Andrew Bennett was born in Surrey in 1960. He studied at Hull University and later at the University of East Anglia, where he wrote a PhD thesis on John Keats. After completing his PhD in 1989 he was appointed to a temporary lectureship at the University of Tampere in Finland, where he worked until 1992. It was at Tampere that he first encountered Nicholas Royle, and it was during the long dark Finnish winters that they first began collaborating together, first on a book about the novels of Elizabeth Bowen, and later on the *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. (For more on this, see the accompanying interview.) In 1992 he moved from Tampere to the University of Aalborg in Denmark, and from there in 1994 to the University of Bristol, where he is now Professor of English Literature. He has also been visiting professor at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland (2006-7), and Nanjing University, China (2007). Andrew Bennett has written three books on Romanticism – on Keats, on Wordsworth, and on the idea of posterity in Romantic poetry. He has also written studies of authorship and a short book on the short-story writer Katherine Mansfield. His most recent book investigates the idea of ignorance in Romantic and post-Romantic literature and literary theory. At the University of Bristol, he teaches courses on eighteenth to twentieth century literature, on contemporary writing and on autobiography, and he contributes to the MA pathway in Romanticism.

**Select Bibliography**

**Books:**

What has ‘ignorance’ to do with literature? In this book I argue that literature may be conceived as a ‘discourse of ignorance’, that literature is an ‘agnoiology’. Unlike philosophy, say, which generally attempts to overcome ignorance, literature can be said to engage with it, embrace, even celebrate it. There is of course far more ignorance than knowledge in the world (however clever you are, however many books you have read, what you don’t know remains a vast, unfathomable hinterland). But this central dimension of human existence is all too often simply denied or rejected or, in a word, ignored. I argue that ignorance is an important theme in many literary texts – that many texts, from John Keats’s poems to Philip Roth’s novels, explore the experience of ignorance, of what it is like not to know. I also suggest that reading often leads not so much to enlightenment as to a deeper, in some ways more interesting, more receptive sense of uncertainty (what most ‘threatens’ reading, Maurice Blanchot argues, is someone ‘who knows in general how to read’). And I explore the idea that at some level the writer is not aware of what it is that he or she is doing. ‘You can take interest in what I am doing’, Derrida once remarked, ‘only insofar as you would be right to believe that – somewhere – I do not know what I am doing’.


One of the persistent myths surrounding the great Romantic poet William Wordsworth concerns the question of how he actually composed poems. Wordsworth himself propagated the paradoxical idea that he didn’t in fact *write* poems at all. Instead, in a poem like ‘Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey’ (1798), he presents himself as wandering up and down the river Wye composing a poem called ‘Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey’, with pen and paper nowhere in sight. Indeed, as if to eliminate writing from the poem altogether, Wordsworth later went to the trouble of changing the poem’s title to ‘Lines Composed…’. Why does this matter? Well, the myth, which has been swallowed hook, line and sinker by biographers, critics and others, has been highly influential in the last two hundred years not just for our understanding of Wordsworth but for our ideas about what
poetry is and about the process of poetic composition more generally. It links to ideas about inspiration and poetic spontaneity and poetic presence: to the idea that poetry just comes to a writer without effort and to the idea that writing itself is somehow extraneous to poetry, even damaging in some way. In this book, I challenge this myth of Wordsworthian composition and seek to show that the act of writing is important thematically in many of Wordsworth’s major poems, as well as being crucial to their rhetorical texture.


What is ‘the author’ and why are they saying such terrible things about him (or her)? Why did Roland Barthes declare the death of the author in 1967? And why should we be concerned about the author anyway, when what we want is to read a poem or novel or story? What’s the author got to do with it? Shouldn’t we, as D.H. Lawrence urged, ‘trust the tale’ not the ‘artist’? In this book I seek to answer these and other questions by offering a brief introduction to one of the key critical and theoretical concepts in literary studies. In addition to surveying the historical development of authorship from Homer to the eighteenth century and beyond, I examine questions of literary collaboration, gender, pseudonymous and anonymous publication, the impact of copyright law, the idea of so-called ‘confessional’ poetry, and the ways in which concepts of intentionality, genius, inspiration, and originality are bound up with developing ideas of authorship.

A volume in the British Council’s *Writers and Their Work* series, this book provides a brief introduction to the work of a remarkable woman – a bisexual interloper into the metropolis from the colonies (Mansfield was from New Zealand) who, by the time of her early death in 1923 at the age of 35, had transformed and modernised the short story. The book focuses in particular on the ways in which life and writing are linked in Mansfield. Living and working as an exile in London, and as a sexual and cultural outsider, Mansfield developed multiple identities (christened Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp, she adopted various names, nicknames, pen-names, pseudonyms – including indeed ‘Katherine Mansfield’). I argue that intrinsic to Mansfield’s art is an unsettling of the question of personal identity through experiments in narrative form and in the development of various modes of literary impersonation.


This book examines the significance of the Romantic period’s ‘culture of posterity’ – the idea that the true poet, ideally a figure of neglected genius, has to be dead in order to be properly appreciated. I argue that the Romantics developed the ancient idea that one can somehow ‘live on’ through one’s work into the idea that the poet should necessarily be ‘ahead of his time’, and that in the end he (and I argue that this is more commonly a concern for men than for women in the early-nineteenth century) can only be understood after one’s death. I present detailed readings of five of the major Romantic poets – Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley and Byron – and suggest that Romanticism involves a radical shift in ideas about the poet and about poetic reception, with wide-ranging implications for our understanding of Romantic-period writing.

We argue that the twentieth-century Anglo-Irish writer Elizabeth Bowen is one of the most important, though undervalued, practitioners of the twentieth-century novel in English. Bowen’s first novel, *The Hotel* (1927), begins with a young woman, Miss Fitzgerald, hurrying out of a hotel and stopping: she is ‘frightened by an interior quietness and by the thought that she had for once in her life stopped thinking and might never begin again’. Such moments of pausation, of suspense or abeyance, seem to us characteristic of Bowen’s work and give us pause: we linger over them and try to work out how such a stilling of life, of thought, works in and through Bowen’s ten novels. Through a series of detailed readings, focusing on effects of immobility, catatonia, shivering, dream, trance, and convulsions, we contend that Bowen’s work calls for a radically new way of doing criticism. As in our *Introduction* we work hard to avoid the abstract and often rather dull use of ‘isms’ and theoretical jargon. Instead we try simply to read and respond to Bowen’s extraordinary novels – works that are more haunting and more thought-provoking (more thought-stopping, indeed) than any critical or theoretical attempt to appropriate them.


This study focuses on questions of narrative and audience in order to offer new readings of John Keats’s major poems. I discuss ways in which Keats’s poetry exploits narrative conventions to attract or ‘seduce’ readers and ways in which reading is figured in the poetry: the speaker in ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, for example, looks quizzically at an ancient artefact and asks the kinds of questions of it that we ask about Keats’s poem; the narrator in ‘La Belle Dame sans Merci’ is left, like the knight, and like the reader, indeed, bemused and bereft at the end of the poem, caught up in a dream-world, ‘alone and palely loitering’. I argue that such ‘figures of reading’ have themselves largely determined the critical reception of Keats’s work. It is not just Porphyro that acts the voyeur in ‘The Eve of St Agnes’: the poem determines its reader as a kind of voyeur too, encouraging or forcing us to ‘look’ with that
amorous young man. And I explore the way in which in the end Keats also, however, conceives of his ideal reception as being necessarily deferred to a time after his death, and the idea that reading produces a kind of ‘posthumous life’ for his writing.

**Edited Books:**


See [Andrew Bennett’s website](#) for details of further publications.