

Institution: UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Unit of Assessment: 28

Title of case study: Dante and Late Medieval Florence: Economic, Cultural and Religious Impact

1. Summary of the impact

The research findings of Claire Honess and Matthew Treherne on the relationship between Dante's poetry and political, religious and intellectual practice in late medieval Italy have brought significant benefits to visitors to Florence and to the Florentine tourist industry, to faith groups and to the general public.

By engaging with the tourist industry, faith groups, UNESCO and regional bodies in Italy, through the development of online resources, and by developing new ways of experiencing Dante's work, Honess and Treherne have enriched both cultural and religious life in Italy, in the UK and beyond, meeting a need identified by key partners.

2. Underpinning research

The research which underpins this impact has been carried out at the University of Leeds by Claire Honess, (appointed 2003 to a Lectureship in Italian) and Matthew Treherne (appointed 2005 to a Lectureship in Italian). They are Co-Directors of the Leeds Centre for Dante Studies (LCDS), which was founded in 2007 as a focus for research, teaching and outreach activities in this area. It is the only centre of its kind in the UK.

The thread that runs through their research is an examination of the political (Honess) and theological (Treherne) concerns of Dante's writings in the context of – rather than as something to be extrapolated from – his poetry. Both, then, are concerned with the social and religious context of the poetry. Within the field of Dante studies, this focus on the connection between Dante's particular context and his poetic practice is distinctive, and has led to new scholarly understandings which in turn have direct relevance for key partners in heritage, tourism and faith groups.

Thus Treherne's research has demonstrated that Dante's theology needs to be understood in the context of lived religious experience – in particular, in the context of the liturgical rituals which helped shape medieval religious life (References **3, 4, 6**). Treherne shows that liturgical experience is not merely decorative within Dante's text, but in fact shapes experiences of time, subjectivity and the sacred which are fundamental to Dante's poetic experimentation (Reference **2**). Uncovering the nature of religious experience can give access to otherwise hidden dimensions of the theology of Dante's poetry. Similarly, Honess's research has shown how Dante's views on politics ought not to be examined solely as abstract ideas, divorced from the everyday experience of life in late medieval Italy, but rather need to be conceived as fully at one with a thick social and cultural experience, connected to the discursive structures of Dante's poetic work and the manner in which political and social experiences were played out in their context (References **1, 3, 4, 5**).

Throughout, a concern with the relationship between the historical context of late medieval Italy, and the poetic form through which Dante engages with that context, is crucial. This focus marks the current major AHRC-funded research project which Honess and Treherne, in collaboration with a colleague at the University of Warwick, are leading, “Dante and Late Medieval Florence: Theology in Poetry, Practice and Society”. This project examines the ways in which religious life was experienced in the specific context of Florence in the 1280s and 1290s – the period when Dante was likely to have been studying theology in the city, ranging across learned and popular contexts. The originality of this research is in this close attention to the local context, and to the literary mediation of that context – research in Dante studies has tended to treat intellectual and cultural traditions as though they were divorced from the context in which Dante and his contemporaries would have known them – and therefore it fills a gap for our partners who wish to explore the lived experience of Christian life which shaped a central work of European literature and a key moment in European history.

3. References to the research

1. C. E. Honess, *From Florence to the Heavenly City: The Poetry of Citizenship in Dante* (Oxford: Legenda, 2006) Available on request.
2. M. Treherne, ‘La *Commedia* e l’immaginario liturgico’, in Giuseppe Ledda (ed), *Pregliera e liturgia nella Commedia* (Ravenna: Longo, 2013), pp. 10-31 Listed in REF2
3. C. E. Honess & M. Treherne (eds), *Reviewing Dante’s Theology* (New York, Bern, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2013), 2 vols [contains: C. E. Honess, ‘Dante’s Political Theology’] Listed in REF2.
4. C. E. Honess & M. Treherne (eds), ‘*Se mai continga...: Exile, Politics and Theology in Dante* (Ravenna: Longo, 2013) [contains: C. E. Honess, ‘“Ritornero poeta...”: Florence, Exile, and Hope’, pp. 87-105; M. Treherne, ‘Reading Dante’s Heaven of the Fixed Stars: Declaration, Pleasure, and Praise’, pp. 13-28] Listed in REF2.
5. C. E. Honess, ‘The Language(s) of Civic Invective in Dante: Rhetoric, Satire and Politics’, *Italian Studies*, 68 (2013), 157-74 Listed in REF2.
6. M. Treherne & V. Montemaggi (eds), *Dante’s ‘Commedia’: Theology as Poetry* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010) [contains: M. Treherne, ‘Liturgical Personhood: Creation, Penitence and Praise in the *Commedia*’, pp. 131-60] Listed in REF2.

Indicators of the quality of this research include:

- Its contribution to Leeds’s submission for RAE 2008, in which no outputs were scored lower than 2*;
- A £974,000 (full economic cost value) AHRC grant for work building on this research (2012-16; Treherne as Principal Investigator, Honess as Co-Investigator; Simon Gilson (Warwick) as Co-Investigator);
- Publication in prestigious outlets (Legenda; University of Notre Dame Press; publications of the International Dante Seminar);
- Positive peer reviews of publications;
- Invitations to join international bodies including the *consiglio scientifico* of the *Società dantesca italiana* and the editorial board of Devers Dante Series.

4. Details of the impact

This work has had an impact on the following groups:

Tourists and tourist organisations

- In collaboration with UNESCO in Florence and the Comune di Firenze, we have developed itineraries, grounded in our research, to enable modern tourists to experience the religious and intellectual sites key to Dante's Florence. These itineraries have been distributed via the tourist information offices in Florence (as paper leaflets) from the tourist season of 2013 and will be available on the UNESCO-Comune di Firenze flagship website, www.florenceheritage.it).
- The Leeds Centre for Dante Studies is the only research organisation to have contributed to UNESCO's work on late medieval Florence. (Corroboration **A**)
- The historic centre of Florence is a UNESCO World Heritage Site visited by around ten million people every year; however, until Leeds research was brought to tourists, late medieval Florence had been barely visible in tourist materials. Our materials, provided in both English and Italian, therefore have significant international reach. (**A**).
- UNESCO confirms that our research meets an urgent need in updating an aspect of the city's heritage industry largely neglected since the 1920s. In particular, it sees our work as valuable in encouraging visitors to return to the city, offering rich encounters with late medieval sites, and foresees using our material for several years into the future. (**A, B**)
- Leeds research has therefore added a crucial new dimension to Florence's attractions as a tourist destination, with considerable reach in terms of potential visitor numbers, and significance in terms both of tourists' experience and of economic and heritage strategy for UNESCO and the Comune di Firenze. (**A, B**)

Faith groups:

- Our understanding of Dante's religious context has particular currency for groups examining their own spirituality and belief. Encouraged by the Bishop of Wakefield, we have established a thriving partnership with the Diocese. In particular, since 2012 we have worked with the Mirfield Centre, an Anglican education centre for priests, monks, religious educators and interested lay people.
- The Centre was "attracted by the possibility of a renowned research team bringing what was at the heart of their research agenda...into a context where non specialists might benefit from and engage with research that happens in the academy, but intends to connect with theological thinking, faith and religious experience today". (**C**)
- A course, *Dante Now*, held at the Centre, focussed on how our research on Dante's engagement with his religious context could be relevant to contemporary religious life. We have also led Christian and Humanist "thinking groups" in the diocese and elsewhere in Yorkshire, encouraging further engagement with Dante.
- Positive feedback reveals the in-depth significance of this work, both for ordained ministers and lay people. These include: "very helpful for my teaching" (from a faith group leader); it has helped me "reflect on the redemptive journey"; "it's made me think more about the Christian side of life". (**D**)

Public audiences and cultural organisation

- We have worked with Opera North (as part of the DARE collaboration between the University of Leeds and Opera North), Leeds Cathedral Choir and University of Leeds Chamber Choir (involving members of our own student body) to present a programme of

Impact case study (REF3b)

artistic and cultural events based on religious culture in Dante's Florence.

- Audiences have received a rich, accessible encounter with Dante's poetry which would have been impossible without our distinctive combination of research opening up socially-grounded understandings of Dante's work and a commitment to public benefit. Feedback confirms this: "you struck a lovely balance between the music, the readings and the guidance through the text"; "a fantastic event, a feast for the mind and the senses alike. The juxtaposition of text, image, and music was incredibly rich". (E)
- At the same time our academic expertise added an extra dimension to the artistic excellence of Opera North's programme of events; contacts in Opera North confirm that this is precisely the kind of collaboration with the University Opera North wishes to develop. (F)
- Public events (including *Discovering Dante*, a series of public events - concert, lectures and exhibition - on Dante held in the University in 2009; and *Three Evenings in Dante's Florence*) attracted audiences of up to 200 per event.
- Online resources have also opened up pathways to our research: podcasts; online lectures by Honess and Treherne and visiting speakers; an online resource, *Analysing Paintings*, providing the basic skills to engage with visual culture in Dante's age; *Discover Dante*, a comprehensive introduction to Dante, and to our research on Dante. Indicative metrics show that in 2008-11 there were >79,000 page views and 13,800 unique visitors. (G)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Director of UNESCO Florence (including emails dated 7 June 2013)
- B. Director of Economic Development (Culture, Tourism and Sport), Comune di Firenze (including letter dated 29 May 2013)
- C. Contacts in the Mirfield Centre
- D. Evaluation following work with the Diocese of Wakefield including evidence of on-going impact
- E. Library of evaluation forms and submitted feedback from public events
- F. Contacts in Opera North
- G. Database of web-based metrics to show use of online resources [from Google Analytics].