

Institution: University of Bristol		
Unit of Assessment: 27) English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Transforming the Teaching of Literary Studies in Higher Education Around the World		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Andrew Bennett	Professor of English	08/1994-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2013-31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? Y		

1. Summary of the impact

Professor Andrew Bennett's research in literary criticism and theory has had a transformative impact on undergraduate teaching in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK and globally. This impact case study details the impact of two books co-authored with Nicholas Royle, University of Sussex: *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory (ILCT)* and *This Thing Called Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing (TTCL)*. Adopted as set texts and recommended reading in English Literature and other courses at HEIs worldwide, the books have materially influenced how Literary Studies is taught at undergraduate level and have reframed and restructured student engagement with literary works in the context of current debates.

2. Underpinning research

Since 2000, Bennett's world-leading research has focused on three broad research areas:

- **Literary theory** Bennett's monographs *The Author* (2005) [3.6] and *Ignorance: Literature and Agnology* (2009) [3.4] ask fundamental questions about authorship, intentionality, and meaning; about the epistemology of literature (what it means to know a literary work, what a literary work can be said to know, and what a reader knows in reading such a work); the ontology of literature ('what is literature?'); the aesthetics of the sublime; the significance of philosophical scepticism for literature; and fiction and the problem of other minds.
- **Romantic poetry and poetics** In a series of scholarly journal essays, contributions to edited books, a scholarly monograph on Wordsworth's compositional practice (2007) [3.5], and an edited volume of essays on Wordsworth (2017), Bennett has addressed topics such as animality; poetic reception; compositional practice; writing theory; literature and history.
- **Twentieth-century and contemporary literature** Bennett's work includes *Katherine Mansfield* (2004) [3.7], and *Suicide Century* (2017) [3.3]: topics covered include life-writing; theory of the short story; historical fiction; literature and science; affect theory; literature and mental health; literature and gender.

The research for these publications has fed into and supplemented the research involved in writing the 3rd, 4th, and 5th editions of *ILCT* (2004, 2009, 2016) [3.1] and into *TTCL* (2015) [3.2]: topics addressed in these books/new editions include: literature and film; monstrosity; literature and war; eco-criticism; animality; affect; trauma; embodiment; love; theory of the short story; creative writing; the novel; reading poems.

Some measure of the quality of Bennett's research can be gauged by reviews of his books: for example, in *Romantic Circles*, the reviewer of *Wordsworth Writing* asserted that the book 'should be considered a touchstone for Wordsworth studies in the twenty-first century'; in *Romanticism* the book was described as offering 'a new way forward, not only for Wordsworth, but for Romanticism'; in a warmly positive piece on *Suicide Century* in the *TLS*, the reviewer describes the book as 'humane' and 'observant'.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 **Bennett A** and Royle N (2016), *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*, 5th edn (Routledge), xv + 432pp. (3rd edn., Pearson, 2004; 4th edn., Pearson, 2009) [Available on request]
- 3.2 **Bennett A** and Royle N (2015), *This Thing Called Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing*, (Routledge), viii + 160pp. [Available on request]
- 3.3 **Bennett A** (2017), *Suicide Century: Literature and Suicide from James Joyce to David Foster Wallace* (Cambridge University Press), vi + 270pp. [Available on request]
- 3.4 **Bennett A** (2009), *Ignorance: Literature and Agnology*, (Manchester University Press), 260pp. [Available on request]
- 3.5 **Bennett A** (2007), *Wordsworth Writing* (Cambridge University Press), 266pp. [Available on request]
- 3.6 **Bennett A** (2005), *The Author* (Routledge), vii + 150pp. [Available on request]
- 3.7 **Bennett A** (2004), *Katherine Mansfield*, British Council 'Writers and Their Work' series (Northcote House), x + 98pp. [Available on request]

Funding information

Bennett A (PI), *Poetry and Ignorance: Epistemologies of Literature*, AHRC 111851/1, 02/2006-05/2006, GBP14,013

4. Details of the impact

The field of academic literary criticism and the underlying theoretical debates that inform it are often seen as opaque and alienating to undergraduate students joining HEIs for the first time. Bennett's co-authored books [3.1, 3.2] 'unpack' literary studies, breaking with what are often seen as rarified and unhelpful 'isms' or approaches that focus on 'schools' of thought (structuralism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, feminism, etc) that fail to relate directly to students' experience of reading literary works. In offering, by contrast, a topic-based model of literary pedagogy, Bennett's books both illustrate and explicate the direct application of critical and theoretical concepts to the primary focus of the discipline: the literary work itself. The books have had a transformative impact on students' engagement with the discipline by changing the way the subject is taught in HE institutions across the world.

4.1 *Introduction to Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (ILCT)

The structurally original *ILCT* has inspired innovative and accessible modes of teaching, presenting key critical concepts through readings of individual literary texts. Literary theory is thereby transformed into a practical, accessible, and productive tool for undergraduate students.

4.1.1 Reach and Economic Impact: Sales and Borrowing Figures [5.1; 5.2; 5.3]

The reach of *ILCT* and its economic impact can be gauged by the following statistics:

- Total worldwide sales of all editions of *ILCT* stands at well over 100,000 since its first publication in 1995. The book in all formats has sold on average c.4,500 copies per year over the last 20 years. Between 2013 and 2019 the book sold c.32,000 copies [5.1]. At a cover-price of between GBP21.99 and GBP23.99 in these years, this amounts to total estimated sales since 2013 of c.GBP700,000.
- A detailed snapshot of UK-only sales of literary theory books from January 2017 to November 2018 from Nielsen Book Data [5.2], puts into context TCM (total consumer market) statistics for UK-only sales of hard copies of *ILCT*: the book is the top-selling book in its category (out of a total of 1,566 different books listed), with 3,407 copies sold (1,100 more than its nearest competitor). In this period, sales of *ILCT* amounted to c.10% of the UK market for all books in this category (a total of 34,545 book sales). The economic value of the UK sales of the book in this period amounted to GBP68,900 (12% of the market value for all books in this category).
- Furthermore, summary Nielsen data [5.2] for every complete calendar year for the REF period shows that *ILCT* consistently out-sells almost every other literary theory book in the UK. In each year from 2017 to 2019, it was the top selling literary theory textbook in

the UK; and from 2013 to 2016 it was the 2nd best-selling book each year, consistently accounting for almost 10% of total market value (these figures exclude the *Norton Anthology* reader in some years).

- *ILCT* is also available to students to download (as the whole book or individual chapters) through university libraries (via DawsonEra (to 2020), VLe Books, and ProQuest eBook Central); in addition to unauthorised earlier versions of the book free to download as a pdf, there is a thriving second-hand market.
- In addition, Public Lending Rights (PLR) data shows that *ILCT* was borrowed from UK public libraries an average of 693 times per year between 2015 and 2019 [5.3].
- Another indication of the reach of *ILCT* is that there are a total of 1,068 citations listed on Google Scholar as of September 2020 for the last three editions [5.9].

4.1.2 Reach and International Impacts: Reading Lists [5.6]

ILCT had considerable reach in this REF period, appearing on reading lists internationally in English literature and other courses. The book is included on lists of recommended further reading and is used as an integral part of modules as a core or compulsory text, often with individual chapters set as week-by-week required reading and with modules structured around the concerns and priorities of the book. The book can be shown to have had a fundamental impact on the way literary criticism and theory is taught in HEIs on English, Comparative Literature, Modern Languages, Classical Studies, and other courses.

Research by the School of Humanities at Bristol in 2019-20 has identified more than 50 universities in the UK and internationally where the book is (or has been since 2014) integrated into English Literature or other courses. Examples include modules at the following Universities:

- **UK:** Aberystwyth, Birmingham City, Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge, Canterbury Christ Church, Cardiff, Chester, Durham, East Anglia, Edinburgh, Falmouth, Glasgow, Gloucestershire, Keele, Kent, Lancaster, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newman, Northumbria, QMUL, Reading, Roehampton, the Open University, Oxford, SOAS, Southampton, St Andrews, South Wales, Surrey, Sussex, UCL, Warwick, York St John.
- **Europe:** Free University, Brussels (Belgium), FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg (Germany), Helsinki (Finland), Luxembourg, Malta, Turku (Finland).
- **Americas:** Idaho, North Florida, San Diego State, West Indies.
- **Australasia:** Auckland, Macquarie, Queensland, Southern Queensland.
- **Asia and the Middle East:** De La Salle (Philippines), Hacettepe (Turkey), Hama (Syria), Islamic University of Gaza.

4.1.3 Shaping the Design and Delivery of the Curriculum [5.7]

Respondents to a survey of academic users of the book conducted in 2019 confirmed that *ILCT* has had a material impact on the way in which teaching is delivered, including in determining the structure and delivery of the relevant units.

The following is a summary of the key findings of the research.

- At a Russell Group university in the north of England where *ILCT* is the core textbook in a first-year unit taken by almost 400 students, it is reported that the book 'has a substantial impact on how the basics of the discipline are taught', specifically because it enables staff to 'teach "literary theory" and "close reading" as mutually constitutive ways of approaching texts rather than competing options', and allows them to 'treat critical traditions as fundamentally intersecting rather than fundamentally separate – it helps save us from having "feminism week", "postcolonialism week" [etc]'; the module at this institution closely follows the book in that 'we often set primary texts that are discussed in the book, we base essay questions on quotations from it, etc'.
- An associate professor at a redbrick university in the south of England comments that s/he was 'so impressed by [*ILCT*] that I embedded it on all my modules', that s/he 'can't speak highly enough of the book', and that the book is 'excellent at unscrambling even the most complex concepts and opening out a set of [questions]'; this tutor comments that the book has been 'a god-send and my students always love it – the scales fall from their eyes when they read it'; and that 'I have had hundreds of excellent seminars and marked equal numbers of nuanced, engaged essays thanks to this book!'

- *ILCT* is a set text on a level 4 module at a post-1994 university in the north east of England; the convenor comments that the book is 'a classic of its genre, presenting students with an accessible and lucid primer that introduces them to a comprehensive range of theoretical topics, beautifully illustrated with an array of literary examples and theorists'.
- A professor of English at a college of the University of London comments that the chapters 'are so intriguing and engaging and set up such useful ideas across texts that they are exemplars of the kinds of things essays should always be doing'.
- The book is used on a second-year unit for over 200 students in a Scottish university: the convenor comments that it is 'indispensable' in introducing 'complex theoretical concepts in a clear, comprehensive and accessible way', and an 'invaluable pedagogical resource' that has 'contributed measurably to the intellectual life of our undergraduates by making theory and criticism available... in a comprehensible manner'.
- A lecturer at a US state university who uses the book on a comparative literature course would recommend the book to other university lecturers as 'thorough' and 'crucial'.
- *ILCT* is a set text for 200+ students per year at a university in Australia, where the convenor comments that it is a 'clearly written introductory guide for first-year students'.
- The book is a set text for up to 100 first-year students at a university in New Zealand, where the course 'follows a similar...structure based on "keywords"'; the convenor comments that the book is used because it is 'by far the best book of its kind'.
- At a university in the Caribbean, the book is a set text on a 2nd-year module. The convenor comments that the book is used because it provides 'succinct yet comprehensive and sophisticated overviews of major concepts in contemporary literary criticism and theory'.
- The book is a set text at a university in the Philippines for c.50 first-year undergraduates, where the convenor comments that the book is 'great introductory material'.

4.1.4 Enhancing Student Understanding and the Learning Experience [5.8]

At the University of Bristol, *ILCT* is a set text in the Classics Department for a first-year introductory unit on 'Literature'. In the English Department, it is a set text for 'Critical Issues', a mandatory unit for all first-year single-honour students that is also taken by joint-honours students in English and Philosophy/Classical Studies/Theatre/ Film/History/Modern Languages, and by Liberal Arts and Erasmus students, and by medical students on the intercalated BA in Medical Humanities (a total of c.375 students enrolled on the unit in 2020-21). The unit introduces students to the basics of literary criticism and theory at university level and is structured around the format of the book; chapters are set by tutors each week to be read and discussed in relation to primary literary texts.

According to an anonymous online survey of the impact of *ILCT* on first- and third-year Bristol undergraduate students (carried out in the Spring of 2020):

- almost 80% of first-year students felt that the book had changed the way they thought about literature;
- 65% of first-year students felt that it had changed the way they thought about other philosophical, cultural, social, or political matters;
- 88% of third-year students agreed that it had changed the way they thought about literature throughout the course;
- 94% of third-year students felt that it changed the way they thought in other ways.

One first-year student commented that 'I always keep the readings of this book in mind when reading now', that it is a 'lingering presence' and 'absolutely amazing!!'; another commented that it is 'really accessible' and 'helped me realise the importance of clarity in critical writing'; others that the ideas were 'eye-opening' and 'thought provoking'. Third-year students attested to the long-term influence of the book, with one commenting that the book is 'amazing at covering topics in really clear and interesting ways' and that it 'changed the way I thought about literature'; another stated that 'every aspect of the way in which I read probably changed' after reading it. On the long-term influence of the book, one student commented that they 'even referenced it when planning my dissertation', another that 'many of the essays I have written have developed

on issues that were discussed in this first term' and that the book 'can often be found in bibliographies to my essays'; another said that they 'cited the book very often'. One commented that the book has been 'really useful' and that they have 'used the book in each year of my studies and...quote[d] from it in my dissertation'; another that it is 'incredibly accessible, informative and interesting' and that they can 'absolutely see myself dipping in and out of chapters in coming years to develop my own thoughts about books I will read'.

4.1.5 Online Data and Reviews [5.4; 5.5]

Further evidence of the impact of *ILCT* is available from online reviews:

- Online reviews of *ILCT* on Amazon.co.uk are overwhelmingly positive and include comments by customers (primarily undergraduate students) such as 'Probably the best all-round book on "literature" as a subject'; 'What a fantastic book!'; 'I got a high first-class mark on my initial poetry essay because of this. Buy it now'; 'Exceedingly Useful'; 'Brilliant book, can't stop reading it'; 'I love this book'; 'Superb'; 'Indispensable, amazing, transcendent'; etc.
- As of September 2020, Amazon.co.uk has 49 ratings of the 2016 edition with an average of 4.7 out of 5 stars (94% 4* and 5*), and 71 ratings of earlier editions, with an average of 4.3 (76% 4 or 5 stars); on *GoodReads* the book scores 3.83 from 623 ratings (67% 4 and 5 stars).

4.1.6 Translation/Re-publication

ILCT has been translated into Chinese (Guangxi Normal University Press, 2007); the edition is sold out and a second edition with newly translated chapters is in preparation. A separate English-Language Indian edition of the third edition of *ILCT* was published in 2008 (Delhi: Dorling Kindersley). A chapter from *ILCT* has been reprinted in Suman Gupta and David Johnson, eds., *A Twentieth-Century Literature Reader: Texts and Debates* (Routledge, 2005).

4.2 This Thing Called Literature (TTCL)

TTCL is designed as a brief introductory 'primer' that will help students bridge the gap from school-level to degree-level literary studies. The book covers topics such as reading a poem/novel/short story/play; thinking critically; writing an essay; and creative writing. A lecturer in a Belgian university comments that the book is 'an ideal text for introducing literature students to the unique benefits that literature has to offer in terms of developing critical thinking and the cogent expression of such thinking' [5.7].

Research has identified *TTCL* as a core set-text for undergraduate literature modules at the Universities of Auckland (NZ), Dundee, Macquarie (Australia), Queensland (Australia), Stavanger (Norway), Brussels (Belgium), Waikato (NZ) [5.6].

To the end of 2019, the book had sold approximately 5,000 copies (an average of c.1,000 per year) [5.1]; as of September 2020, the book scores 4.7 on Amazon.co.uk (87% at 5*), and 3.72 from 70 ratings on *GoodReads* (62% 4 and 5 stars) [5.4; 5.5]. The book has also been translated into Turkish (2018).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 *ILCT* sales and royalties statements 2013-19; *TTCL* royalties 2015-19

5.2 Comparative books sales figures from Nielsen BookData: see *Nielsen Spreadsheets* 1-2 (2018, 2019)

5.3 Annual statements on lending data from the British Library Public Lending Right (2020)

5.4 Online reviews/rankings from Amazon [accessed September 2020]

5.5 Online reviews/rankings from Goodreads [accessed September 2020]

5.6 Website data (including URLs) on university courses using *ILCT/TTCL* (collected March-May 2020)

5.7 Data from 2019 University of Bristol survey on use of the books as set text or recommended reading in undergraduate teaching; feedback from staff

5.8 Data from 2020 survey of University of Bristol undergraduates on *ILCT*

5.9 Google Scholar citation figures [accessed September 2020]