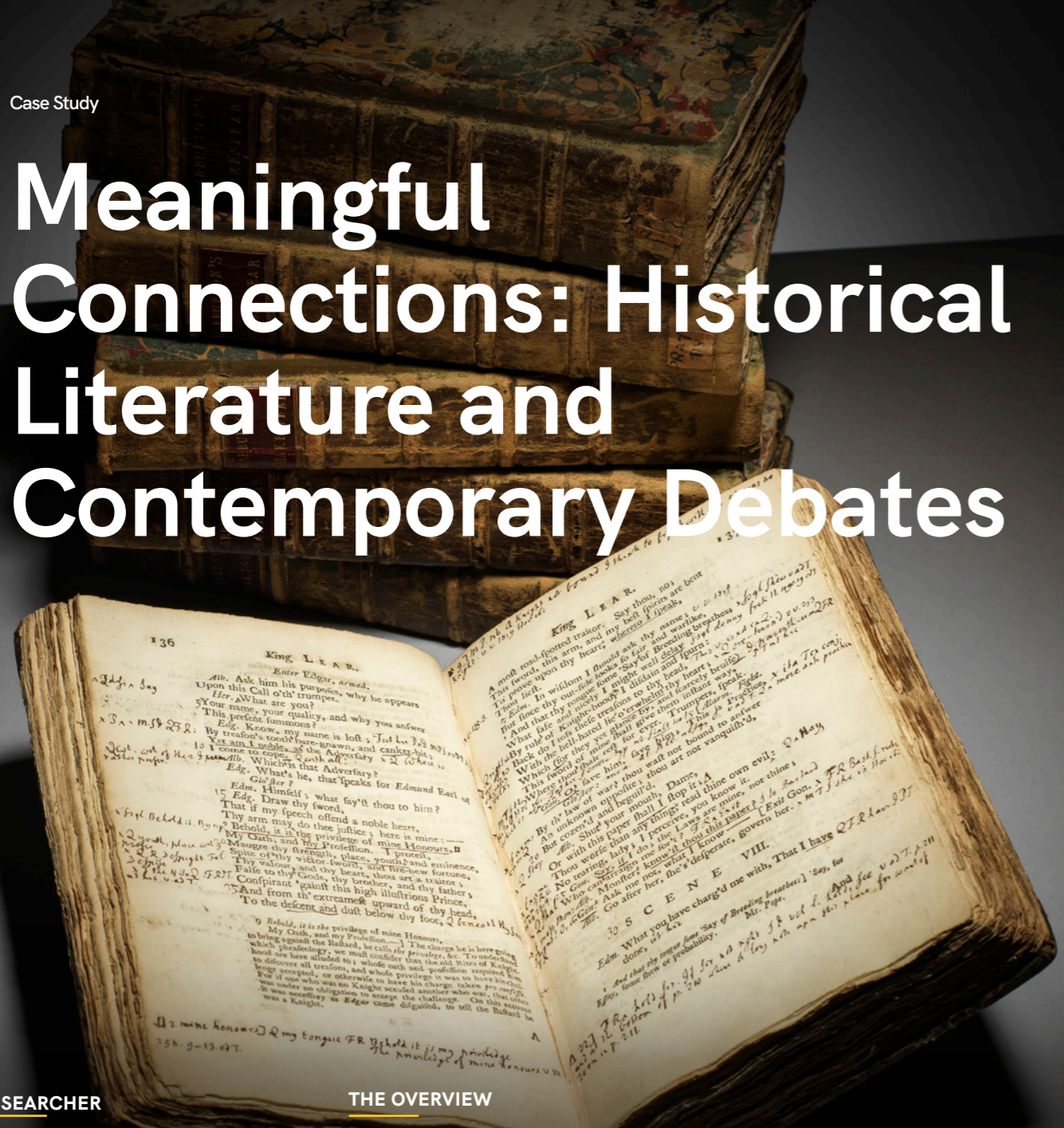


Case Study

Meaningful Connections: Historical Literature and Contemporary Debates



RESEARCHER

Professor Richard Marggraf Turley

THE OVERVIEW

Historicism is an approach to explaining the existence of phenomena by studying their history, or the process by which they came about. In this historicist inquiry, Professor Richard Marggraf Turley worked with key beneficiaries to explore how historical art and literature can inform our thinking around 1) food justice and sustainability and 2) the impacts of new forms of surveillance. Research revealed meaningful connections between the work of major historical writers and artists, and current societal challenges around food security and surveillance culture.

Professor Marggraf Turley communicated his interdisciplinary research through public speaking and dialogue, school visits, interactive workshops, radio broadcasts and media interviews in ways that led to new perspectives on the relation between literature and history and revealed the value of literary analysis to contemporary debate. His work has had an impact on teaching practices, on public understanding, on creative practice and on tourism.

THE RESEARCH

Professor Marggraf Turley’s research focused on canonical poems, paintings and plays from key historical junctures where current anxieties around food and surveillance come into focus.

His work has had an impact on teaching practices, on public understanding, on creative practice and on tourism.

The first area of research draws from diverse areas of interdisciplinary expertise to explore how Shakespeare’s tragedy *King Lear*, John Keats’s ode ‘To Autumn’ and John Constable’s painting ‘The Hay Wain’ are not only embedded in historical debates over equitable food distribution, but can also help to frame, shape and illuminate contemporary public understandings of food security and sustainability in an age of acute environmental crisis.

The research combined literary analysis with food science to produce a holistic ecology of historicist inquiry focused on the politics of food production and systems of distribution. It spurred creative engagement with the agricultural and environmental problems we currently face, at the same time as pushing literary texts directly to the centre of current debates.

The second area of Professor Marggraf Turley’s research investigates the extent to which Romantic poems and paintings produced at the beginning of new global forms of surveillance both anticipate and also contribute meaningfully to current debates around surveillance culture. In 2017, he published the first interdisciplinary essay to bring together research on Romantic literature with the field of Surveillance Studies.

THE IMPACT

INFLUENCING CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND APPROACHES TO TEACHING

Through interactive workshops focusing on the representation of food justice and surveillance in Keats and Shakespeare, Professor Marggraf Turley has regularly communicated his research to GCSE and ‘A’ level pupils in Wales and England.

Feedback from the sessions evidence his impact on theoretical understanding and also on approaches to teaching literary analysis in schools.

INFORMING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING

Professor Marggraf Turley’s research used Romantic authors to develop public understanding on social and ethical issues raised by biometric surveillance technology. He ran interactive demonstrations using biometric devices (smart watches, smart speakers, face recognition, other forms of remote sensing) to measure participants’ physical and emotional responses to Romantic poems and paintings. These events included Q&As that discussed how historical literature can inform our understanding of the increased embedding of surveillant devices in our daily lives.

Events included ‘The Quantified Romantics’, featuring ‘The Vortex’ (an immersive black box experiment) at Ceredigion Museum in 2015, funded by the *Being Human* festival. Attracting large audiences, ‘The Vortex’ also subsequently featured at the launch of the 2016 *Being Human* festival in Senate House, London, and ran again at a ‘Living Frankenstein’ evening in Senate House, at the Bath Literature Festival and at the Aberystwyth Steampunk Spectacular.

Professor Marggraf Turley’s research has featured in a *Guardian Food Blog* interview, in *The Observer* and in *Times Higher Education*.

GENERATING NEW WAYS OF THINKING THAT INFLUENCE CREATIVE PRACTICE

Professor Marggraf Turley delivered a public talk on Keats, Shakespeare, food justice and surveillance at the University of Oxford’s ‘John Keats in 1819’ Day School Lecture in April 2019. In the audience was the Artistic Director of a Winchester theatre company, resulting in follow-up conversations, which in turn led to impact the way she (as playwright) and performers in the company approached a new play about the composition of Keats’s best-known poem ‘To Autumn’.

Independent authors, including Lucasta Miller, have also been enabled in their professional writing careers by Professor Marggraf Turley’s research, with his work on Keats mentioned prominently in acknowledgments.

CONTRIBUTING TO THE QUALITY OF THE TOURIST EXPERIENCE

Winchester City Council’s Visit Winchester ‘Sunset Walk’ tourist brochure was revised in 2014 to include a ‘Did you know?’ reference to Professor Marggraf Turley’s collaborative research on food security and Keats’s ode ‘To Autumn’. As a result of his research, the brochure now includes St Giles Hill, identified as the probable location that inspired the famous ode, as a walkers’ destination. The cover of the brochure was also changed to feature an image taken from the summit of St Giles Hill.

