

<b>Institution:</b> University of Sussex		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 – English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Challenging and Expanding the Canon of Early Modern Drama for Theatre Companies, Practitioners, and Audiences		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2005 – 2019		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Matthew Dimmock	Professor of Early Modern Studies	September 2003 – present
Andrew Hadfield	Professor of English Literature	August 2003 – present
Rachel Stenner	Lecturer in English Literature, 1350-1660	September 2018 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015 – 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> <p>Through their research into the circumstances and dramatic practices of earlier periods, Sussex Early Modernists have changed the way theatre and opera companies work, challenging stakeholders and the public by rethinking the standard repertoire, opening up the established canon to lost works, and provoking a productive dialogue between early modern and contemporary practices and assumptions. Built on partnerships with theatrical companies, advisory work, and unearthing previously unknown 16th- and 17th-century drama, this experimental 'research in action' (exploring research questions and archival materials through performance) has enabled theatre companies and specific productions to adopt new approaches to challenging material, in particular concerning racial and religious difference. Beyond their impact on companies and productions, the group has generated important insights into urgent contemporary debates about decolonisation, national identity, and the limits of the curriculum and the established theatrical repertoire.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> <p>From 2004, with Dimmock and Hadfield as founding members, the Sussex Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies (CEMMS) has advanced cutting-edge research through partnerships with cultural organisations. Early modern drama and performance has been a particularly fertile area, including AHRC-funded collaborative work with the National Trust on country house drama within Sussex, notably at Petworth (2013-16), and an ongoing link with the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC that has enabled both primary research and its dissemination. Close relations have also been established with Shakespeare's Globe – formalised with a partnership agreement in 2013 – enabling collaboration in research and pedagogy. Stenner's appointment in 2018 enabled further expansion of these areas. The distinctive approach they have developed combines: a) a 'research in action' method in which early modern texts are investigated, deconstructed and reconstructed through experiments in performance that are particularly attuned to early contexts and to contemporary resonances; with b) the use of archival expertise to bring unknown materials from this crucial period (when the first public, professional theatres were established) to theatre professionals and wider audiences. These two interconnected research interventions are rooted in, and dependent on, their partnerships beyond the academy.</p>		

Using largely unknown material to demonstrate a nuanced approach to the Elizabethan performance of Muslim identities, Dimmock's monograph *New Turkes: Dramatising Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* [R1] has led to him being recognised as 'one of the leading scholars of Islam in early modern English literature' (Matar 2007). His research led to the rediscovery of William Percy's manuscript play *Mahomet and His Heaven*, the first English dramatization of the Prophet Muhammad [R2]. Routinely referenced, this 'astonishing' edition (Connor 2007) was shaped by a Globe staging in 2005. His recent monograph – *Elizabethan Globalism* [R5, G2] – centres upon a manuscript play, reassembled by Dimmock in 2013, dramatizing international diplomacy. Integral to the research was a public performance on the Globe's Wannamaker stage in July 2016 that developed out of workshops with the company to explore ways of performing this 'lost' text for the first time in four hundred years. This approach has also generated new sources for the performance of 'alien' figures in more canonical drama [R6].

Hadfield has lectured at the Globe since 2006 and is co-investigator of the AHRC-funded 'The Thomas Nashe Project' [G1] which, partnered with the Globe, is rethinking Nashe's prose and drama. This involved pioneering staged performances of *The Terrors of the Night* and of *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (in its original setting), with Globe actors and directors. Hadfield is also co-editing James Shirley's *The Politician* for the Oxford *Collected Works* – an English play which was first staged in Ireland's first public theatre, the Werburg Street Theatre. This research [as in R3] has led to an ongoing collaboration with University College Dublin centred on performing the play in Dublin (at The Smock Alley Theatre) and Brighton in March and April 2019. Performance research at CEMMS has enabled Stenner's pioneering work on early English print culture [R4] to develop into the first staging of William Baldwin's extraordinary satire *Beware the Cat* (1553) with the RSC, and performances in Brighton, Stratford and Cyprus in 2019.

Dimmock and Hadfield brought the interconnected strands of their work together for a series of performance/research events in November 2020, in collaboration with the Globe. This two-day public event – 'Shakespeare and Race' – innovatively fused archival research, research-in-action, and engagement with stake-holder groups, theatre professionals, and the public in order to test, clarify and develop their findings. Participants included directors, actors, theatre companies, drama students and teachers from across the UK.

### 3. References to the research

- [R1] Dimmock, Matthew (2005) *New Turkes: Dramatising Islam and the Ottomans in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate). Available on request.
- [R2] Percy, William (2006) *Mahomet and His Heaven* ed. Matthew Dimmock (Aldershot: Ashgate). Available on request.
- [R3] Hadfield, Andrew (2018) 'Culture and Anarchy in Mid-Seventeenth-Century Ireland: The Strange Case of James Shirley at Werburgh Street', *Literature Compass* Special Issue: 'The Literatures of Early Modern Ireland', <https://doi.org/10.1111/lic3.12493>
- [R4] Stenner, Rachel (2018) *The Typographic Imaginary in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Routledge). Submitted to REF2.
- [R5] Dimmock, Matthew (2019) *Elizabethan Globalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press). Submitted to REF2.
- [R6] Dimmock, Matthew (2020) 'Tudor Turks: Ottomans Speaking English in Early Modern *Sultansbriefe*', *English Literary Renaissance* 50.3, 335-58. Submitted to REF2.

### Key Research Grants

- [G1] 'The Thomas Nashe Project', Andrew Hadfield Co-I (PI: Richards, Newcastle), AHRC ([AH/M009076/1](#)) Total £750,181, of which £330,952 to Sussex (2015-20).
- [G2] 'Reorienting the English Renaissance', Matthew Dimmock, Leverhulme Fellowship (RF-2015-552) £46,264 (2015-16).

#### 4. Details of the impact

Dimmock, Hadfield and Stenner's research has brought unknown early modern drama, poetry and prose to theatre and opera companies and to wider audiences through performance, podcasts, press, film, television and radio. In practice-based collaborations they have developed innovative approaches to the staging of such material, so that the early modern can productively inform current debates concerning national identity, race and religion. This work challenges preconceptions about historical representations and exposes their influence on theatre repertoires and the educational curriculum in the present (demonstrated in the responses of performers and audiences to the 2020 Globe events [S9c]). Their research is unified by the recognition that this period is uniquely influential, a point at which the professional theatre is first established in England, at exactly the same time that English overseas commercial and colonial engagements were rapidly expanding. As a result, the new commercial theatres had to formulate strikingly original dramatic languages in which to depict 'others', the legacies of which live on today. Accordingly, the work of Dimmock, Hadfield and Stenner makes an important and distinctive contribution to the decolonising movement: offering a broader, more inclusive range of sources and roles; increasing the diversity of early modern drama through performance-based research; and thereby showing, for instance, how black lives mattered in late 16th- and early 17th-century England. These themes were the rationale for the major public event they organised in late 2020: 'Shakespeare and Race'.

#### Materials and Practices that Enlarge the Resources of Early Modern Theatre and Alter Perceptions of the Period

A primary source of impact has been the provision of largely unknown texts to theatre companies, and the partnerships that have been built around the use, understanding, and implications of such material. This work makes 'theatre a form of research itself' [S9b] and has influentially demonstrated (as one participant noted), how 'theatrical performance has the powerful potential to bring timely and revisionary knowledge of the past into the present' [S4].

Hadfield's Nashe work involved the preparation of a text of *The Terrors of the Night* for its first performance on the Globe's Wannamaker stage (July 2017): a 'viscerally realized ... triumph' [S1] that thrilled participants in its innovative 'use of a performative lens to approach Elizabethan prose' [S1]. This was followed by a series of performances of Nashe's play *Summer's Last Will and Testament* in London and Stratford-Upon-Avon (September/ October 2017), and a restaging of its first performance in the Archbishop's Palace in Croydon by the children's company Edward's Boys [S2]. Hadfield's research on Nashe's *Lenten Stuff* inspired an experimental film on that text by prize-winning artist/filmmaker [text removed for publication], which premiered in Rome in 2019; in [text removed for publication]'s words, Hadfield's work was 'crucial in determining the shape of the film – the structure, tone, and sound' [S6]. It was screened at the AHRC 'Being Human' festival the same year. He also provided advice on early modern representations of the body for the composer [text removed for publication] which 'without a doubt shaped the opera' she produced for the Aldeburgh Festival in 2018 [S7].

Dimmock's research has provided texts for numerous staged readings at the Globe, at the Sussex Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (ACCA), and elsewhere, from *Mahomet* in 2005, to the first, surprising and 'extraordinary' [S9b] performance in four hundred years of Robert Cecil's Chinese-themed 1602 housewarming entertainments, in 2016. As with Hadfield's production of *The Terrors*, Stenner has brought a little-known Elizabethan prose work to the contemporary stage with her production of *Beware the Cat* at the ACCA, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in Stratford, and in Cyprus. This work has similarly challenged perceptions of the period, galvanising performers and directors; opening up unfamiliar material for public audiences [S10b]. The same is true of Hadfield's work on Irishness and the Irish contexts for early modern English writing, crucial to his revival of Shirley's play *The Politician* on Dublin and Brighton stages in 2019, which challenged actors' and directors' ideas about Anglo-Irish theatrical engagements in the pre-modern period [S8].

#### Staging Foreignness and Expanding the Capacity of the Early Modern Repertoire to Address Race

The concern with national identity in Hadfield's research points to a prominent theme emerging from early modern performance research at Sussex, viz. a focus on the way always-complex notions of 'foreignness' underwent profound changes across the early modern period. This has been notably prominent in Dimmock's work, and the recognition of his expertise led to an invitation to provide expert advice on race and identity for Sir David McVicar's 2015 Glyndebourne production of Mozart's opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* [S3a]. This production employed Dimmock's insights into the diverse complexity of European-Ottoman engagements to prompt a 'rethink[ing]' of 'a remarkable work' [S3b]. Dimmock delivered public lectures, led workshops and headed podcasts on the history and representation of the Ottoman Empire for the cast and a general audience. The production sold out, went on nationwide tour, and was released on DVD. It was performed to 34,900 people in person, with another 14,250 seeing it live streamed or on DVD and was a great success for Glyndebourne [S3c]. [text removed for publication] commented that 'the input of a scholar of Matthew [Dimmock]'s knowledge, sensitivity and tact was an invaluable contribution to the production's subsequent success and to the intellectual understanding of the Company of the dramatic process of rehearsing this difficult but ultimately tremendously rewarding opera' [S3a]. Press coverage emphasised how those elements he had contributed helped to generate 'the most convincing dramaturgical presentation of the opera in recent times' [S3b]. As a result he was subsequently invited to contribute his research to the Royal Opera House production of Verdi's *Otello* (2017), the RSC *Tamburlaine* (2018), and the Glyndebourne production of Handel's *Rinaldo* (2019) – all productions interested in exploring the relevance of earlier stagings of African, Asian, or Middle Eastern figures in the present – and to write two substantial articles for *Prospect* magazine that explored the relevance of such material for contemporary audiences (June 2015, September 2018).

Dimmock's rediscovery of the manuscript play 'A Conference' (1602) [R5] – which features the first Chinese character in English drama, and explicitly challenges prevailing assumptions of Tudor England's xenophobia – further formed the basis for an extensive collaboration with the Anglo-Chinese theatre company Red Dragonfly [S5] and the translation of this play into Mandarin. This involved a series of open research workshops staged at Sussex in 2017-18, which in turn had a profound impact on the company and its sense of what was possible: giving them 'new experiences ... new insights' and new ways of working [S5]. The result was an original contemporary play, *The China Masques*, written by the company dramaturge Ross Ericson, which relies upon Dimmock's research to ask important questions about the nature of national and racial differences, the ways in which such identities are performed, and how they determine what is and can be performed on stage. The company feel that this new work makes 'an important and unique contribution to the underlying issue of representations of Chinese culture in British theatre' [S5]. The play was to have been premiered at the Brighton Fringe Festival in May 2020, but the Covid pandemic prevented this [S5].

The opening up of early modern English drama – and its largely unknown preoccupation with non-European characters and locations – has an obvious and important role to play in decolonising the repertoire and the curriculum. The online event that Dimmock and Hadfield organised with Shakespeare's Globe in November 2020, 'Shakespeare and Race', built on work already begun in this area at Sussex, as well as the Globe; it was driven by the need to demonstrate this diversity on a public stage, and to explore how drama might inform and enrich contemporary debates about identity in the wake of Black Lives Matter. The initiative drew together their research to offer a series of public events: an initial lecture (Ndiaye, Chicago), a pedagogic workshop (chaired by Hadfield), and a sequence of short films staging early modern scenes of race and desire followed by a panel discussion (in which Dimmock participated). With 500 registered audience members from across the world, the event sold out. In the films – on which Dimmock and Hadfield worked closely with the actors – largely unknown plays (*Soliman and Perseda*; *Lust's Dominion*) were placed alongside Shakespeare's *Othello* to pose provocative questions about the canon, Shakespeare, and conceptions of race.

For the actors in particular, the majority of whom identified as BAME – and who were unfamiliar with the non-Shakespearean drama or that 'parts existed for actors of their ethnic background' from this period – this was 'incredibly eye-opening' [S9b]. Thanks to the event, one actor learned for the first time 'that there was an entire period of the early modern era where plays



centring on Black and Muslim characters were being written' [S9c]; another actor/director praised the clarity and the 'urgency' of the questions raised and celebrated the 'productive discomfort' they generated [S9c]. The audience included teachers and directors, many of whom found the process 'invaluable' and insightful; they noted how it had encouraged them to reassess their assumptions; to 'de-canonise', 'to expand the purview of the early modern plays they use' or to 'pair some of the lesser discussed/performed early modern race plays with something like *Othello*' in the classroom. Others felt it had reshaped 'their awareness of race both historically and in the present' [S9c].

The event therefore opened up new knowledge about early modern theatre, broadening a sense of those plays written in the period and their subject matter for actors, directors, teachers and the Globe itself – material that will influence future performances and programming. For [text removed for publication] at the Globe, the event emphatically demonstrated how 'pre-modern literature and drama can be researched, taught and performed through the lens of anti-racism, decoloniality and critical race studies' [S9a].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[S1] Reviews / Questionnaires for Globe performance of *Terrors*.

[S2] Reviews / Questionnaires for performances of *Summer's Last Will*.

[S3] a. Supporting statements from Glyndebourne/ [text removed for publication] (by email); b. reviews from *The Guardian* ([www.theguardian.com/music/2015/jun/14/entfuhrung-aus-dem-serail-review-glyndebourne-sussex](http://www.theguardian.com/music/2015/jun/14/entfuhrung-aus-dem-serail-review-glyndebourne-sussex)) and *Classical Music* ([www.classical-music.com/reviews/opera/mozarts-die-entfuhrung-aus-dem-serail-performed-glyndebourne-2015](http://www.classical-music.com/reviews/opera/mozarts-die-entfuhrung-aus-dem-serail-performed-glyndebourne-2015)); c. Audience figures from Glyndebourne Opera House (by email).

[S4] Questionnaires / blog for Globe performance of 'A Conference'.

[S5] Supporting statement from Red Dragonfly.

[S6] Supporting statement from filmmaker [text removed for publication].

[S7] Supporting statement from composer [text removed for publication]

[S8] Supporting statements / questionnaires from a. UCD and b. Sussex ACCA performances of *The Politician*.

[S9] Testimony from a. [text removed for publication] at The Globe and b. [text removed for publication] at The Globe relating to the impact of the project; c. stakeholders and participants at the 'Shakespeare and Race' event at the Globe (interviews and questionnaire data).

[S10] Material – a. questionnaires and b. company interviews – relating to the ACCA and Stratford performances of *Beware the Cat*.