

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Canterbury Christ Church University
Unit of Assessment: English Language and Literature (29)
Title of case study: Recovering Lives and Texts
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study reclaims neglected writers and texts, enabling user engagement with British literary heritage through the commemoration, interpretation and presentation of authors' lives and forgotten or rare fiction. It expands cultural capital and enhances the imaginations and understanding of individuals and groups by raising awareness of the lives and literature of non-canonical Victorian and Edwardian writers. Using previously unexamined archival and privately-held source material it challenges previous assumptions about, for instance, disability and invalidism in relation to Victorian women writers. Through cultivating interest in, and enabling public knowledge of, such authors and their work it creates cultural and educational enrichment.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Central to this case study is biographical research undertaken by Gavin from 1995 to the present on Anna Sewell (1820-1878), by Oulton from 2005 to the present on Mary Cholmondeley (1859-1925) and by Oulton from 2008 to the present on Jerome K. Jerome (1859-1927). This research contributes to the resurgence of interest in biography and to the ongoing feminist project to promote the recovery of forgotten or lesser-known female authors and their work. It also challenges the Victorian canon and revisits cultural representation of issues including gender, class and invalidism/disability.</p> <p>The first biography of Sewell for over 30 years, Gavin's <i>Dark Horse: A Life of Anna Sewell</i> (2004) re-examines the paradoxically <i>little</i> known life of the author of <i>Black Beauty</i>, a novel among the best-selling ever produced. The biography was entered as an output in the RAE 2008.</p> <p>Oulton's 2009 <i>Let the Flowers Go: A Life of Mary Cholmondeley</i> is the only scholarly and full length biography of one of the bestselling authors of 1899. In an article in <i>The Guardian</i> in 2007, the ephemerality of bestselling fiction was linked to the 'ghostly' list of the top ten bestselling titles in the US for 1900, including Cholmondeley's <i>Red Pottage</i>. Oulton located two of Cholmondeley's three journals, believed to be missing since 1928, her draft manuscripts and a previously unseen family archive as part of the research. The biography challenges assumptions about the status of female invalidism and mental health in the Victorian period, charting Cholmondeley's changing perception of the relationship between health, breakdown and creativity.</p> <p>Oulton's 2012 <i>Below the Fairy City: A Life of Jerome K. Jerome</i> is the first biography of Jerome in thirty years and the first to include details contained in his mother's diary, written during Jerome's childhood. It investigates late Victorian sexual ideology through the analysis of previously unseen letters and other archival material, and it is also the first biography to make extensive use of Jerome's 1890s journalism, including numerous articles on the New Woman and the vivisection debate. The biography corrects numerous errors contained in earlier versions of his life.</p> <p>Key researchers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adrienne Gavin: research carried out at Canterbury Christ Church University 1995 to present. Senior Lecturer 1995-2000, Principal Lecturer 2000-2005, Reader 2005-2011, Professor 2011-present. 2. Carolyn Oulton: research carried out at Canterbury Christ Church University 2005 to present. Lecturer 2004-2005, Senior Lecturer 2005-2010, Reader in Victorian Literature 2010-present.
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>A. Gavin, <i>Dark Horse: A Life of Anna Sewell</i> (Sutton, 2004). Book. Can be supplied on request. Gavin is a leading expert on Anna Sewell and the proposal for this volume won the 2000 Biographers' Club Prize, judged by distinguished biographers Victoria Glendinning, Frances</p>

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Spalding and Richard Holmes (Professor of Biographical Studies at the University of East Anglia).

C. Oulton, *Let the Flowers Go: A Life of Mary Cholmondeley* (Pickering & Chatto 2009). Book. Listed in REF2.

Oulton is a leading expert on Cholmondeley. This volume was accepted as the inaugural volume in the Pickering & Chatto Gender and Genre series, following two readers' reports. A review in *Victorian Studies* described the book as 'outstanding', noting: 'Meticulously researched, the biography is built from a plethora of diverse sources... Especially significant are the diaries... which had disappeared from notice for generations... Adding to the thick fabric of this impressive biography is a broad range of archival material.'

C. Oulton, *Below the Fairy City: A Life of Jerome K. Jerome* (Victorian Secrets 2012). Book. Listed in REF2.

Oulton is a leading expert on Jerome. The biography includes substantial new research including previously unseen correspondence between Jerome and the publisher Arrowsmith that casts new light on late Victorian literary representation and codification of sexuality. It also analyses Jerome's campaigning journalism and his correspondence with leading literary figures. John Sutherland described the book as 'illuminating' in the *Literary Review*, while the Edwardian Literary Network calls it 'a fresh perspective on the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century literary culture in London'.

4. Details of the impact

Gavin's Sewell research has considerably raised public awareness nationally and internationally of this canonical writer's life and work, impacting on literary tourists and reading groups and aiding the preservation of British literary heritage. The volume was reviewed widely by national and regional press and media on publication. Since the publication of the biography Gavin has delivered 16 talks or papers on Sewell, seven of which were by invitation, and has given 20 media interviews on Sewell and *Black Beauty*. Professor John Carey wrote in the *Sunday Times* in 2004: 'By the time [Gavin] is through, it seems inevitable Anna should have written just the book she did...Gavin's biography makes [*Black Beauty*] seem an even finer book than before, which is what all literary biographies should do.' The impact and its reach have been extended by Gavin's critical edition of Sewell's *Black Beauty*, published by the public-facing Oxford World's Classics in 2012. Impact is evidenced by sales of 3,000 copies for *Dark Horse* and 1,198 by June 2013 for *Black Beauty*. Public lending rights statistics attest to *Dark Horse's* continued interest to users of public libraries being borrowed 2,486 times from 1 July 2007 – 30 June 2012. The biography also featured as the April 2009 Book of the Month at the Well Read Women's Book Club in Knoxville, Tennessee, USA to whom Gavin gave an invited talk to 20 members, the club organizer commenting that Sewell's 'story touched us even more after having you speak with us about her. Your research was also very helpful to me personally in determining the origins of my copy of *Black Beauty*, which I had taken to several appraisers with no luck. I can't thank you enough for your insight and willingness to share with us your knowledge.' The biography's depiction of Sewell's life has elicited often emotional responses from individual readers including children, creative writers, and senior citizens who have used the biography to widen their understanding of literary and equine history, a common effect on them being that they then go on to read or re-read *Black Beauty*. A correspondent from Cleveland, Ohio, for example, writes: 'After perusing your wonderful Life of Anna Sewell, we re-read *Black Beauty*. A half century's distance has done nothing, except recall the charm and the anger of its author. Your biography allows us to know and speak directly with Anna Sewell' (2012). The reach of its impact is indicated, too, by its citation on public websites run by users as various as genealogical societies, local history groups, and creators of horse-related or popular literature websites and blogs. The Sole Society's genealogical journal and website drew on it for an article on 'Anna Sewell in Lancing' in 2011. On local history website OldCatton.com it forms the basis of a section on 'Anna Sewell, *Black Beauty* and Old Catton,' whose author comments: 'Our article has attempted to focus on Anna's life in and around Old Catton. But [*Dark Horse*] offers a much more detailed and formative view [of] Anna's whole life and we would heartily recommend it to anyone who has found this article of interest and would like to learn much more about Anna, her family and her life.' Coree Reuter on *The Chronicle of the Horse* website cites Gavin's identification of lupus as the explanation for Sewell's invalidism and

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the blog 'Catherine Pope – Victorian Geek' writes of Gavin's 'excellent biography of Anna Sewell...which I thoroughly recommend.'

Oulton's Cholmondeley research has similarly raised public awareness of Cholmondeley's life and work, impacting on lecture audiences and individuals and aiding the preservation of British literary heritage. The impact of this research and its reach have been extended by Oulton's critical edition of Cholmondeley's *Diana Tempest*, published by the public-facing Valancourt Books in 2009, and by the Mary Cholmondeley website, authored by Oulton and widely accessed by users (17,755 since 1 Jan 2008, with web hits consistently increasing from around 25 per week in 2008 to around 80 per week in 2013) who want to learn about Cholmondeley's life. A user in October 2011 commented: 'I've had a look at your website which has made me even more curious about Mary Cholmondeley.' The website has received increasing attention on reading blogs and has served to disseminate the underpinning research. In 2012 the website was archived by the British Library web archive at their request. A public lecture in 2011 (with an audience of around 30) at the Folkestone Book Festival on 'Forgotten Victorian Women Writers,' which included Cholmondeley, both registered and increased public awareness of the range of Victorian women's writing being re-evaluated by the unit. In April 2013 *The Ufford Punch* ran an article on Cholmondeley's residence in the village, soliciting comments from Oulton as an acknowledged expert in order to raise awareness of Cholmondeley's local novel *Notwithstanding*.

Oulton's Jerome research also raised public awareness of Jerome's life and work, impacting on audiences and individuals and aiding the preservation of British literary heritage. The impact of this research and its reach have been extended by Oulton's critical edition of Jerome's *Weeds*, the first widely available edition of this novella, published by the public-facing Victorian Secrets in 2012 (35 copies sold) and by her critical introduction for the free kindle edition of *Three Men in a Boat* for Victorian Secrets (2012) (77 copies downloaded). Oulton's Jerome research has been widely discussed on the Jerome K. Jerome Society's online forum (comments including: 'I would be really interested to hear author, Carolyn Oulton, give a talk on any JKJ aspect of her choice), changing perceptions of the life and significance of Jerome. Oulton has contributed to *Idle Thoughts*, the journal of the Society (with an international readership of 500), and regularly posts replies to questions in the forum pages of the society's website, receiving several thousand hits, as well as advising on a new play based on Jerome's life, and advising on and endorsing a successful Marchmont Blue Plaque application. This research has also featured on a series of blogs; 'Bill Posters,' for example, comments, 'What I love about Oulton's study is that it gets under the skin of the man.' The biography attracted 600 entries in a Goodreads Giveaway in 2013 and Oulton was a guest blogger on the Virtual Victorian in 2013. (Comments on her article on Jerome's London included: 'A really fascinating post. I loved the details about the various London neighborhoods and his reactions to them. I have never read *Three Men in a Boat*, but now I want to' and 'A very interesting account. Such a beautiful cover, I yearn to own it! I haven't had the pleasure of reading *Three Men in a Boat*, now I'm searching online for a copy.') A public lecture held at the City of Westminster Archives Centre was described by the audience as 'engaging and informative' and a public lecture to an audience of 30 at Waterstones in Canterbury in 2012 as part of the ICVWW's Book of the Month series inspired energetic debate on the merits of Jerome's lesser-known fiction.

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

Gavin, Dark Horse (2004):

Email to A. Gavin on behalf of the Well Read Women's Book Club Knoxville, Tennessee, USA (May 2010) (contact ID 1)

'Anna Sewell, Black Beauty and Old Catton,' OldCatton.Com (undated)

www.oldcatton.com (follow links: Archive – Featured Articles – Anna Sewell writes Black Beauty in Old Catton)

Letter from a retired librarian to A. Gavin (19 Jan 2012) (available on request)

'Anna Sewell in Lancing,' *The Sole Society* (April 2011) <http://www.sole.org.uk/annasew.htm>

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(*genealogical society*) (contact ID 2)

Oulton, *Let the Flowers Go* (2009):

Emails in response to The Mary Cholmondeley Website www.marycholmondeley.com.
The Ufford Punch, April 2013, p.4 (contact ID 3)

Oulton, *Below the Fairy City* (2012):

Emails from Member of Marchmont Association plaques sub-group to C. Oulton in 2013 (contact ID 4)

Comments on Carolyn Oulton, 'Jerome K. Jerome and London.' 4 January 2013.
<http://virtualvictorian.blogspot.co.uk/2013/01/jerome-k-jerome-and-london.html#comment-form>.

Discussions on the Jerome K. Jerome Society forum, various. (contact ID 5)
<http://www.jeromekjerome.com/forum/>

Goodreads readers who marked *Below the Fairy City* 'to read' in 2013
<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16159480-below-the-fairy-city>