

Institution: University of Leicester		
Unit of Assessment: UOA 27		
Title of case study: Joe Orton, 50 Years On: Enhancing Understanding of Gay History, Inspiring New Cultural Artefacts, and Celebrating Leicester's Literary Heritage		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Emma Parker	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor in Post-War and Contemporary Literature	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1998-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 29/06/2014- 31/07/2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact Dr Emma Parker's research on playwright Joe Orton (1933-1967), revived and refocused local and inter/national interest in this working class, Leicester-born playwright and gay icon whose provocative comedies satirised the Establishment in the 1960s. To mark the 50th anniversary of Orton's three major plays and his death, Parker co/produced prize-winning events, exhibitions, educational resources and cultural artefacts, engaging and inspiring >100,000 people in 72 countries across five continents. Parker's research and extensive media coverage developed public understanding of gay history, bringing new, marginalised audiences to Orton, including prisoners and LGBTQ community members. Parker's work encouraged Leicester to celebrate its literary heritage and shaped the Orton Statue Appeal that raised >GBP115,000.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Hailed as one of the greatest writers of his day, Orton's work has fallen out of critical fashion since interest sparked by John Lahr's biography <i>Prick Up Your Ears</i> (1978) in the 1980s. Parker's new perspectives and approaches have reanimated and transformed engagement with Orton.</p> <p>Revising understanding of gender, sexuality and social class Rejecting the persistent characterisation of Orton as a 'tragic queer' - arising from a cultural preoccupation with his 'promiscuity' and the grisly murder by his partner Kenneth Halliwell - and drawing on critical developments in debates about gender and sexuality since the 1980s, Parker demonstrates that Orton's work anticipates feminist and queer theory in its critique of the norms of gender, sexuality and class [R1-R7]. She also shows that overlooked aspects of Orton's creative practice off stage reflect and illuminate his work on stage. Parker proposes that Orton and Halliwell redesigned the covers of stolen editions of Shakespeare plays to amplify their homoeroticism, whilst subverting the Bard's function as an emblem of social distinction [R4]. Likewise, she establishes that the prank letters Orton penned under the pseudonym 'Edna Welthorpe', typically understood as nothing more than a piece of mischievous fun, echo and complement the satire on social and sexual conservatism in his plays [R1]. Parker challenges Orton's reputation for misogyny by highlighting the intersection of his satire on attitudes to female and same-sex desire [R1, R6].</p> <p>Revealing new aspects of Orton's life and work Drawing on unpublished material in the Joe Orton archive at the University of Leicester, Parker's</p>		

research has highlighted unknown or unfamiliar aspects of Orton's life and work, such as his posthumously published fiction [R2] and interest in music [R3] and art [R4]. For example, Parker shows that Orton's record collection articulates the same queer sensibility as his plays [R3].

Highlighting Orton's continuing relevance

Countering the common view that Orton's work is outdated, Parker links his satire on rape to the #MeToo movement [R6], highlighting the plays' continuing relevance to the contemporary world in terms of ongoing inequalities.

Constructing a new oral history archive

Finally, Parker created an online oral history archive, capturing previously undocumented memories of the original productions. Alongside recorded interviews with (subsequently deceased) actors and directors who worked directly with Orton in the 1960s, such as Dudley Sutton (1933-2018) and Braham Murray (1943-2018), interviews about significant revivals create an online Orton stage history for the first time, a valuable resource for future research [R7].

3. References to the research

R1. Emma Parker (ed). "Introduction" and "An Interview with Nick Bagnall" in Joe Orton, *Entertaining Mr Sloane. The 50th Anniversary Edition* (Methuen Drama/Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 1-25; pp. 27-33. ISBN 9781472522054.

R2. Emma Parker. "Queers, Gals, Chaps, Chicks, and Lads". *The Oxford History of the Novel in English, Vol. 7: British and Irish Fiction Since 1940*. Peter Boxall and Bryan Cheyette (eds), (Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 328-346).

R3. Emma Parker. "A Queer Ear: Joe Orton and Music". *Art & Music*, Issue 37, Spring 2017, pp. 44-48 (2,700 words). <https://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/english/people/emmaparker/article>

R4. Emma Parker. "Joe Orton and Shakespeare: Collage, Class and Queerness". *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 37.2, 2017, pp. 237-268

R5. Loot education resources.

Emma Parker. "They'd do anything for money': Joe Orton's *Loot*". *i.e. Magazine*, Issue 12, WJEC. 4 December 2015 (2015), pp. 5-6. https://issuu.com/wjec_cbac/docs/issue12;

Emma Parker. "A close reading of *Loot*". *Discovering Literature: 20th Century*. The British Library. 7 September 2017. <https://www.bl.uk/20th-century-literature/articles/a-close-reading-of-loot>;

Emma Parker. "Funny Money: *Loot* then and now". *Loot Education Pack*, Watermill Theatre, 2017, pp. 15-16.

https://www.watermill.org.uk/uploads/documents/education/136_290017_Loot%20Education%20Pack.pdf

R6. Emma Parker. "Joe Orton, Women and Rape". Keynote lecture, *12th International Conference on Language, Education, Humanities and Innovation*, Hong Kong, 25-26 January, 2019. <http://icsai.org/emma-parker/>

R7. Emma Parker (Producer), Interviews. Actors: Alec Baldwin https://youtu.be/T8_vdEN_yk; Dudley Sutton <https://youtu.be/Y6iVO2GScvQ>; Kenneth Cranham <https://youtu.be/IZouH7BGiuY>; Frances Barber https://youtu.be/8-9kKizs_4o; Julia Foster <https://youtu.be/0U4Gf11UXHA>; Graham Fellows (aka John Shuttleworth) <https://youtu.be/ipCHEOzgia0>; and Michael Elwyn

<https://youtu.be/AsATYwmZ80s>. Directors: Braham Murray <https://youtu.be/tWvKLpuetnl>; Nick Bagnall <https://youtu.be/LuQEDMfKLSU>; John Tillinger <https://youtu.be/4U9N3oVZpgU>. Writer Jake Arnott <https://youtu.be/ZAwRIWUc0HM>. Street artist STEWY <https://youtu.be/WyZ4saPxKR4>. Orton's sisters: Leonie Orton and Marilyn Lock <https://youtu.be/W2NNEP6WmHg>. >53,000 views.

4. Details of the impact

Enhancing Understanding of Gay History

LGBTQ lives are significantly underrepresented in museums. Drawing on [R4], Parker co-curated two exhibitions of *What the Artist Saw: Art Inspired by the Life and Work of Joe Orton* and produced the text for the exhibition, which featured her analysis of Orton/Halliwell's reworked Shakespeare dustjackets. The exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), London (5/2/17-4/3/17) marked LGBT History Month [E1], increasing MOCA's average visitor numbers by 40%. [E1]. At New Walk Museum and Art Gallery (NWMAG), Leicester (29/7/17-22/10/17), the exhibition drew **51,630 visitors** [E2] and was widely covered in local media. Visitors stated: "My eyes have truly been opened to the bravery of Joe Orton . . . we have [him] to thank for the changing attitudes we have today"; and a parent commented that it initiated a helpful conversation with her children about homosexuality [E2].

Parker co-curated *Crimes of Passion: The Story of Joe Orton* with the senior curator at the National Justice Museum (NJM), Nottingham (22/07/17-1/10/17). NJM featured [R4] and Orton's 'crimes' (his homosexuality and 'vandalised' book covers, which resulted in a six-month prison sentence). Artist David Lock used insights from [R4] to run two art workshops at HMP Lowdham that presented Orton's collages as a protest against inequality and "challenged . . . ideas about who can be an artist, especially in terms of social class" [E3]. The workshops inspired twelve incarcerated people to produce artwork that was featured in the exhibition [E3]. This was NJM's first LGBTQ-themed exhibition, attracting 12,743 visitors. It won a Special Commendation at the Nottinghamshire Heritage Awards (2018), and elicited a NJM commitment to future LGBTQ-focused events [E4].

Inspiring New Cultural Artefacts

Parker's research [R1, R4] generated new creative and cultural responses to Orton, making his work accessible beyond the theatre and relevant to twenty-first century global audiences. Novelist Jake Arnott stated that Parker's research inspired him to adapt an unpublished Orton essay, featured in [R1], for *The Visa Affair* on BBC Radio 3. [E5]. Parker's research [R4] "directly influenced" David Lock's painting 'El Muniria', commissioned for *What the Artist Saw*. It "fundamentally changed" his understanding of how "the art of the past can be adapted to create new meanings in the present" [E3]. The painting was shortlisted for the John Moores Painting Prize 2018 and purchased by the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, to expand its LGBTQ collection [E3].

Parker collaborated with filmmaker Chris Shepherd on an Orton-inspired animated short starring Alison Steadman, "Yours Faithfully, Edna Welthorpe (Mrs)" (2017). As Executive Producer, Parker drew on her research [R1, R4] to show Shepherd how Orton channelled his anger at social and sexual inequality into humour [E6]. Parker introduced the film at two arts festivals, Latitude (16/7/17) and Homotopia (4/11/17), and it was screened at five inter/national film festivals [E6]. It was also screened on: the US Criterion TV channel; the BBC Arts webpage; and the BBC Culture and BBC Radio 4 Facebook pages [E6].

Parker's research [R1, R4], inspired journalist Samira Ahmed to create the one-hour BBC Radio 4 'Front Row' special featuring Parker and her two exhibitions, stating "[Parker] made it happen" [E9]. Parker wrote and presented a six-minute feature on Orton's record collection (based on [R3]) for BBC Radio 4 'Front Row', highlighting the covert expression of his queerness through music in a time of sexual repression (23/04/19) [E9]. ITV Central News featured Parker's YouTube interviews with Alec Baldwin and Kenneth Cranham which have >15,000 views [E11].

Influencing Teaching and National Education

Parker led a national, Arts Council England-funded Edna Welthorpe creative writing competition for **80 post-16 students** (Spring 2014). Its success inspired the fashion designer Vivienne Westwood to donate £5,000 for Parker to run the competition annually from Spring 2020 to help young people learn about Orton and understand the contemporary relevance of his satire. [E7A].

Parker developed an online learning resource with a worksheet and modern Edna Welthorpe letters that Parker commissioned from actors and writers—including Alec Baldwin and Jesse Armstrong (*The Thick of It*, *Succession*) [E7]. Nearly 5,000 visitors from 72 countries viewed the resources 13,689 times—including citizens with limited LGBTQ rights (in Uzbekistan, Mauritius, Saudi Arabia) [E7]. Parker's learning resource won an Arts Council England-sponsored Saboteur Award (2018) by public vote [E7]. Users stated: "I hadn't heard of Joe Orton before. Now I want to know more"; "I have been inspired to write more"; "This made me want to pursue English in the future" [E7].

Parker's articles analysing *Loot* [R5] and other resources are recommended by the WJEC exam board as supporting materials, and featured in *i.e. Magazine*, WJEC's online English magazine providing key information, suggestions for teaching, updates and news. Since 2017, 6,602 candidates have taken WJEC English Literature A level. The curricula accessing all *Loot* resources, including Parker's, were used by 240 schools p.a. (mean average) and >15,000 pupils total at A- and AS-Levels in Wales, England, and Northern Ireland in that timeframe [E8]. WJEC's English Subject Officer Rhodri Jones stated: "When we choose texts for the [curriculum] specification, we are always concerned [about] accessible materials for teachers and students to support their studies. [Parker] ensured that there have been plenty of materials on Orton" [E8].

Celebrating Leicester's Literary Heritage

'*Entertaining Mr Sloane: A 50th anniversary Celebration*' (19/6/14), '*Loot: A 50th Anniversary Celebration*' (25/9/16), and '*Yours Faithfully, Edna Welthorpe: A Tribute to Joe Orton*' (9/8/17) drew >700 attendees [E2]. These research-led [R1 – R7] events in Leicester were extensively covered in local media, raising local awareness of Orton, and reframing debates about his work, which encouraged the city to celebrate its literary heritage. This has culminated in the Orton Statue Appeal. As Chair, Parker raised >GBP115,000 (2019) to erect a statue in Orton Square, Leicester. Based on [R1 – R7], Parker wrote the script for the appeal film, featuring the actor Ian McKellen, and text for the crowdfunding website. Parker collaborated with artist Christian Furr to raise money by producing limited edition fine art prints of three of Orton/Halliwell's 'defaced' book covers. Drawing on [R4], Parker's analyses accompanied each print [E11]. Leonie Orton—Joe's sister and head of the Orton Estate—said Parker's research was 'crucial' to the success of the appeal: "we couldn't have done it without her" [E10]. Parker's research shaped public understanding that Orton represents equality, diversity and inclusion, and was vital to winning public support for a statue that shows that - as Parker's campaign slogan states - "talent is everywhere and art is for everyone" [R1 – R7] [E2, E10].

In recognition of her exceptional contribution to the region's literary heritage, the Women in Management organisation named Parker winner of the 2018 East Midlands Women's Award for 'Outstanding Woman in Arts, Media and Music' [E5].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

E1. Exhibition catalogue and testimony from Michael Petry, director of Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), London. <https://tinyurl.com/yxrdozca>

E2. Collated items relating to New Walk Museum Leicester, and Little Theatre, Leicester, visitor reach. NWMAG evidence statement from Phil Hackett, Resources Manager for Arts and Museums, Leicester City Council, New Walk Museum visitor feedback. Little Theatre seating capacity and Leicester Mercury 50th Anniversary article confirming the sold-out shows.

E3. Testimony from artist David Lock.

E4. Testimony from Senior Curator and Archivist, Collections and Community, National Justice Museum.

E5. Testimony from Jake Arnott, novelist and author of *The Visa Affair* for BBC Radio 3.

EMWA Outstanding Woman in Arts, Media and Music Award 2018 winner:

<https://tinyurl.com/yyqma2hq>

E6. Testimony from filmmaker Chris Shepherd.

E7. <http://www.ednawelthorpe.co.uk> and website analytics report on the use of the teaching resources, and Saboteur Award: <https://tinyurl.com/y5ozd8u6>

E8. WJEC evidence: Statement from English Subject Officer; WJEC exam board and WJEC statistics. <https://tinyurl.com/y5zs2aho> and https://issuu.com/wjec_cbac/docs/issue12

E9. Compiled cultural artefacts/outputs inspired by Parker's research. Testimony from Samira Ahmed, Journalist, BBC Radio4. Emails from Sarah Teale, Senior Broadcast Journalist, BBC East Midlands; and Jane Hesketh, Reporter, ITV Central News.

E10. Testimonial: Leonie Orton, co-administrator of the Orton Estate . Statue appeal website: <https://tinyurl.com/yyxe8ysk>

E11. Compiled media coverage of Parker's research.