

Institution: University of Wolverhampton		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Performing Medieval Gender: A Storytelling Project		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2017- 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name:	Role:	Period employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Daisy Black	Lecturer in English Literature	2017 - Present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: June 2017- July 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact <p>Black's early performance research has impacted upon local and international organisations, including museums, religious spaces, schools, storytelling groups and festivals. Her storytelling, online festival and workshops reached over 3,600 participants, increased awareness of medieval gender and race studies and promoted the use of performance in education, arts and heritage. Black also developed and facilitated new digital storytelling practices during the pandemic. She provided professional learning enhancement and changed the practice of 70 educators, curators and storytellers and for 120 school pupils across the UK and USA. Her popular performances demonstrate a renewal of public interest in medieval narratives.</p>		
2. Underpinning research <p>The impact derives from the research of Black. Black joined the University of Wolverhampton in 2017, having already published on gender in medieval performance. Her work contributed to Wolverhampton's already strong research culture in gender studies, women's narratives and histories. Black set up and runs the Centre for Transnational and Transcultural Research's <i>Gender, Sexuality and Representation</i> research group, which brings together Humanities colleagues working on gender. Her findings, reported in the underpinning research [R1-R5], reveal a new and innovative discourse on the understanding of gender, race and conflict within medieval performance.</p> <p>A major strand of Black's work examines how gender conflict in medieval plays stages moments of theological and social transition. Her monograph [R1] conducted an important analysis of how medieval playgoers and theatre makers understood, used and gendered time in performing their biblical stories. This included a needed reworking of prior critical attitudes to the plays' Jewish, female and 'queer' characters, including Herod, Joseph, Noah's wife and Bethlehem's mothers. These characters have conventionally been interpreted as unruly, comic or sinful. However, Black argued these characters stress continuity and memory, and therefore challenge Christian theologies which read Christ's advent as a moment of definitive change. This also nuanced prior discussions about how race and anti-Semitism operate in these plays.</p> <p>Two chapters interrogated the disruption of established gender and power structures in early drama [R2, R4]. A chapter on women's involvement with medieval and early modern performance cultures conducted a trans-European study which dismantled the still-prevalent narrative of the "all-male stage" [R3]. Black's chapter on how medieval gender is represented in modern table-top gaming cultures found that a recurring theme in medievalist pop-culture is that women are either</p>		

written out of the narrative or represented as sex objects or supernatural antagonists [R5]. Where this research called for a greater communication between medieval researchers and the designers and brokers of medievalist popular culture, these findings were also central to her impact work. Her storytelling performances staged a direct intervention by bringing alternative medieval narratives to a public context.

While this research was conducted, Black used her findings and methodologies to underpin and develop her storytelling shows. These include *Broken Shells* [underpinned by the gender and race studies of R1 and R3]; *Unruly Woman* [R1, R5]; *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Full Yarn* [R1, R5]; *Nine Days' Wonder* [R3] and *Mappa Mundi* [R1, R2, R5]. As well as adapting and transmitting primary research from these publications, the performances adopted Black's conceptual methodologies concerning the telling of women's historical narratives and the figuring of race. Black's AHRC / BBC New Generation Thinker work also led to an additional series of BBC Radio 3 broadcasts underpinned by R1-5 which, to date, cover topics including medieval performances of motherhood and wifehood, anti-Semitism in early performance, stage villains, the actress on the early stage and medieval storytelling. While changing public ideas about medieval gender, race and history, these performances and documentaries also commanded contemporary socio-political relevance, particularly in the context of #MeToo, Black Lives Matter and the pandemic.

3. References to the research

The publications have been through rigorous peer-review processes, each receiving at least two reviews. Black's monograph [R1] had two positive peer reviews from specialists and is published by a widely-respected press in her field. It is currently under consideration for the Medieval and Renaissance Drama Society's David Bevington Award for the best new book in early drama studies. R3 was commissioned by the editor, who is herself a respected scholar in this field and knew of Black's expertise in this area. The quality of Black's research was recognised in Black's 2018 appointment as an AHRC / BBC New Generation Thinker. R1, R2, R2 and R4 appear on University reading lists, including at the universities of Manchester, Hull, Swansea, Kings College London, Surrey and Durham. On the back of this research, Black is regularly booked to give keynote lectures, workshops and performances as part of the public outreach for major academic conferences in her discipline (section 4).

R1. Black, D. (2020) *Play Time: Gender, anti-Semitism and Temporality in Medieval Biblical Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press) (REF 2 Output).

R2. Black, D. (2018) 'Dressing the Pleasure Garden: Creation, Recreation and Varieties of Pleasure in the two texts of the Norwich Grocers' Play', in Skinner, P. and Tyers, T. (eds.) *The Medieval and Early Modern Garden in Britain: Enclosure and Transformation, 1200-1750* (New York: Routledge), pp. 102-122 (Reserve REF 2 Output).

R3. Black, D. (2020) 'Theatre and Performance' in Capern, A. (ed.) *The Routledge History of Women in Early Modern Europe* (Exeter: Routledge), pp. 357-387.

R4. Black, D. (2019) 'Commanding Un-Empty Space: Silence, Stillness and Scopic Authority in the York *Christ Before Herod*', in Blud, V. and Watt, D. (eds.) *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds* (London: Institute of Historical Research), pp. 237-250 (<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9b2tw8.22>).

R5. Black, D. (2021) 'Malevolent and Marginal: The Feminized 'Dark Ages' in Modern Card Game Cultures', in Houghton, R. and Alvested, K. (eds.) *The Middle Ages in Modern Culture: History and Authenticity in Contemporary Medievalism* (I.B. Tauris), pp TBC (Delayed Output).

Note: The publication of R5 was delayed due to pandemic (see mitigation statement). Originally due out in Summer 2020, the underpinning research was conducted in 2018.

4. Details of the impact

Black's research in gender and medieval performance instigated new forms of storytelling practice and generated a renewal of public interest in medieval narratives. It has been influential in increasing awareness of medieval gender and race and has resulted in the professional enhancement and improvement in practice of teachers, curators, storytellers, school pupils and folk educators (see C1 for a full list). Moreover, Black's findings have been utilised to inform public debate, and generate new forms of thinking and practice.

I1. Story performances increased knowledge about medieval gender, literature and culture.

With its focus on gender, performance and social conflict, Black's research is particularly suited to cultural engagement which encourages modern audiences to question what they know about the medieval world. It provided the intellectual framework for 5 storytelling shows toured across the UK, USA and online. All were accompanied by programmes containing study resources and increased their audiences' knowledge about the medieval world.

The live performances reached 1,447 people, an online performance engaged 1,100 viewers and workshops had 190 participants. These included museum and cathedral visitors; arts festival attendees; dance communities; arts and heritage professionals; high schools and international storytelling communities. Black frequently filled venue capacities [C1]. The performances raised money for charity and the arts and heritage groups that hosted them [C3, C5, C6, C8]. *Unruly Woman* raised GBP450 for domestic violence shelters. The online stream of *Broken Shells* raised GBP379 for Birmingham refugee charity The Hope Projects.

Early in the pandemic, Black organised a story festival on YouTube and Facebook based on Boccaccio's *Decameron*. This played a crucial role in community building and skill development, creating performance opportunities and improving mental health during a challenging time for the arts [I3, C4].

Data gathered from Black's performances demonstrates increased knowledge in their non-specialist audiences [C1]. Across 26 performances, 70% of questionnaire respondents said they had initially known little about the medieval research, texts, and histories of the shows. Afterwards, 95% said their knowledge had increased, and 46% indicated their intention to take further actions. These included reading medieval literature (the mystery plays, Chaucer and other medieval stories); researching medieval performance and history; visiting landmarks, museums and heritage sites (including the Bayeux Museum, Reading Museum, New York's Metropolitan Museum and Hereford Cathedral); as well as attending other historical and storytelling events.

27 participants responding to a follow-up questionnaire claimed they had completed these actions, with one writing a blog post and another embroidering one of the *Bayeux Tapestry* scenes. Reading Museum curators said they would use Black's story in tours of their Tapestry facsimile, and Darlington Literature Group said *Broken Shells* "had a lasting effect on our discussions of other historical texts" [C5]. This group since attended other storytelling performances, and members did their own medieval storytelling during the pandemic (C5). *Nine Days' Wonder* was commissioned by a historical dance group who have since decided to include similar works in their future programmes [C7], and a USA historical dance group reported members using their new, "more diverse view of history" after Black's performance in their own productions of mummers plays and their own cultural work [C9].

There was strong interest in the elements of the shows most underpinned by Black's research. *Unruly Woman* audiences commented on its "emphasis on the voices of women"; that it "pushed beyond the all-too-frequent male-dominated historical focus and has given our participants an expanded and more diverse view of history" [C1, C9]. A *Broken Shells* audience member said it "challenged Chaucer's misogyny and racism but showed that [...] women did get the chance to overcome the odds" [C1]. Feedback also indicated interest in racial and national identity, with a

Wolverhampton Literature Festival audience member saying *Mappa Mundi* increased their “understanding that England has always been multicultural” [C1].

12. Workshops developed skills and the adoption of early performance traditions in education, arts and heritage.

Black’s workshops developed performance skills in education, arts and heritage [C2]. A workshop at Leeds International Medieval Congress used materials from R1-R5 to train academics, curators and schoolteachers in storytelling for teaching and outreach. Half of the attendees said they would use these skills in teaching and public engagement and “add storytelling elements in their guided tours and presentations” [C1]. Further actions they had taken included hiring tellers, attending performances and other workshops. As a result of the workshop’s success, the Congress has organised further story performances and story circles [C3]. Black’s work therefore expanded employment opportunities for other artists. Black ran a week of workshops on medieval drama underpinned by R1-R4 for participants at Hey Days English Dance Festival, California, and a day workshop for attendees of the UK Scandinavian and International Dance Festival. Both engaged festival-goers, and gave participants practical experience in reading and staging medieval scripts. The Hey Days participants reported “a new interest and curiosity in medieval religious drama and a desire to learn more”. One has since staged one of the plays in Washington DC [C1]. A workshop for students and teachers at Dorcan Academy, Swindon drew on primary sources from R1-R2 as part of the Being Human Festival. By the end of the workshop, participants could tell a medieval story and discuss its use of gender, race, class and comedy. The class now use this material in their learning and teaching.

13. *The Modern Decameron* increased knowledge of medieval literature, developed communities and skills, created performance opportunities and improved mental health.

83 professional and amateur storytellers around the world recorded 120 tales for *The Modern Decameron*, and Black told stories from her research for R1, R2 and R5. The videos have received 12,523 views to date. The project had a strong emotional impact on its performers and audiences, and several who responded to the questionnaires commented on the connection between Boccaccio’s plague story and their own experiences of C19 [C1, C4]. One said it reminded them “humanity has been through pandemics before and they dealt with it by telling stories” [C1]. 80% of the respondents indicated an intention to find out more about medieval literature, and took further actions including reading and telling medieval stories, historical research and attending other online events.

One frequently mentioned impact was that the project formed a global community, with several saying they had watched and discussed stories with friends around the world [C1, C4]. It also had a positive impact on the participants’ mental health: a third mentioned the psychological impact of this project, which helped them feel in touch with others. One teller said: “It gave me something positive to work towards at the beginning of lockdown, improving my mental health. Listening to the stories every day was fascinating and therapeutic” [C1]. Others said the festival allowed them to access storytelling in a way that, because of disabilities or geography, they could not have otherwise done.

Further responses suggest socio-economic and developmental impact across arts, education and business. One took their experience into their (business) job as it moved online; one used the stories in home schooling; a teacher said, “I’ve been thinking of ways to bring this model into the classroom in the fall”; and another said the project influenced their Arts Council application for a Storytellers’ Working Party “to further investigate performance possibilities in the “new” digital world” [C1, C4]. 4 organisers said the project exposed them to performers they plan to book for future events: “you are [...] creating a catalogue of storytellers. When everything starts up again we will have seen so many new faces to choose our next program from” [C1]. 73% of the audience said they would continue to attend story online and in-person story events. All tellers learnt new skills, including video editing, recording, learning from their peers’ presentation techniques and how to tell stories on camera [C1, C4]. Several told stories for the first time and others have since

recorded new performances. One set up an online story night and 11 put on ticketed online events. This provided cultural artefacts, opportunities, skills and income for professionals badly affected by venue closures.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. Questionnaire data report from the storytelling shows, workshops and The Modern Decameron.
- C2. Statement from Senior Congress Officer and Public Engagement Organiser for Leeds International Medieval Congress.
- C3. Statement from Arts and Culture Manager at the City of Wolverhampton Council (on behalf of Wolverhampton Literature Festival).
- C4. Statement from professional storyteller and Modern Decameron participant.
- C5. Statement from Darlington Literature Group class leader.
- C6. Statement from Archaeology and Monuments Officer, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust.
- C7. Statement from Chair of Stonesfield Folk Dance Club.
- C8. Statement from Sheffield StoryForge.
- C9. Statement from Program Director, New London Assembly, USA.