

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of York</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature</p>
<p>Title of case study: Rethinking Religion: Early Modern Beliefs and the Modern World</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Twenty-first century concepts of faith, community, and division were forged in the early modern period: an age of Reformations, unprecedented cross-cultural encounters (especially between Christianity and Islam), and new understandings of religious, personal and social identity. The research of Ziad Elmarsafy, Kevin Killeen, and Helen Smith, in this field, has impacted upon a wide range of publics, individuals, and institutions, who have gained a new understanding of national and international attitudes to religious life, and a changed perspective on pressing contemporary debates about belief and society. Beneficiaries include school students, interested members of the public, and staff, volunteers, and visitors at Hardwick Hall and York Minster Library. These latter collaborations paved the way for national impact, benefitting the National Trust, and Cathedral Libraries and Archives.</p> <p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>In prize-winning publications, and two major research projects, Elmarsafy (joined HEI in 2006 as SL, now Reader), Killeen (in 2008 as ECR, now SL) and Smith (in 2004 as Lecturer now Reader) have focussed on the relationship between religious texts (especially holy scriptures), experience and identity from the Reformations to the Enlightenment. With colleagues from History, they constitute the core of a vibrant research cluster, focused on early modern religion and the book, based in the interdisciplinary Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies. Collaboration and exchange among CREMS members has informed the publications of Elmarsafy, Killeen and Smith. Their research, which offers new perspectives on questions of belief, interpretation, and cross-cultural exchange, has furthermore been shaped by the department's distinctive transnational approach.</p> <p>Killeen's research has brought new insights into biblical scholarship in the mid-17th century. As well as exploring the subject in detail through the example of the important, and previously neglected, figure of Sir Thomas Browne, Killeen has demonstrated how the Bible was appropriated and applied by a range of historical and literary actors. His work reveals how crucial religious scholarship and hermeneutic practice were to the intellectual history and political language of a turbulent historical moment, which has been central to recent accounts of British national identity.</p> <p>Smith's <i>Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England</i> sheds new light on women's roles in textual production. She has uncovered evidence of women's religious commitments, their roles in the making and movement of Catholic and Protestant books, and their participation in debates around confessional change and cultural encounter. Her work on material texts has drawn new critical attention to the journeys and transactions, including confessional change, which books participated in and structured.</p> <p>Elmarsafy's <i>The Enlightenment Qu'ran</i> brings to light the history of Qu'ranic translation from the 12th to the 18th centuries, and shows that Qu'ranic texts were central to European thought during the early modern period. His work on contemporary Islamic literature has demonstrated the long-term legacies of early modern debates within contemporary discourses surrounding religious identity and the Islamic world.</p> <p>Two major research projects have underpinned the impact described below. Killeen organised a major international conference, 'The Bible in the 17th Century' (supported by the British Academy, the Society for Renaissance Studies and the Royal Historical Society), in 2011. At this event, he and Smith brought together contributors to their research-driven <i>Oxford Handbook of the Bible in England, 1530-1700</i> (under contract with Oxford University Press). Their research for this ongoing project reinforces the centrality of the Bible to English identity, politics, and culture, and offers a new view of the local, national, and international contexts in which the Bible was interpreted and deployed.</p> <p>Smith was Co-Investigator on the AHRC-funded project 'Conversion Narratives in Early Modern Europe' (Sep 2010-Aug 2013). The project focussed on religious change in the dual contexts of the Reformations and the encounter of Europe with the rising Ottoman Empire. The research undertaken by project members revealed the dissemination of key narratives across Europe, and</p>

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highlighted the global range of questions of religious change (including at the project's major international conference 'Conversion Narratives in the Early Modern World' in 2011). Smith's research for the project shows the conceptual and corporeal closeness of religious conversion and bodily cure. She has extended recent work on the 'Turk plays' by uncovering themes of religious transformation in Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan*. This work (which drew on Elmarsafy's expertise) informed a recent theatrical production. Smith's research into the history and holdings of Hardwick Hall has demonstrated their material and conceptual links to the English Reformation, European printed texts, and Islamic materials and designs.

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

- Ziad Elmarsafy, *The Enlightenment Qur'an: The Politics of Translation and the Construction of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009). Awarded British-Kuwait Friendship Society Prize. (REF 2)
- Kevin Killeen, *Biblical Scholarship, Science and Politics in Early Modern England: Thomas Browne and the Thorny Place of Knowledge* (2009). Awarded Council for College and University English Book Prize. (REF 2)
- , 'Chastising with Scorpions: Reading the Old Testament in Early Modern England', in 'The Textuality of Reading in Early Modern England' eds. Jennifer Richards and Fred Schurink; Special Issue of *The Huntington Library Quarterly* (2010): 491-506. DOI: 10.1525/hlq.2010.73.3.491
- 'Hanging up kings: The Political Bible in Early Modern England', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 72:4 (2011): 549-570. DOI: 10.1353/jhi.2011.0035
- Helen Smith, *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, 2012). Awarded DeLong SHARP Book History Prize. (REF2)
- , "'Go your ways for an Apostata': Religion and Inconstancy in *The Dutch Courtesan*, Dutch Courtesan Project, <http://www.dutchcourtesan.co.uk/religion-inconstancy/>.

Research funding indicating quality of research

1. Simon Ditchfield (PI) and Smith (CI), 'Conversion Narratives in Early Modern England', AHRC Research Grant, September 2011-August 2013 (£572,056).
2. Killeen, Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship, 2008-09; BA conference grant (£10,000); Conference Grants from RHS and SRS.
3. Killeen (CI), 'The Complete Works of Sir Thomas Browne', AHRC Research Grant, January 2013-January 2018 (£946,070.93).
4. Smith, Leverhulme Research Fellowship, awarded in April 2013 (£44,538)
5. Smith (PI), 'Imagining Jerusalem, 1099 to the Present Day'. AHRC Research Network, September 2013-August 2015 (£44,539)

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

Through a wide-ranging and interlinked impact programme, the group's research has inspired creative and critical responses among a range of publics, individuals, and institutions, ranging from school students to the National Trust and its users. Impact events have brought local and visiting York audiences to the heart of national debates and stimulated historically-informed responses with a national, and international, reach. Killeen and Smith have collaborated extensively in organising the two key strands of impact activity: on the Bible (led by Killeen) and on conversion narratives and religious change (led by Smith). Elmarsafy's research has underpinned much of this second strand, and been central to the exhibition and app at Hardwick Hall, described below.

Inspiring Publics

In 2011, Killeen trained postgraduates to work with over 180 local primary **school students** on 'Parallel Stories: Parables for our Time', exploring the application of religious narratives to contemporary events. Sixth-form students from across Yorkshire, and from BSix, Hackney, an area at the centre of recent debates around religious tensions, took part in five workshops with Helen Smith and Abigail Shinn (postdoctoral fellow on the Conversion Narratives project) from 2011-13, exploring religious life in the Renaissance, and applying the team's findings to their own experiences. One teacher testified that Parallel Stories' 'creative approach... enabled the children to understand the Bible's significance today', whilst a BSix student emailed Smith to say that the workshops 'inspired me so much that I am basing my Extended project qualification on something very similar.... I regularly check the blog' (Evidence #1).

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Six public lectures in spring 2013 (including by Smith, Elmarsafy, and Conversion Narratives members Abigail Shinn, Peter Mazur and Simon Ditchfield, chaired by Killeen) brought the group's research to a **wide local public** (<http://www.york.ac.uk/crems/conversion/news/publiclectures/>). The lectures, held at the Medical Society Rooms in the centre of York in order to attract an audience beyond the University, encouraged attendees to understand the historical diversity of religious experience, and its pertinence to present debates. Routinely over capacity, the lectures attracted c. 420 attendees. Feedback gathered through postcards filled in after each lecture singled out a variety of ideas showing connections between current and early modern experiences of religion that attendees found provocative, including 'the Anglo-Ottoman detente under Elizabeth I', 'the controversies involved in translating the Qu'ran', 'women's embroidery [as] a rich source for understanding the social and religious upheavals of the Renaissance', and 'how mutable identities were' (Evidence #2).

The Bible was a core theme of the first York Festival of Ideas in July 2011, allowing **York residents and visitors** to participate in and gain a sophisticated understanding of national celebrations of the 400th Anniversary of the King James Bible (Evidence #3). A Conversion Narratives walking tour, family Bible event, and national 'Ten commandments for the 21st century' competition, encouraged **individuals** to understand the centrality of the King James Bible translations and biblical politics to national life, and realise the enduring relevance of early modern debates around conversion and religious identity (Evidence #2).

The Conversion Narratives blog and website (www.york.ac.uk/conversion; www.europeanconversionnarratives.wordpress.com) have opened the group's research to an **international audience**, with posts drawing, for example, on Smith's research into women's reading and tales of conversion, Killeen's research into Browne and the KJV, and Elmarsafy's research into Islamic culture; the blog had over 29,000 hits from 127 countries between Sept 2010 and July 31st 2013, and the project had over 1000 twitter followers on July 31st 2013. Responses to the blog reveal the eagerness of non-academics to participate in and be informed by the research of the project: 'Lilufa' commented: 'this sort of research is highly valuable in terms of aiding one's understanding of another's religion or way of life. It is through this understanding prejudices can be tackled' (Evidence #4).

Re-presenting the Past

Two exhibitions, one led by Killeen and one led by Smith, brought Elmarsafy, Killeen and Smith's research findings to **national and international audiences**, and had a significant impact upon the **National Trust** and **Cathedral Libraries and Archives**. The group's research has enabled Hardwick Hall and the York Minster Library to understand more fully the potential and richness of their collections, and to appreciate the capacity of those collections to contribute to contemporary debates and communicate difficult historical concepts to a wide audience. Through a series of meetings and exchanges in June and July 2013, these insights have also impacted upon senior curators at the National Trust and institutions within the new Cathedral Libraries and Archives Network (Evidence #5 and 6).

Hardwick Hall, one of the most important surviving Elizabethan houses, attracts over 250,000 visitors a year, and brings together a team of 250 volunteers. Hardwick was the ideal site to explore religious history and women's agency, thanks to the history of its builder, Bess of Hardwick, and its holdings, especially an appliqué hanging showing 'True faith and her contrary, Mahomet' and rare painted hangings depicting the conversion of Saul. Smith curated the 'Virtue and Vice' exhibition (Apr 2013-Nov 2014). She wrote the accompanying mobile app which links Hardwick's collections to those held nationally and internationally, and enables non-academic audiences to engage actively in contextualizing the Hall's collections (Android:play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.rustymonkey.virtueandvice&hl=en_GB; iOS:itunes.apple.com/app/virtue-and-vice/id635915944?ign-mpt=uo%3D5).

One element of Smith's exhibition specifically illustrates the capacity of research and creative practice to come together to address areas of cultural conflict. Hardwick's 'Mahomet' appliqué hanging controversially, from a modern perspective, represents the triumph of English Protestantism over Islam (though Smith's interpretation for the exhibition reveals its more nuanced approach to this iconographic tradition). Elmarsafy was centrally engaged in the decisions made about how to approach the provocative 'Mahomet' hanging, and how to present it within the exhibition and app. **Jan Garside**, a nationally-recognised textile artist, engaged in a series of

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conversations with Smith (which drew on Smith's, Killeen's and Elmarsafy's research), and reinterpreted Hardwick's controversial hanging in a textile installation reflecting upon cultural encounter and women's agency. This collaboration not only added to the impact of the research presented in the exhibition, but had a beneficial impact on Garside, who brought new designs into her work, based on Smith's analysis of material encounters in the Renaissance, and began to conceive differently of the relevance of historical collections to her practice (Evidence #7).

The exhibition's most significant impact has been upon the **National Trust** (including its **senior administrators, curators and volunteers**). After a workshop presenting the research of Elmarsafy, Killeen and Smith, 79% of Hardwick room guides confirmed they would change how they presented the Hall to visitors (Evidence #8). One, in particular, noted the dual impact of the exhibition and the research workshop, confirming 'the visitors themselves will think differently'. The exhibition has indeed had a direct impact upon **local, national, and international visitors**. Visitors interviewed in July 2013 were enthusiastic about how the exhibition connected Hardwick to national and international histories with continuing relevance (Evidence #8). Elena Williams, Assistant House and Collections Manager, confirms 'the exhibition has changed how we present the Hall, and made staff more confident in presenting complex historical knowledge and ideas to visitors from across the world' (Evidence #9). Meetings with national curatorial staff (for Pictures and Sculpture and Books and Libraries), have confirmed the Trust's aim to build on the exhibition throughout the organization, and led to an ongoing research partnership and an invitation to explore the exhibition's lessons in the Trust's autumn 2013 *ABC Bulletin*. David Adshead, Head Curator of the National Trust, has confirmed that this collaboration will shape the Trust's research agenda as it moves forward (Evidence #5).

York Minster Library, the largest Cathedral Library in Britain, has important collections in theology, early science, literature, and music. 'A Book Fit for a King', curated by Killeen as part of the King James Bible celebrations (July-Nov 2011; www.york.ac.uk/projects/bible/), has been described as 'the most important exhibition run by the Minster Library to date. It gave us new insights into the values and histories of our own collections' (Evidence #10). The exhibition raised awareness among **local communities and tourists** of the historic importance of York's ecclesiastical past and of the ecclesiastical context of learning in the early modern period. The Minster Librarian has confirmed that Killeen's presentation of cutting-edge research has inspired the **Dean and Chapter** to understand the value of the library's historic holdings, and how they can be made relevant in today's world (Evidence #10). This close collaboration has established the University of York and York Minster Library as the leading institutions in the formation of the new Cathedral Libraries and Archives Network (Evidence #6 and #10). Representatives of major Cathedral and ecclesiastical libraries met with York academics (including Smith) on 15th March, 2013 to launch the network. This network facilitates and promotes research on these collections and acts as an interface between academic communities, church bodies and the wider public.

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

1. Evidence of schools impact (NCEM press release featuring teacher (tinyurl.com/okrekxf); email from BSix student).
2. Portfolio of feedback materials from impact events.
3. Festival of Ideas 2011 programme and York Press articles: 16/03/11 (tinyurl.com/pffa6c5), 20/06/11 (tinyurl.com/nthotge), 06/07/11 (tinyurl.com/pvyxnfj).
4. i. Conversion Narratives blog and website statistics. ii. Blog comment from Lilufa.
5. Letter from Head Curator of the National Trust.
6. Cathedral Libraries and Archives Network website: www.clan-uk.org.
7. Letter and blog entry from Jan Garside, Textile Artist (tinyurl.com/nfopkxd). Interview with Jan undertaken 30th July 2013 (tinyurl.com/ogsdhou).
8. i. Feedback from NT volunteers; ii. Hardwick visitor interviews; iii. tripadvisor comment 29/06/2013 ('the information boards in the house are among the best I've ever seen').
9. Letter from Assistant House and Collectors Manager, Hardwick Hall.
10. Letter from York Minster Librarian. York Press article 25/05/11 showing influence of York research on Librarian's understanding of the collections (tinyurl.com/q42dcs3).