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| Institution: Bangor University, 10007857 | | |
| Unit of Assessment: UoA 27 – English Language & Literature | | |
| Title of case study: Reframing Medieval Texts for Contemporary Audiences | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 - 2019 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): 1) Professor Raluca Radulescu 2) Professor Sue Niebrzydowski | Role(s) (e.g. job title): 1) Professor of Medieval Literature 2) Professor in Medieval Literature | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 1) January 2005 - present 2) September 2006 - present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 31 July 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact | | |
| <p>Bangor University's research into medieval English literature has demonstrated its relevance in the modern world. Specifically, it has expanded global access to medieval texts and archives; influenced and shaped English literature in primary and secondary school curricula in Wales and England; influenced and informed the practices of cultural heritage institutions; and demonstrated, through varied media, the continued relevance of a crucial part of our literary heritage to modern concerns among local, national and international audiences.</p> | | |
| 2. Underpinning research | | |
| <p>Bangor University research into late medieval literature has been ongoing since its inception in 1884. More recently, the Material Texts research cluster in the School of Languages, Literatures and Linguistics, which encompasses the Stephen Colclough Centre for the History and Culture of the Book, the Centre for Arthurian Studies (CAS), and the Institute of Medieval and Early Modern Studies (IMEMS), has fostered a wide range of research in the field of medieval literature, revealing the enduring relevance of these texts for contemporary audiences.</p> <p>Niebrzydowski's research examines the cultural, literary and linguistic context for the representation of women in medieval English literature, demonstrating the long duree of women's lives being hidden from history. The research underpinning this impact study is particularly informed by Niebrzydowski's literary critical studies of Chaucer's female characters [3.1 - 3.3] since joining Bangor University in 2006. In these Niebrzydowski offers new insight into the interplay of gender, age and sexuality in Chaucer's representations of women, with particular reference to the <i>Wife of Bath</i> and <i>May from The Merchant's Tale</i>, two of <i>The Canterbury Tales</i> frequently studied at A-Level.</p> <p>The research presented in Niebrzydowski's monograph [3.1] is expanded upon in subsequent work exploring wives in later medieval literature [3.2, 3.3]. In this study, Chaucer's <i>Wife of Bath</i> featured prominently alongside lesser-known texts, bringing the literary construction of wifhood, hitherto ignored by medievalists in preference for studies of virgins and widows, to new audiences</p> | | |

interested in the history of gender more widely. This was in part due to Niebrzydowski's work on sexual exploitation [3.2, 3.3]. This research on Chaucerian women led directly to Niebrzydowski's appointment as academic director of the Chaucer Project (between 2012 and 2014), a research collaboration between Bangor University and the National Library of Wales (NLW), with involvement also of the Huntington Library, California. This project created a digital facsimile of Peniarth MS 392D, the oldest extant copy of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and importantly included the 'Merthyr Fragment'. The Merthyr Fragment is the surviving leaf of what was once a complete copy of *The Canterbury Tales* and is significant as it comprises three surviving folia of a lost manuscript written by the same professional scribe (early 15th century) who copied the Hengwrt *Canterbury Tales*.

Radulescu's research has focused on the cultural, political and literary relevance of medieval Arthurian legends in their original context for over two decades. In particular, her research into the translation of the Grail Quest from Old French into Middle English has challenged traditional critical views of the Grail as a story written only for aristocratic audiences, aimed to instigate the reform of medieval chivalry through spiritual goals. In her 2013 monograph [3.4], arising from research funded by the British Academy [3.a], Radulescu has shown that the literate middle classes in late medieval England utilised the Grail story for cultural and political gain at a time of great change during the Wars of the Roses, also against a background of increased effort on the part of the English Church to assert its independence from Rome. The manuscript versions of the penitential romances, alongside Henry Lovelich's London translations of Arthurian romance, and Thomas Malory's treatment of the Grail in his *Morte Darthur* display three key moments in the rise of interest in political uses of literature during the Wars of the Roses. In her subsequent chapters [3.5, 3.6], Radulescu demonstrates that individual journeys of penitence can be reinterpreted to signify models of behaviour for middle class political actors of the late fifteenth century. The analysis of individual and collective reading patterns for these texts in their original manuscript contexts, particularly the miscellany manuscript contexts in which these texts were received, forms the core research on which Radulescu's impact activities have been based. This research has also been funded through a British Academy conference grant [3.b].

3. References to the research

Research Outputs

- 3.1 **Niebrzydowski, S.**, (2006) *Bonoure and Buxum: A Study of Wives in Late Medieval English Literature* (Verlag Peter Lang, Bern). Submitted to RAE2008 (Copy available on request)
- 3.2 **Niebrzydowski, S.** (2007) "So wel koude he me glose": The Erotics of Touch in the Wife of Bath's Prologue' in Rushton, C. and Hopkins, A. (eds.) *The Erotic in the Literature of Medieval Britain* (Boydell and Brewer, 2007). ISBN 9781843841197 (Copy available on request)
- 3.3 **Niebrzydowski, S.** (2011) Introduction: 'Becoming Bene-straw': The Middle-Aged Woman in the Middle Ages in **Niebrzydowski, S.** (ed.) *Middle-Aged Women in the Middle Ages* (D. S. Brewer, Cambridge), 1-14. Submitted to REF2014 (Copy available on request)
- 3.4 **Radulescu, R.** (2013) *Romance and Its Contexts in Fifteenth-century England: Politics, Piety and Penitence* (D. S. Brewer, Cambridge) Submitted to REF2014 (Copy available on request)
- 3.5 **Radulescu, R.** (2017) 'Percyvell of Galles and the Shape of the Arthurian Quest,' in Busby, K., Putter, A., Tether, L. and McFadyen, J. (eds.) *Handbook of Arthurian Romance in Europe*, eds (Berlin, de Gruyter), 389-402 (Copy available on request)
- 3.6 **Radulescu R.** (2019) 'Spiritual Malory, in the New Companion to Malory', in Leitch, M. and Rushton, C. J. (eds.) (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer), 211-26 (Copy available on request)

Grants

- 3.a **Radulescu, R.** (2010 - 2012) *Spiritual Journeys Through Political Landscapes*. British Academy, SG101173, GBP6,337 (Bangor University: R02110)
- 3.b **Radulescu, R.** (2012) *Research conference*. British Academy, GBP6,620 (Bangor University: R02114)

4. Details of the impact

Access to medieval texts and archives

Bangor University research has had a significant and lasting impact on global access to the oldest copy of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Led by Niebrzydowski, research collaboration with the National Library of Wales (NLW) has provided scholars and the general public world-wide with online access for the first time to the Hengwrt copy of the *Canterbury Tales* via the NLW's Digital Mirror [5.1] and since 2014 it has received 23,345 views. In terms of online views, the Hengwrt Chaucer is now one of the most popular NLW resources, achieving views and being accessed on a par with two of the most popular medieval manuscripts (the *White Book of Rhydderch* and the *Black Book of Carmarthen*; both of which are of significant Welsh importance); the digitised Chaucer being accessed by a world-wide audience of users as was always the intention. The digital facsimile of Peniarth MS 392D was designated a World Heritage Artefact in 2014. Niebrzydowski was instrumental in encouraging the digitisation project from inception, in acquiring funding for the public events to release NLW funds for the practicalities of the digitisation. As a direct result of the digitisation project, the University of Saskatchewan developed a freely available App [5.2] that used the digitised images of the Hengwrt manuscript and is accompanied by an audio performance of the *General Prologue* translated by Terry Jones, of *Monty Python* fame and also a Chaucerian scholar. Launched in February 2020, the App has over 5000 downloads, is rated 4.6* by users and reviewed as "truly a remarkable concept and performance".

Radulescu is the only academic member of the committee of the Association for Manuscripts and Archives in Research Collections (AMARC), the association for major repository libraries in the UK (British Library, the National Library of Wales, the National Library of Scotland, etc.). In this capacity Radulescu has been part of numerous research initiatives involving developing capacity in special collections, which led to her instrumental role, in 2014, in facilitating the move of an important collection of rare books, the Flintshire Harries Arthurian collection (over 2,000 rare items), resulting in the founding of the Centre for Arthurian Studies. The Centre and the use of the rare items is utilised internationally and in 2020 it became the custodian of the archives of the International Arthurian Society, meaning it is now the main global resource for the history of scholarship in this field.

Impact on statutory education

Bangor University's research into medieval literary studies has influenced primary and secondary school Creative Learning and A-level English Literature curricula. It has directly influenced decisions made by teachers to choose, for the first time, to teach English-language Chaucerian and Arthurian texts in Wales, and to use Arthurian texts in English schools as part of the new emerging Creative Learning curriculum across the UK.

Teachers who attended NLW events initiated a collaboration with Niebrzydowski (from 2017 to 2020), whose research underpinned their production of a new teaching resource, *Choose Chaucer: The Merchant's Tale* [5.3]. As attested by teachers, the resource led to the adoption of Chaucer onto the syllabuses, modified teaching methods and improved grades at a number of schools [5.4]. Freely available via the WJEC website, the A-Level English Subject Officer for WJEC, has indicated that the national audience for this material is substantial. Between 2018 and 2019, of approximately 1500 candidates in Wales and Northern Ireland around 500 pupils studied Chaucer; in England there were approximately 2,500 candidates, with around 900 pupils studying Chaucer [5.5].

Radulescu's research, and the rare books in the new Centre for Arthurian Studies, particularly the joint Bangor University and Flintshire Harries collections, attracted more than 100 members of the public in 2015 ('King Arthur Fun Day') and over 550 school pupils in 2016 ('Medieval Fun Day'), to events organised collaboratively with Caernarfon Castle (CADW). As a result, and with ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) funding, a new pedagogical model, based on targeted talks and interactive activities as part of the Quest/Hymngais project was developed by Radulescu and a local creative practitioner [5.6]. This model has raised pupils' level of interest in, and engagement with, the Arthurian legend, building self-confidence and better understanding of the strengths brought by reading ('finding one's Grail'), as attested by pupil evidence and a participating school's

Assistant Headteacher who stated that pupils “*gained significantly in self-confidence and in feelings of self-worth*” inspired by the Grail story and “*the project raised their expectations*” [5.7].

The influence of the Grail teaching programme has been enhanced by the use of the Arthurian website created by Radulescu, commissioned by the BBC, for its educational online arm, BBC i-wonder in 2015, a website for teachers and pupils of all ages, and the public. As evidence attests, teachers have used this content produced by Radulescu to inform their teaching of the legends [5.8].

Impact on cultural heritage organisations

Bangor University’s research in Arthurian studies has shaped the educational policy for the Welsh Government’s historic environment service, CADW, in its delivery of a ‘continuing education’ programme with Radulescu delivering a series of lectures on Arthurian studies during the Medieval Fundays. The Custodian at Caernarfon Castle, the Lifelong Learning section of CADW, reported he “*was very impressed with the scope and flexibility of such a project*” and since then “*it has influenced and facilitated educational visits to CADW sites throughout Wales*”; feedback from visitors for this revitalised way to engage with heritage has led to “*enthusing over their experience to the extent that, when they get home, they are keen to tell their family about what they did and saw. This has helped develop another Lifelong Learning education theme of ‘family learning’ and we have now repurposed a space in the castle to this end*” [5.9].

Bangor University research on medieval women and literature directly informed the curatorship of a public exhibition at the NLW celebrating the launch of the digitisation of the Hengwrt Chaucer, ‘*To tell a story: Chaucer and the Canterbury Tales*’ (March to June 2014) [5.10]. This exhibition went on to permanently change NLW’s preservation practice for manuscript leaves; previously reliant on cardboard folders, the exhibition is now presented under glass. Niebrzydowski also produced two permanent resources for the NLW, altering the way in which they deliver the visitor experience. The NLW Education Officer stated “*Chaucer was the first time we’d asked for a budget to be earmarked specifically for producing a booklet, but this has now become standard procedure for all programmes with which we are involved*” [5.11].

Impact on the media and new audiences

Bangor medievalists have demonstrated the contemporary relevance of medieval literature to a wide range of audiences. Radulescu’s *Conversation* article (online readership: 26,900,000) ‘How King Arthur became one of the most pervasive legends of all time’, based on her research of the legends, has 63,810 views, with approximately 2,000 new reads per month, 209 shares on Facebook, over 40 retweets, and is republished in 5 major outlets and 1086 internationally.

Radulescu’s media contributions have achieved international reach; her National Geographic TV documentary has been purchased, translated (to Romanian) and distributed by an Italian company to promote tourism linking the Arthur legend to Tuscany. The documentary has received 1829 views (YouTube) since 2016 [5.12]. In addition, Radulescu’s body of work led to commissioned work for the Royal Mail (limited collectible series on the topic of King Arthur) in 2020, a documentary for Russian young adults (2019) and an article for young adult magazine *Science et Vie* (readership: 4,000,000) in 2020, which in turn have impacted the way young audiences have engaged with the legends. The impacts have been widely disseminated in a variety of media including *BBC News*, *BBC online*, *BBC Radio 3*; public lectures at the National Theatre, Flintshire Historical Society, AMARC, Worshipful Company of Skinners; and exhibitions, films, and public lectures.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 **National Library of Wales Digital Mirror website** providing global access to the Hengwrt Chaucer.

<https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/the-hengwrt-chaucer/#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=-1885%2C-1%2C6984%2C4815>

5.2 **CantApp: The General Prologue.** Website hosting the freely available App produced as a result of the NLW digitisation project.

<http://www.sd-editions.com/CantApp/GP/>

5.3 **Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) website.** Hosts the A-level resource: Choose Chaucer: The Merchant's Tale. A co-authored resource, the production of which was led by Niebrzydowski following the digitisation of the Hengwrt manuscript.

<https://resources.wjec.co.uk/Pages/ResourceSingle.aspx?rId=2995>

5.4 **Testimonial from Head of English, St Gerard's School Trust, Bangor** (participant in the impact process). Confirms the modification of teaching methods for A-level Chaucer sessions and an improvement in grades for the Chaucer paper.

5.5 **Testimonial from Subject Officer for English at WJEC** (reporter in the impact process). Confirms that between 2018 and 2019, approximately 500 pupils studied Chaucer at A 'level in Wales and Northern Ireland (approximately one third of total candidates) and in England there were approximately 2,500 candidates, with around 900 pupils studying Chaucer.

5.6 **Website for the 'Quest' programme**, an educational programme for secondary school pupils and their teachers based on Radulescu's research, now on the Welsh Government Hwb for Creative Learning curriculum.

<https://hwb.gov.wales/repository/resource/c0297558-f1b9-4988-9aac-a2b76247e493/en>

5.7 **Testimonial from Assistant Headteacher, Ysgol Aberconwy** (participant in the impact process). Corroborates the growth in confidence and skills gained as a result of Radulescu's workshops.

5.8 **Testimonial from secondary school teacher, Chester International School** (participant in the impact process). Corroborates the influence of the content of the BBC i-wonder Arthurian website and the Conversation article on the teaching of Arthurian myth to international secondary school pupils.

5.9 **Testimonial from Custodian of Caernarfon castle (CADW)** (participant in the impact process). Corroborates the impact of the collaboration with Radulescu on events with primary school children, and specifically the impact on the education programme at the castle, and across CADW.

5.10 **YouTube video of Hengwrt Chaucer, 'To tell a story: Chaucer and the Canterbury Tales' exhibition.** Corroborates the global reach of Niebrzydowski's research (currently 7,094 views). (Evidence submitted is a screenshot).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3PvAuPtB9jA>

5.11 **Testimonial from Manuscripts Librarian, NLW, and Education Officer, NLW** (participants in the impact process). Confirms the Library's change in practice brought about by Niebrzydowski's gallery guide, Chaucer at the National Library of Wales, and her educational booklet, Treasures at the National Library of Wales: Chaucer.

5.12 **YouTube video of Ancient Files, National Geographic TV documentary.** Purchased and translated by an Italian company to promote tourism, the video demonstrates the international reach of Radulescu's work (currently 1829 views). (Evidence submitted is a screenshot; Language: Romanian and English).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-XX3vKxQo8>