

R3. Katharina Hall, 'Detecting the Past' Nazi-themed Crime Fiction Database.

This database provides details of over 150 primary 'Nazi-themed' texts (English-language, German-language, and others in translation).

- URL: see http://www.academia.edu/1763356/Detecting_the_Past_Nazi-themed_crime_fiction_database. Also available at the MPI blog: see <http://mrspeabodyinvestigates.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/detecting-the-past-nazi-themed-crime-fiction-database-with-hyperlinks-june-2013.pdf> (or <http://tinyurl.com/p4lygba>).

R4. Katharina Hall, 'The Crime Writer as Historian: Representations of National Socialism and its Post-war Legacies in Joseph Kanon's *The Good German* and Pierre Frei's *Berlin*', *Journal of European Studies*, 42/1 (2012), 50-67.

- DOI: 10.1177/0047244111428846
- URL: <http://jes.sagepub.com/content/42/1/50.abstract>

Quality: *Journal of European Studies* is a refereed journal (two readers' reports). Article awarded 3 stars in internal/external research audits at Swansea University.

R5. Katharina Hall, 'The "Nazi Detective" as Provider of Justice in post-1990 British and German Crime Fiction: Philip Kerr's *The Pale Criminal*, Robert Harris's *Fatherland*, and Richard Birkefeld and Göran Hachmeister's *Wer übrig bleibt, hat recht*, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 50/2 (2013), 288-313.

- DOI: 10.5325/complitstudies.50.2.0288
- URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/complitstudies.50.2.0288>

Quality: *CLS* is a refereed U.S. journal that accepts 20% of submissions (two readers' reports). Article awarded 3 and 4 stars in internal/external research audits at Swansea University.

4. Details of the impact

Through the creation of a widely read blog in 2011 (see Section 5, **C1**), Dr Hall has had a major impact on public understandings of international crime fiction. MPI has become a dynamic forum for the non-academic crime fiction community to interact (readers, bloggers, authors, translators, publishers, cultural commentators), and in the process has generated very significant interest and activity. It has **global reach**, with users from **over 130 countries**, and is hosted by 'Mrs. Peabody', a friendly persona encouraging maximum user-participation. Its posts have generated **over**

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220,000 hits (average 6,500/month, 1,500/week, 225/day) and **over 2,500 comments** (WordPress statistics; blog-curator's hits excluded, **C2**).

MPI is built around two novel innovations: a researcher 'opening up' her on-going critical reflections on emergent crime fiction genres to a wide audience, and making accessible a growing database of research texts (**C3**). **Over 50 'Detecting the Past' texts** are examined in the blog (click hyperlinks in C3 for relevant posts), showcasing Nazi-themed and German/European/international crime. Dr Hall's academic expertise underpins reviews, themed posts, author interviews, and conference/convention reports, with users invited to access the project database and research articles on [MPI's 'About' page](#) and in [relevant posts](#). Blog discussions involving readers, bloggers, authors, translators and publishers (such as Bitter Lemon, MacLehose and Hersilia Press) explore crime fiction's capacity to offer social/political/historical critiques, and core themes such as guilt and justice. The quality of debate is often extremely high and incorporates discussion of Nazi-themed and European texts (see threads on ['Violence and Women in Crime'](#), ['Would the real Finland please stand up'](#), ['Arne Dahl'](#), and ['Philip Kerr'](#)).

MPI is a mutually beneficial space for the blogger and its users. By discussing texts iteratively with a highly motivated non-academic audience, Dr Hall has captured a host of new insights about the production and reception of crime fiction that inform her research. Non-academic impacts are also significant and include the following:

- By sharing her critical reflections on high-quality crime fiction, Dr. Hall has had a **notable impact on user reading practices**. In a July 2013 user-survey (**C4**), **over half** of the respondents felt that their '*reading habits had been influenced or changed by the blog*'. Comments include: '*introduced to many new European crime writers*'; '*pointed towards writers, particularly German, that I might not otherwise have encountered*'; '*have read a lot more since following Mrs P*'; '*have become more adventurous in what crime fiction I read*'; '*have purchased titles I wouldn't have done without your recommendation*' (Users 1-5, **C4**).
- **Users' lives are enriched by Dr Hall's expert interpretation of cultural capital**. **85%** of survey respondents felt that 'the blogger's academic expertise adds value to the blog' and **70%** that 'the blog introduces me to crime fiction that enriches my life'. Comments include: '*I really appreciate MPI. There are many book blogs, but this one really stands out in terms of the quality of its reviews. The fact that the blogger is an academic is very apparent in the breadth and depth of the analysis*'; '*I enjoy the blog because it is more than a compendium of reviews. I like the way it gives an insight into the culture and background of the novel, which enriches my reading*'. (Users 6 and 7, **C4**).
- Crime is often consumed unreflexively as entertainment. MPI has **successfully encouraged users to explore the thematic and ethical complexity of the genre more deeply**: '*I feel encouraged to be an active reader, drawing comparisons with other crime novels/films rather than simply reading the text for the story*'; '*I've learned new ways to think about crime fiction*'; MPI '*has made me think differently about crime novels I've read*' (Users 8-10, **C4**); '*Mrs. Peabody's analysis encouraged me to read the book, as she dealt with critical moral questions that arose during WWII and its aftermath*' (User 11, ['Reactions to Reading'](#) blog, June 2013).

Cumulatively, Dr Hall has had an impact on wider public discourses about crime fiction. By creating so much informed dialogue and debate through her blog, she has influenced how discussion about crime fiction is framed in more mainstream media. In October/November 2012 she contributed to two episodes of Mark Lawson's [BBC Radio 4 series, *Foreign Bodies: A History of Modern Europe through Literary Detectives*](#) (**C5**), in which she explored the engagement of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's and Jakob Arjouni's crime fiction with the legacy of National Socialism (aired between *World at One* and *The Archers*; Radio 4's weekly audience figures for the fourth quarter of 2012: **10.75 million** ([BBC/RAJAR](#)), **C6**). In 2013 Dr Hall was invited to judge the international [Petrona](#) crime fiction award (**C7**), to contribute to *The Times* crime-fiction critic's new *Euro Noir* book (**C8**), and to attend a programming meeting with the Head of BBC Wales Drama. MPI's companion Twitter

account (**C9**) has over **800** followers including a number of crime writers (Ann Cleeves, Arne Dahl, Mons Kallentoft, Ernesto Mallo, Derek B. Miller, Stuart Neville, Jason Webster),

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publishers/publishing contacts (Penguin Books; Bitter Lemon Press; Hersilia Press; MacLehose Press; Alison Hennessy, Harvill Secker Commissioning Editor), and critics (James Kidd/*Independent*; Barry Forshaw/*The Times*). These broader activities evidence MPI's influence and its recognition within the industry as 'a ground-breaking blog that is transforming readers' understanding and appreciation of international crime' (*The Times* crime-fiction critic, **C8**).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. **Mrs Peabody Investigates blog posts, comments and discussion threads:**
<http://mrspeabodyinvestigates.wordpress.com/>
- C2. **Mrs Peabody Investigates WordPress user statistics** – available on request.
- C3. **'Detecting the Past' project database:**
<http://mrspeabodyinvestigates.files.wordpress.com/2011/01/detecting-the-past-nazi-themed-crime-fiction-database-with-hyperlinks-june-2013.pdf>
- C4. **Mrs Peabody Investigates user-survey results** (188 respondents, July 2013) – available on request.
- C5. **Mark Lawson's BBC Radio 4 series, *Foreign Bodies*:**
A History of Modern Europe through Literary Detectives
 Episodes 2 and 11, October/November 2012:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mnz34>
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mnz8v>
- C6. **RAJAR BBC Radio 4 2012 Q4 (fourth quarter) audience figures:**
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2013/main-rajar-q4.html>
- C7. **'The Petrona Award', *The Bookseller***
<http://www.thebookseller.com/news/new-award-targets-scandinavian-crime-fiction.html>.
- C8. **Letter from freelance writer and crime critic for *The Times*.**
- C9. **MPI companion Twitter account:** Mrs_Pea68.
- C10. **Selected links to MPI on BBC / crime / publisher / author / bookseller websites:**
 BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00xzy0f/buzz>); Black and White Publishing (http://www.blackandwhitepublishing.com/index.php/books/view/what_lots_wife_saw),
 Chronicles of Crime Bookshop (<http://www.chroniclesofcrime.com/links.shtml>); 'Confessions of a Mystery Novelist'; 'Crime Time' (<http://www.nudgemenow.com/article/crime-time-with-barry-forshaw-4/>); 'djskrimiblog'; 'Euro Crime'; Hersilia Press (<http://www.hersilia-press.co.uk/?s=di+giovanni>); 'The Game's Afoot'; 'In Search of the Classic Mystery Novel' (<http://classicmystery.wordpress.com/2011/01/19/mrs-peabody/>); 'International Noir'; 'It's a Crime!'; Philip Kerr (http://berniegunther.com/book/field_grey/); Derek B. Miller (<https://www.facebook.com/Derekbmillerauthor>); Dror Mishani (<http://d-a-mishani.com/the-missing-file/>); Jo Nesbø (<http://jonesbo.com/2999>); 'Novel Heights'; 'Reactions to Reading'; 'Tipping my Fedora'.