

Institution: Royal Holloway, University of London

Unit of Assessment: English

Title of case study: The Faerie Queene Now: Remaking Religious Poetry for Today's World.

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

This creative/critical collaboration sought to reclaim Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* for today's world, investigating how to remake this religious poem and national epic for diverse audiences and users, and exploring its potential to revivify religion and society, through artistic works and new liturgies. Impact beyond the academy was always at the conceptual heart of the project. Bringing together members of different faith groups, school communities, and cultural practitioners (musicians, puppeteers, poets), it engaged them in debate and sought to produce new cultural forms that would not only contribute to cultural life but affect civil society and public discourse. An unforeseen if powerful impact was a national debate and controversy over deployments of the figure of St George.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The research that underpins this project is twofold: first, an investigation into how Spenser's vast 16th-century nationalist and religious poem might resonate with today's debates about the role of religion in national identity; secondly, an exploration of how a canonical but languishing work could be revived and made more relevant through discussion among different interest groups, and thence feed into creative practice. Several insights of this research are timely since they are precisely about building bridges between Universities and audiences beyond them.

The project, which began on 1 April 2010 and continued through to the end of 2011, is underpinned further by research that pre-dates the project's inception. The Principal Investigator was Professor Ewan Fernie (Royal Holloway 2003-2010) with co-investigator Dr Simon Palfrey (Oxford), each attending to different strands of the project. The [website](#) provides further context. Fernie had already interrogated Renaissance spirituality, having co-edited *Spiritual Shakespeares* (2005). He had also, in a series of writings, explored the aesthetics of immediacy in direct experiences of poetry and drama. His argument emphasized commitment to the present and opposed the relentless drive to contextualize literature historically that dominates critical work. Editing the series '*Shakespeare Now*', and calling this project '*The Faerie Queene Now*', Fernie points to the 'presentism' which underpins the project, informing its central aim of investigating how the experience of Spenser's poetry *today* can illuminate and shape immediate concerns emerging in our world, in the here and now, such as post-imperial guilt or national identity. Fernie had, furthermore, explored critical/creative dialogue through a collaboration with Dr Palfrey, *Dunsinane*, a re-writing of *Macbeth*. Professor Shapcott (Royal Holloway since 2004), a collaborator in the project, has a record of cross-media explorations and collaborations, which informed her creative engagement with the project. Her collection, *Of Mutabilitie*, which explores transformation and mortality and whose title refers to one of Spenser's most celebrated works, won the Costa Prize in 2011. Professor Sir Andrew Motion (RHUL English) also contributed verse to the inaugural events, bringing together the creative and critical strands of our Department.

The project was built on the firm foundation that this research and creative practice provided. It also explored its own research questions through a consciously experimental collaborative process, comprising two strands: the 'Liturgical Project' and 'the Fable and Drama project'. The first of these involved exploratory workshops, led by Fernie and the Reverend Canon Shanks of Manchester Cathedral which, beginning in April 2010, brought together a diverse set of people including Jo Shapcott; Professor Michael Symmons Roberts of Manchester Metropolitan University; Reverend Canon John A. Ovenden of St George's Chapel, Windsor; Martin Denny, Director of the Windsor Festival. The event was recorded and can be listened to here: backdoorbroadcasting.net/2010/04/the-faerie-queene-liturg-project/

Exploring the relationship between a diverse and shifting English society and its religious traditions, it aimed to forge new poetic and religious forms. The collaborative insights of this research led to events at Windsor and Manchester Cathedral. The 'Fable and Drama' strand was conceived by Fernie and Palfrey but, being led by Palfrey, the impacts of that project will only be considered here insofar as they relate back to research carried out at Royal Holloway. These strands and the various constituencies came together in two events detailed below.

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

Outputs

1. Ewan Fernie (ed.), *Spiritual Shakespeares* (Routledge, 2005).
Reviewed:
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/shq/summary/v057/57.2hammill.html>
and
<http://shakespearenowseries.blogspot.co.uk/p/critical-acclaim-for-series.html>
2. ---, 'Shakespeare and the Prospect of Presentism', *Shakespeare Survey* 58 (2005)
3. ---, 'Action! Henry V', in *Presentist Shakespeares*, ed. Hugh Grady and Terence Hawkes (Routledge, 2007)
4. ---, (ed), *Redcrosse: Remaking Religious Poetry for Today's World* (Continuum, 2012). (Includes full text of the liturgy with reflections on the issues it raises and the public controversy it caused.)
5. Project Website: <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/English/faeriequeene/>
6. Jo Shapcott, *Of Mutabilitie* (Faber, 2010).

Funding

- AHRC Funding (£69,681);
- LCACE: (£5000, awarded to Fernie for 'Music for the Faerie Queene Now' project, for use within the period of the project);
- PRS for Music Foundation (£2000, awarded to Rupert Gough and the RHUL Choir for commissioning the Faerie Queene Canticles 2010-11);
- Arts Council England (£3,000 for Andrew Taylor and the 'liturgy strand' of the project, 2010-11).

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

The areas in which the impacts of this research and its related project are found include

- civil society, by sparking debate and challenging cultural values
- and cultural life, by forging and inspiring new religious and cultural forms, while also bringing cultural heritage to life.

Both of these were enhanced by the interdisciplinary nature of the project. Crossing the borders of secular and theological domains, academics joined forces with poets and priests, composers and actors, designers and directors, musicians and members of the public.

The project's aims of reaching **civil society** beyond academia – including **religious institutions** – brought both anticipated and unanticipated results. Public awareness of key issues of religion, nationalism, cultural identity, and the meanings of spiritual and sacred icons, was achieved in a range of powerful ways. Using material from the conferences and workshops, **a new civic liturgy** was presented as part of a special service at Manchester Cathedral shortly after St George's Day 2011 (delayed because of the timing of Easter). This incorporated giant puppets of St George and the Dragon, designed by a Catalan group, and constructed by people from the Booth Centre and the Mustard Tree, two of Manchester's largest homeless shelters. Publicity was widespread with reports in the media, including *Radio 4's 'Today Programme'* (see References). The event was well attended and aroused controversy: the fact that St George was represented with dark skin (drawing on Mark Cazalet's 2001 reredos painting in the Cathedral) generated hostile responses from the English Defence League and the British National Party, who sent hate-mail to the Cathedral and threatened to picket the Cathedral on the day of the service. This led to further coverage and debate in the national press (see References), on blogs and in sermons at Manchester Cathedral, to which the congregation responded supportively. *The Independent's* report, for instance, was followed up by 217 comments, and the controversy was picked up by Diarmaid MacCulloch in his 2012 BBC documentary 'How God Made the English'.

The Liturgy strand led to several events, **enhancing cultural life**: (1) the collaborative work 'Redcrosse', devised by Fernie, Shapcott, Motion and Michael Roberts, with music by the composer of 'Acoustic Triangle', was premiered in St George's Chapel at the Windsor Spring Festival in 2011; (2) a new musical work 'The Faerie Queene Canticles' based on the devised liturgical text was subsequently commissioned with music, again, from the composer of the trio Acoustic Triangle. This was performed and recorded before 360 people at Romsey Abbey (8 July 2011), accompanied by the Royal Holloway choir. This has been performed again since (at St George's Bristol, 5 May 2012). Royal Holloway choir and Acoustic Triangle now collaborate regularly. (3) The 'Redcrosse' project was, moreover, taken up by the RSC for performance in Coventry at the Cathedral's jubilee celebrations in 2012, directed by one of the RSC's Assistant Directors. Not in the original plans, this illustrates how the research inspired new cultural forms.

This and the project's other strand (Fable and Drama) were united for two distinct interdisciplinary events: first, a cross-sector conference reflecting on poetry and spirituality, hosted by Cumberland Lodge in January 2011 which in turn contributed to a closed performance at Shakespeare's Globe (February 2011), and led to a second event, a 'Poet in the City' public arts day at Kings Place on 7 March 2011, with Fernie and Shapcott reading their work, and performances, readings and academic debate taking place. The project has thus contributed to **cultural life** by inspiring new work from a range of artists, spurring public performances of new and existing works of art.

The complex historico-religio-literary enquiry initiated by Fernie and Palfrey, helped by Shapcott and Motion, reached a wide and diverse range of cultural and critical constituencies. In mediated forms the project has come to the potential notice of the 350,000 regular *Guardian* readers, 200,000 *Independent* readers, and circa 1.4 million for a Radio 4 feature on the project on 14 May 2011. It has an afterlife in the repeated performances by the RSC and Tim Garland, and also in the liturgy being taken up in a

number of churches, including St George's in the East and St George's Hanworth. Dr Rowan Williams described it as making 'with immense imaginative energy and honesty... a unique contribution to what is often a pretty sterile discussion of who we are in these islands.' (Endorsement printed on *Redcrosse*). It is having an influence on the way the Anglican Church perceives its liturgical tradition (see Shanks) and how it engages with academia and literature: a 'Literature and Liturgy' project at Regents Park College, Oxford, inspired by the project as a whole, will be commissioning creative work with a liturgy based around *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Its impact is ongoing and it is providing a model for further experiments in such interdisciplinary forms (around the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, for instance, in 2016 – see source 4).

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

Evidence of Public debate concerning the deployment of St George:

1. *The Guardian*, 24 January 2011: 'Poets enlist for Quest to Pull St George from the Jaws of the Far Right',
<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jan/24/poets-enlist-st-george-liturgy>
2. *The Independent*, 22 April 2011: 'Saint George, the Canon and a Flood of Right Wing Hate', followed by 217 comments.
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/saint-george-the-canon-and-a-flood-of-rightwing-hate-2271982.html>
3. *Manchester Evening News*, May 7 and 9, 2011:
<http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/manchester-cathedral-event-depicting-st-860164>
<http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/video-manchester-cathedral-event-depicting-860198>

Impact on project partners beyond the academy (eg. Manchester Cathedral, artistic performers):

4. Account of hate mail sent to Manchester Cathedral's Canon Theologian: 'A Desire for the Impossible' in *Redcrosse*, ed. Ewan Fernie (Bloomsbury: 2013), especially pp. 66-77.
 5. The composer of the trio Acoustic Triangle can provide details of impact on work of musical performers, <http://www.audio-b.com/acoustictriangle>
 6. The RSC Assistant Director can provide details of the Impact on theatrical work, see <http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/news/rsc-sent-to-coventry-for-poeti-900>, 7.
- Testimonials and reviews on *Redcrosse* showing impact on Church of England and other partners:
<http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/redcrosse-remaking-religious-poetry-for-todays-world-9781441138996/>
8. The Programme Director can provide details of Impact on *St George's House and Chapel, Windsor Castle*
 9. The Chief executive of Poet in the City can provide details of the impact of events at *Poet in the City*, also see: <http://www.poetinthe.city.co.uk/events/95/audio>

News of follow-up event which will draw on the project:

10. <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/jan/05/shakespeare-euro-laureate>