

Institution: University of Warwick
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Re-presenting Britain's literary heritage
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Researchers in Warwick's English Department have offered new perspectives on Britain's cultural and literary heritage by re-evaluating authors: both the very well-known (Dickens), the obscure (Charlotte Smith), and the otherwise forgotten (seventeenth-century women writers whose writing in manuscript would, without extensive archival recovery, be lost to view). The research has increased public understanding of Britain's rich literary history by inspiring new forms of traditional and digital art, public events and exhibitions, improved tourist information, and has led to the preservation and presentation of many literary artefacts through the creation of digital resources.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The underpinning research re-contextualises and brings a new appreciation to important figures of the British literary canon, one of whom – Charles Dickens – has already received substantial public recognition and scholarly interest, while others – hitherto unknown seventeenth-century women writers, and Charlotte Smith, the nineteenth-century poet and novelist – have been obscured by a focus on male writers.</p> <p>Professor Elizabeth Clarke (2001-present) has devoted her research career to the recovery of neglected early modern women writers: work that is closely related to her interest in religious and spiritual writing as published in her monographs <i>Theory and Theology in George Herbert's Poetry: 'Divinitie, and Poesie, met'</i> (OUP, 1997) and <i>Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England</i> (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). In the latter work, religious writings – such as the Song of Songs in which many of the protagonists are women – encouraged women to write at a time when writing was still considered a male preserve. The recovery of women's writing, most of which exists only in manuscript, led to the foundation of <i>The Perdita Project</i>, an annotated catalogue of women's manuscript writing. <i>The Perdita Project</i> has resulted in four edited volumes on early modern women's writing: <i>The Double Voice: Gendered Writing in Early Modern England</i>, ed. with Danielle Clarke (2000); <i>The 'Centuries' of Julia Palmer</i>, ed. with Victoria Burke (2001); <i>Early Modern Manuscript Women's Writing</i> (2004), "Still Kissing the Rod?", a special issue of <i>Women's Writing</i> (2007), and the poetry anthology <i>Early Modern Women's Manuscript Poetry</i> (2005), ed. with Jill Seal and Gillian Wright.</p> <p>Professor Jacqueline Labbe (2000-2013) was among the first generation of scholars to work on recovering the place of women writers in the British Romantic movement, questioning accepted definitions of Romanticism as a critical space which was occupied solely by men. Labbe researches the poetry and prose of Charlotte Smith whose writings were celebrated during her lifetime for their sensibility, innovation and skill but whose achievements have been overshadowed since by her contemporary male authors, Coleridge and Wordsworth. Since 1994, Labbe has published three monographs on Smith's poetry, an edited volume (the first of its kind), two editions of her work (the complete works of poetry and one of her novels), and more than twenty articles, the majority of which has been written since Labbe joined Warwick. Labbe's research (<i>Writing Romanticism</i>, 2011) has shown that Smith's writings were read by and influenced William Wordsworth, thereby confirming Smith as one of the central voices of the period.</p> <p>Professor Jon Mee's (2007-2013) research explores Dickens' <i>oeuvre</i> in the context of the radical political thought circulating around London in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Mee looks at the narrative qualities of Dickens' two historical novels, <i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> and <i>Barnaby Rudge</i>, which complicate the relationship between the individual and the crowd, the personal and the political, cause and effect, and the past and the present. In both novels Dickens is concerned to show the socio-economic causes underpinning the violent episodes (the French Revolution and the Gordon Riots respectively). In <i>A Tale of Two Cities and the French Revolution</i> (2009), Mee and his co-editors argue that <i>A Tale</i> discloses Dickens' belief that the <i>ancient regime</i> was ultimately responsible for the revolutionary violence. The collection of essays successfully</p>

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persuades readers 'to see *A Tale* afresh', and 'might even lead us to regard this particular novel as being as "wonderful" in its way as all the others' (*Victorian Studies*, 52:4 (Summer, 2010)). In his most recent book chapter, 'Dickens and Ways of Seeing the French Revolution', Mee relates Dickens's textuality to the 'less familiar ground of its relation to historical change and the role and relation within it of individuals and larger collectivities.' Mee highlights the way in which the cinematic nature of Dickens' writing entangles the past and the present in his historical novels so that its presence is continually felt.

3. References to the research

Clarke, Elizabeth, ed. with Victoria E. Burke and Jonathan Gibson, *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing*, ed. (Ashgate, 2004). [Reviewed in *English Historical Review* 120:485 (Feb., 2005), 216-8; *University of Toronto Quarterly* 75:1 (Winter 2006), 242-4; *Renaissance Quarterly* 58:3 (Fall 2005), 1025-8].

Clarke, Elizabeth, ed. with Jill Seal Millman and Gillian Wright, *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Poetry* (Manchester University Press, 2005).

Clarke, Elizabeth, ed. with Lynn Robson, Special Journal issue of *Women's Writing* 14.2 (Jul., 2007).

Labbe, Jacqueline, *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784-1807* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). [Reviewed in *Romanticism* 18 (Oct., 2012), 318-20; *Women's Writing* 19 (Oct., 2012), 1-3; *Times Higher Education*, 22 Dec., 2011].

Labbe, Jacqueline, *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, poetry and the culture of gender* (Manchester UP and Palgrave, 2003).

Mee, Jonathan, Colin Jones and Josephine McDonagh, eds., *A Tale of Two Cities and the French Revolution* (Palgrave 2009). [Reviewed in *Victorian Studies* 52:4 (Summer 2010), 632-4].

Mee, Jonathan, 'Dickens and Ways of Seeing the French Revolution: A Tale of Two Cities' in *Reading Historical Fiction. The Revenant and the Remembered Past*, ed. Kate Mitchell and Nicola Parsons (Palgrave, 2012), pp. 172-86.

Evidence of quality:

The *Perdita* Project was supported by an AHRB Project Grant, 'The *Perdita* Project for Early Women's Manuscript Compilations', £165k (1999-2001) and an AHRC Resource Enhancement Award, 'Publication of Metadata from the *Perdita* Project', £93.5k (2003-5); as well as a number of internal awards. Clarke's *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Poetry* (2005) was winner of the Josephine Roberts Prize for Best Edition sponsored by Society for the Study of Early Modern Women (2006). In the introduction to *The Works of Charlotte Smith*, General Editor Stuart Curran considered Labbe's *Charlotte Smith: Romanticism, Poetry and the Culture of Gender* to be a 'pioneering study' (I, xvii).

4. Details of the impact

By re-assessing and popularising some of Britain's lesser known authors as well as its most celebrated, the research has expanded our understanding of the British literary tradition and with it a sense of a shared national heritage. It has increased public understanding of Britain's rich literary history by inspiring new forms of traditional and digital art – including video documentaries, mobile phone apps, e-books and musical scores – and has also led to the preservation and presentation of many literary artefacts through the creation of digital resources.

The Perdita Project recovers early modern women's writing considered 'lost' because these scripts survive largely in manuscript form, effectively rendering them inaccessible to the vast majority of readers. Started in 1997 while Clarke was Research Lecturer at Nottingham Trent University until 2001 when she moved to Warwick, *The Perdita Project* has uncovered, catalogued and described over 450 manuscript compilations by over 300 British women from 1500 to 1700. The research was sold to Adam Matthew Digital in 2003, a publisher of digital primary source collections. *The Perdita Manuscripts, 1500-1700* collection comprises 230 manuscripts from 15 libraries in the UK and USA. Adam Matthew have sold 68 subscriptions of the database to universities and organisations in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and Ireland, Hong Kong and the Netherlands, while the royalties to Warwick have earned over £86K to date. Unlike other digital

collections of early modern women's writing, *The Perdita Manuscripts* collection offers digitized images of the documents and gathers together little known materials from disparate locations. Genres represented include account books, diaries, religious writings, prose, poetry, cooking and medical recipes, and autobiographical material. The online resource has given access to unpublished material to libraries and their users around the world and generated economic benefits in digital publishing.

By making women's manuscript writing accessible, *The Perdita Manuscripts* collection has introduced women writers into Britain's literary history. This goal is shared by Labbe who has sought to re-position Charlotte Smith within British Romanticism and within the natural landscape of her South Downs home. Labbe has succeeded in increasing public awareness and knowledge about Smith in the region through an exhibition and by enhancing tourist information.

The Smith family residence, Bignor Park in Sussex, now a privately run stately home, has improved the visitor information about the historical significance of the house and its relationship to Smith. It has introduced a webpage about Smith, for which Labbe provided the content, and a pamphlet for the garden tour also written by Labbe. Visitors to the house, which numbered over 500 in 2012, have the opportunity to learn about its connection to Smith, its importance as a subject for her writings and the contribution of her writings to Romantic poetry. The owner of Bignor Park has acknowledged that the pamphlets add 'value to the overall visitor experience' and that 'as a result of Jackie's input, Charlotte Smith is now an important focus of our educational and visitor information, having been entirely omitted before.' The work at Bignor Park was complemented by a month-long art and literature exhibition at Eastbourne Library (May-June 2011). The exhibition was free to all library users and was considered by the library manager to have been 'successful with people stopping to look at it frequently.' All of the 500 pamphlets and 500 postcards produced for the exhibition were distributed, indicating that at least 1,000 people spent time exploring the exhibition.

Labbe's engagement activities in the region inspired the creation of new art forms. Composer Ned Biggam wrote a choral piece based on Smith's Sonnet XCII for the Whispering Woods event in 2012 hosted at Bignor Park, organised by Creative West Sussex and sponsored by West Sussex Arts Partnership and Arts Council England. A second new piece of music by a local composer based on Smith's poem 'Beachy Head' was performed by a string quartet at the 2012 Open Art festival showing local artists and musicians in the village of East Dean, East Sussex. The concert attracted an audience of 100, of which 80 were members of the general public (£10 / ticket), generating much needed income for a small village arts festival. The organisers were inspired by the increased presence of Smith in the region and used the information Labbe provided for the website to construct their programme (email correspondence).

The researchers have exploited new digital communication methods for encouraging a greater and more in-depth engagement with traditional literary works. Labbe was engaged by an independent filmmaker to produce videos about Smith, which are available on YouTube. As of July 2013, the 3-part series had a total of 4,025 hits. The videos have been embedded in an e-book of *The Old Manor House*. For the bicentenary of Dickens' birthday (February 2012), Mee led an interdisciplinary project with colleagues across the university and from the heritage industry about Dickens' life, works and legacy. The project produced a 45-minute documentary, a series of podcasts and a mobile phone app (total downloads for podcasts and videos 1,134,430; plus another 10,556 views of videos on YouTube). The *Celebrating Dickens* documentary won the British Universities Film and Video Council Award for Education In-house Production at the annual award ceremony on 18 April 2013. The BUFVC's Learning on Screen Awards celebrate and reward excellence in the use of moving image and related media in learning, teaching and research. Unlike other Dickens mobile apps which have only the text of his novels, *Celebrating Dickens* offers a plethora of podcasts, articles and videos exploring Dickens' novels and adaptations of his work, based on Mee's publications. Available since February 2012, the iPhone (rated 4.5 stars) and Android (rated 4.6 stars) apps received a total of 11,383 downloads up to July 2013.

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Mee's research on Dickens has led to invitations to contribute to bicentenary celebrations of Dickens at other institutions. Mee's public lecture on 'Dickens' Points of View' at the Bodleian (June 2012), had a public audience of 60. Feedback from his National Maritime Museum lecture on Dickens' use of imagery in his writing (Oct 2012) showed that the audience of approximately 25 members of the public discovered a new approach to engaging with Dickens' novels.

The reach of the impact has been worldwide and has been achieved via online engagement and new media, and is demonstrated by worldwide media interest; the geographical spread of *The Perdita* database sales to libraries worldwide; and the volume of Dickens podcast and app downloads. The reach has also been felt in local communities, such as in the South Downs, who have benefitted from and adapted the research to create new artworks and musical compositions.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Perdita

- Royalty figures from Warwick Ventures and sales information from Adam Matthew Digital
- Review in *Choice*, March 2009:

'Whereas other sites, such as Early Modern Resources and the University of Maryland's Early Modern Women Database, offer online early modern documents, they provide neither digitized photos of documents, nor such a gathering of women's writing in one location.'

- Review in *Library Journal*, August 2008:

'This is a truly scholarly resource whose combined content and design merit a resounding ten.'

'This fine product is recommended for a wider audience than one might first think.'

- Referenced in the *Washington Times* (20.4.2012) and *Booklist* (1.8.2008).

Charlotte Smith

- Statement from the Area Manager, Eastbourne Library, East Sussex
- Exhibition figures: over 1,000 visitors went through the art exhibition held at Eastbourne library as indicated by the distribution of pamphlets and postcards.
- Visitor's book – 60 comments. A sample of the comments includes:

'Fantastic display – has drawn me to this writer – perhaps more writers from this area.'

'Very eye-catching display – I was drawn to discover more! It is always interesting to discover new writers whom I have not encountered before especially as she is from Sussex.'

'This really opened up a porthole on a writer I've heard about but never found the opportunity to engage with.'

- Statement from the Owner, Bignor Park
- Bignor Park webpage on Smith <http://www.bignorpark.co.uk/index.php/about/charlotte-smith> with attribution to Labbe
- Statement from Director about YouTube views and Labbe's input into documentary

Dickens

- BCFVC award
http://bufvc.ac.uk/events/learningonscreen/winners?dm_i=IAP,1ELO0,9JPZET,4RURB,1
- Audience numbers and feedback from public lectures:
 - 'Dickens' Point of View', Bodleian Library, 13.6.12 (approx. 60 audience members)
 - 'Whose eyes are we looking through in Dickens?', National Maritime Museum, 25.10.12 (approx. 25 audience members)
- The *Celebrating Dickens* app was featured in local and international press:
 - Coventry Observer* (9.2.12)
 - Stratford Observer* (23.4.12)
 - Alaska Dispatch* (USA, 7.2.12)
 - International Business Times* (USA, 7.2.12)
 - First Post* (India, 7.2.12)
 - Sina* (China, 28.2.12)
 - Xinhua* (China, 28.2.12)