

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University College London		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Enhancing Public Understanding of the Ingenuity and Innovativeness of Jane Austen's Fiction		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): John Mullan	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Lord Northcliffe Chair of Modern English Literature	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1994-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013-December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>John Mullan's research challenges assumptions about Jane Austen's conservatism by demonstrating the technical audacity and sophistication of her fiction, and its continuing contemporary vitality. His explication of implicit conventions and rarely acknowledged formal innovations in Austen's novels has deepened understanding of her work to sizeable audiences at literary festivals and a further 3,600,000 people via varied media outlets. His research brought a new understanding of her writing for actors in Laura Wade's critically acclaimed play <i>The Watsons</i> and the 12,800 theatre-goers who saw it in Chichester and London. His research influenced the design of the Royal Mint's bicentenary £2 coin and shaped the depiction of social codes in Netflix's <i>Bridgerton</i>. Mullan has changed the way Austen is taught in schools and contributed popular new learning resources to the British Library's 'Discovering Literature' website.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>John Mullan's research has re-shaped contemporary academic engagement with this major novelist. After decades during which scholars have been preoccupied with the social context and political implications of Austen's fiction, his research has turned critical attention to her experiments in dialogue and narrative form. His research pursues precise matters of social conventions in her fiction (how do characters know about each other's money? how do they address each other?), but in order to show how these conventions have been put to complex dramatic use. His research and attentive close reading reveal not just the ingenuity of Austen's evolving fictional technique, but her revolutionary transformation of novelistic form and of the expectations of readers.</p> <p>Mullan's knowledge and expertise on Austen's writing is long established and highly respected. He has published a leading critical monograph on Austen, <i>What Matters in Jane Austen?</i> [R1]. Addressed to both an academic audience and the general reader, this is an exploration of Austen's technical virtuosity that examines formal patterns in her novels. Close attention to her use of conventions that have become invisible to modern readers (from how to make a proposal of marriage, to why a person might blush) and to influences on her characters (from the importance of the weather, to the reasons for their silences) reveals how she activates the reader's powers of inference. In all these matters, his research has been dedicated to showing the minute interconnectedness of each of her finished novels, which, in effect, test the reader's attention and powers of observation.</p> <p>Above all, <i>What Matters in Jane Austen?</i> [R1] shows how innovative, indeed experimental, a novelist she was in comparison with contemporaries and predecessors – and how later novelists owe much to her innovations. It pays particular attention to Austen's development of free indirect style, a technique hardly known in the English novel before her, yet exploited by her with extraordinary (and increasing) sophistication. This development is also highlighted in Mullan's introduction to his major, definitive Oxford World's Classics edition, now standard, of Austen's</p>		

Sense and Sensibility [R2]. Here the technique is shown in its early evolution, as Austen learns to elide authorial judgement with the reflections of the novel's main character, Elinor, and to dramatize this character's unfolding thoughts. The introduction also shows how Austen uses free indirect style to imply the heroine's private sense of the comic, and how she develops new ways of distinguishing character through idiolect. His notes to the edition make visible the exact social conventions that Austen was exploiting.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. John Mullan, *What Matters in Jane Austen?*, Bloomsbury, 2012. 9781620400418. Available on request.

R2. John Mullan, Editor, Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, Oxford University Press, 2017. 9780198793359. Available on request

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Mullan's research [R1, R2] demonstrates Jane Austen's continuing contemporary vitality and has changed how contemporary readers and commentators have responded to her work. It has enhanced understanding of Austen's works for actors and audiences of Laura Wade's critically acclaimed play *The Watsons* and brought a new understanding of her techniques to considerable audiences at literary festivals and a further 3,600,000 people via varied media outlets. His research has also influenced the design of the Royal Mint's bicentenary £2 coin and shaped coin collectors' understanding of Austen's significance. Mullan has changed the way Austen is taught in schools and contributed popular new learning resources on the British Library's 'Discovering Literature' website, contributing to achieving the 'Everyone Engaged' mission of their 'Living Knowledge' strategy.

Enhancing public understanding of Austen's novels

Mullan's research-informed contributions to events have shifted the way that audiences understand Austen's work. On 27 February 2014, Mullan participated in 'Jane Austen vs Emily Bronte', the first of Intelligence Squared's literary combat events, where expert advocates go head-to-head and actors perform from the texts; the live audience of 1000 selected Austen as the winner. The event was filmed and uploaded to YouTube, which has received 156,228 views, 1900 'likes' and 250 comments, and it was subsequently broadcast as a podcast [text redacted] [A]. Such was the success of the event that Intelligence Squared has run a further 9 'Versus' events and invited Mullan back in 2018 to participate in 'Dickens vs Tolstoy'. Comments on YouTube demonstrate the viewers' new or deepened understanding of Austen's novels. Echoing Mullan's argument in [R1], one responded, 'If you think that the Bronte sisters wrote on more serious subjects than Jane Austen did, or that Austen is all about balls and drawing rooms, you haven't been reading closely enough'. Another wrote, 'What a delight to find such intellectual stimulation on YouTube! I've read all the books mentioned several times and yet so many new ideas were presented here' [A]. John Dugdale's review of the event (*The Guardian* 28 February 2014, 2908 shares and 151 comments) quoted directly from Mullan's argument, made in [R1], that Austen was "the greatest writer of dialogue in English literature". [Mullan] went on to call her pioneering use of free indirect style "the most important invention in the history of the novel" [A]. Combining print circulation figures of *The Guardian* (695,000) with the live, YouTube, and podcast audiences puts the reach of Mullan's argument for Austen's importance at 1,402,228. [Text redacted] [A]. *What Matters in Jane Austen* [R1] sold over 8,000 copies globally in this REF impact period (1 August 2013 to 31 December 2020).

Mullan's Austen research has also been featured on respected cultural broadcasting outlets, raising audience awareness of the novelist's innovativeness. On Radio 4, these have included *In Our Time* (on *Emma*) and *Equal As We Are* (with playwright Laura Wade, on marriage proposals in Austen). The latter led to his further collaboration with the playwright (see below). In 2020, his series of six audio-essays on each of Austen's novels featured on *Front Row*. *Front Row* averages 2.21 million listeners per week. As the Programme Producer put it, Mullan's 'vast, deep knowledge and his infectious enthusiasm for the novels made each one of them a really

lively, engaging and informative listen'. This was important because 'Front Row relies on the authority and expertise of its contributors for its status as a respected national arts programme' [B]. The *In Our Time* episode on *Emma* (19 November 2015), for which Mullan was one of three invited experts, was so popular that it was, as the Producer explains, 'among those proposed by listeners for their Top 10 favourite programmes' and its significance is emphasised being one of the 50 programmes (out of over 800) to be included in the *In Our Time* book that celebrates the series' twentieth anniversary (Simon and Schuster, 2018) [B]. For TV, in 2017 he was consultant and contributor for the Sky Arts programme *I Hate Jane Austen*, broadcast on Sky Arts in 2018 and subsequently in the USA, New Zealand and Canada. Giles Coren, the presenter, begins the programme disliking Austen. The Executive Producer writes that the programme's conversations between Mullan and Coren 'were both enlightening for the die-hard Austen fan, the student of literature and even for those in the audience who perhaps had never read any Austen before'. Mullan brought 'world-class expertise' to the programme and for the Sky Arts team, his publications 'were key texts [...] as we pulled together the script'. At the end of the programme, Coren 'admits that his opinion may have shifted' [B]. In 2019, because of his Austen expertise, Mullan was invited by Netflix to advise on the series *Bridgerton* (premiered December 25, 2020), set in London in 1813. Drawing on [R1], he advised the programme's Executive Producer on social codes such as habits of address and courtship conventions. Mullan is named in the programme credits. In its first week (25-31 December 2020), *Bridgerton* reached more than 63 million households and was the most viewed programme in 76 countries [C].

Mullan has brought a new interest in Austen's techniques to literary festivals and Austen societies from Nova Scotia to Moscow. A total audience of over 6,000 at 36 events have benefited from a refined sense of Austen's place in the development of the British novel and an explanation of her contemporary relevance. Between 2014 and 2018 Mullan gave four talks on her novels at the Hay-on-Wye Literary Festival and chaired a discussion of Austen with Colm Tóibín and Sarah Churchwell. For the Hay Festival Director, Mullan 'gives a generalist public audience a taste of top end academic research' to large audiences that 'range from 650-1290' people and which are expanded through subsequent media coverage [D]. His 2014 talk on *Mansfield Park* has been viewed 11,540 times on YouTube while his 'insightful' 2015 contribution inspired an article in *The Telegraph* titled 'Sex, sea air and stupidity: 5 things we learned about Jane Austen' (24 May 2015, circulation 380, 922). In the reporting period (1 August 2013 to 31 December 2020), he spoke about Austen's fiction at twelve other UK literary festivals. His annual public talks as part of the Jane Austen festival in Bath (except 2020 due to COVID-19) reached a total audience of 501 [E]. The Festival Director notes that '[ticket sales] increased year on year' and comments that *What Matters in Jane Austen* [R1] 'opened up the study of Austen to a wider audience and [Mullan's] unique style of delivery makes her work accessible to those who prefer to read and enjoy rather than pull the work apart' [E].

The organisers of Austen Society events value Mullan's expertise in revealing Austen's techniques to their members and in helping these societies realise their mission. In 2013 and 2018 he gave keynote addresses at the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA) AGM to a combined audience of 1715 members. The Coordinator of the 2018 meeting indicates the high value to JASNA of Mullan as a speaker: he 'digs deep to bring us even deeper into our understanding and relationship with Jane Austen.' This 'forward[s] our mission of sharing the genius of Jane Austen's life and works' [F]. For the Coordinator of the AGM held in September 2013, Mullan's theses about 'moral ambiguity and moral liability [...] and relativism as self-justification were wholly new to me, and made me reread and appreciate [*Mansfield Park*] on an entirely new level.' They attest, Mullan 'has "cracked the code" and brought Jane Austen's subtext to the forefront, and her characters to even more modern-day relevance' [F]. On 8 July 2017, Mullan gave the keynote speech at the Jane Austen Society's AGM to 400-500 people (members and non-members). The Society's Chairman, explains: 'The fact that we chose John to be the speaker at the AGM in the especially important bicentenary year of 2017 is a tribute to the regard in which he is held. [...] His lecture ['How People Speak in Jane Austen'] was brilliant: scholarly, with a lot of detail about the author's use of idiolect, but lively and enjoyable for all' [F].

Enhancing understanding of Austen's works for actors and audiences of *The Watsons*

From 3 November to 1 December 2018, Laura Wade's play *The Watsons*, based on Austen's unfinished novel of the same title, showed to a total audience of approximately 6510 at the Chichester Festival Theatre. Mullan supplied the programme notes for the production which drew on his in-depth knowledge of Austen's works to situate Wade's completion of *The Watsons* in a long tradition of Austen adaptation and appropriation. 2,553 copies of the programme were sold [G]. *The Guardian's* Michael Billington referred to Mullan's programme essay to contextualise Wade's script in his 5* review of the play, explaining that 'In one sense, it is absurd to say that a character takes over from the author: all the words spoken here are written by Wade. Yet, in the case of Austen, her people and plots have a vigorous extratextual life, as John Mullan reminds us in the programme' [G]. When the play transferred to London in October 2019, where it was seen by an audience of approximately 6300 people at the Menier Chocolate Factory theatre, Mullan's notes again featured in the programme (sales: 1631, [G]). In addition, Wade asked the cast and director, Samuel West, to read [R1]. Each actor was assigned a chapter and in rehearsal presented their findings from their reading to the rest of the cast [G]. Wade explains that reading [R1] enabled the cast to form 'a consensus about the world that they're existing in and also a consensus about themselves as characters in Jane Austen because what [Mullan has] done [in R1] is draw together all of the books and find patterns across them'. This pattern was particularly important because *The Watsons* is unfinished: 'Your book is really good at being able to say this is what this kind of person does and so that they could understand themselves inside that framework.' It also provided vital social and historical context for the cast. As Wade put it, 'they've got to understand how people were people at that time and how Austen people are people, in order to be able to play them' and 'in order for them to be able to explain that to the audience' [G].

The cast was broadly the same for the runs in Chichester and London (both of which sold out) and Wade explained that reading [R1] contributed to the cast's performances becoming 'richer and deeper' in the second run. For example, the actor playing Lord Osborne read the chapter on proposals because his character proposes marriage during the play. Wade explains that he 'was really interested in [...] how it was possible to propose in writing [...] and that wasn't something that we'd known about as a group before [...] and that fed into his character'. Wade explains how the actor's process of creating a backstory for his character used Mullan's research: he imagined that because Osborne is 'quite a shy person I probably considered proposing in writing, and I might have sort of written it out and practised it, but then decided that I should probably actually man up and do it in person'. As Wade puts it, 'this enables the work and deepens it for [the actors] and therefore for the audience it feels deeper' [G]. The performances in London were therefore 'built on stronger foundations', derived in part from [R1]. For one actor, playing Mrs Robert, reading the chapter on money in [R1] 'helped her to a deeper understanding of her character and it helped everyone else understand the wider context of the play'. In addition, Wade noted that the actors felt 'legitimised by a proper book' as it made the cast 'feel like what we're doing is a worthwhile endeavour, that we're investigating something that is worth someone writing a book about' [G]. [R1] therefore enhanced the 21-strong cast's understanding of Austen's works, enriching their performances for the c. 6, 300 people who saw the play in London. *The Watsons* was named one of 'The 50 best theatre shows of the 21st century' by *The Guardian* and received 4* reviews in *The Times*, *Financial Times*, *The Telegraph* and *Evening Standard*. (Its 2020 transfer to the Harold Pinter Theatre, London, was postponed due to COVID-19.) [G].

Enriching the Royal Mint's commemorative Austen campaign

Mullan's research shaped understanding of Austen for The Royal Mint and coin collectors. In 2017, Austen's bicentenary and the year that the Bank of England issued the new £10 note featuring Austen, the Royal Mint issued a commemorative Austen £2 coin. The design of the £2 coin 'features a design approved by leading Austen academic, Professor John Mullan'. Mullan wrote the entry in the Royal Mint catalogue advertising the coin and wrote a piece for the Royal Mint magazine, *Bulletin*, which highlights the 'revolutionary' nature of Austen's fiction and her use of experimental techniques [R1]. [Text redacted] [H].

Improving the provision of educational resources on Austen

Mullan's scholarship has changed the way Austen's work is taught in schools. He has given 13 lectures on Austen's novels to approximately 500 Sixth Form pupils and teachers in schools in and around London during the REF impact period (1 August 2013 to 31 December 2020). His direct impact on pupils is attested to by a Teacher at [text redacted], who commented that Mullan 'provided some high level stretch and challenge ideas, as well as an insight into university level study and a good de-bunking of Austen not being cool or funny', as well as giving students an opportunity to 'incorporate criticism into their essays (An important part of the A-level syllabus that is a big jump from GCSE)'. The Head of the English Department at The Heathland School, Hounslow, further noted that 'I can categorically say it had an impact on the kids in terms of their ways of seeing and writing.' Mullan also served as an expert on the advisory group convened to shape the redevelopment and reform of English A levels in 2014-2015 [I].

Mullan is a consultant and writer for the British Library's 'Discovering Literature' website, particularly aimed at school students and teachers and accessed by over 6 million unique users annually. He has contributed 3 articles based on his research into 'what matters' in Austen [R1] which the British Library's Lead Producer for Digital Learning Programmes confirms 'are some of the most popular on the site [...] they regularly receive enthusiastic responses from hundreds of teachers on social media' [J]. As a member of the project's advisory board, Mullan has helped shape this popular and accessible resource since its inception, building new audiences for the understanding of Austen and the history of the novel more generally. The British Library's Lead Producer for Digital Learning Programmes writes that Mullan's 'invaluable guidance underpinned the planning and delivery of our content' and his 'support was fundamental to the success of our project' [J]. He has thus contributed to achieving the 'Everyone Engaged' mission of the British Library's 'Living Knowledge' strategy to have impact on their audiences by the dissemination of knowledge and an increase in the understanding of literature.

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

- A. Evidence relating to 'Jane Austen vs Emily Bronte' (Intelligence Squared): [text redacted] recording and comments on YouTube <https://bit.ly/3ggOMVx> and Guardian review <https://bit.ly/30mX325>.
- B. Testimonial from producers: Front Row producer; Email 're: In Our Time', 27 November 2018; Executive Producer 'I Hate Jane Austen', Sky Arts.
- C. *Bridgerton* viewing data and media coverage.
- D. Testimonial from Hay Festival Director.
- E. Testimonial from Festival Director of Bath Austen festival.
- F. Group of testimonials relating to Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA) AGM.
- G. Evidence relating the *The Watsons*: programme, testimonials/interviews from Laura Wade and cast. Programme sales figures provided by Chichester Festival Theatre and Menier Chocolate Factory. Media relating to *The Watsons*.
- H. [Text redacted]
- I. Evidence relating to schools engagement: Teacher at [Text redacted]; Head of the English Department at The Heathland School; English Subject Advisor (Pearson).
- J. Testimonial, Lead Producer for Digital Learning Programmes, British Library.