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| Institution: University of Westminster | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language and Literature | | |
| Title of case study: Innovating in the Production and Exploitation of Shakespeare Screen Adaptations with the Royal Shakespeare Company | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011 – Dec 2020 | | |
| Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit: | | |
| Name(s): John Wyver | Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor | Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 12/2006-ongoing |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: Nov 2013 - Dec 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) | | |
| <p>Through his collaborations with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Professor Wyver's academic and practice-based research in creative screen adaptations of Shakespeare has had significant impacts on the activities and planning of one of the UK's most important theatre companies, on cultural life and education for large audiences in Britain and abroad, and on the economic prosperity of the UK cultural sector, resulting in a spend of [text removed for publication] within the UK creative industries. Beneficiaries include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the RSC, who are able to create aesthetically and commercially successful screen productions in-house, significantly expand their audience reach and donor relationships, and fulfil their remit as a publicly subsidised organisation; • audiences of more than 1 million who gain access to acclaimed RSC performances, despite being unable to visit its theatres in Stratford-upon-Avon (including during the pandemic); • around 376,000 pupils in secondary education studying literature in the UK; • and future audiences, since Wyver's adaptations are creating an archive of RSC performances of the entire First Folio for the preservation of national literary and theatrical heritage. | | |
| 2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) | | |
| <p>From 2011-15, Professor John Wyver was Principal Investigator for 'Screen Plays: Theatre Plays on British Television' at the University of Westminster, an AHRC-funded research project that documented and critically engaged with plays originally written for the theatre that have been presented on British television. This has resulted in a publicly accessible database of information about 3,000-plus productions, two conferences, three BFI Southbank screening seasons, a widely-read blog, and more than a dozen peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, including those listed below.</p> <p>A very significant element in this research was work exploring the several hundred adaptations of Shakespeare made previously for British television [e.g. outputs 1, 2, 3]. This led to Wyver's monograph <i>Screening the Royal Shakespeare Company</i>, a critical history of screen adaptations of stage productions by the RSC from 1910 to the present [output 4]. Drawing on the BBC Written Archives, RSC archives and other private and public sources, the book traces the ways in which the RSC and its work has been presented in film, on television and in more recent screen-based forms. Described by Sir Stanley Wells in the TLS as a "meticulously researched, amply documented and wonderfully wide-ranging study", the book details the changing importance of screen adaptations for the RSC (and the Stratford companies that preceded it) across more than a century and offers close readings of mainstream film adaptations and television productions since 1951. The book was also extracted in The Guardian (June 10 2019) for a wider, non-academic audience.</p> <p>As Wyver argues in a 2014 peer-reviewed article, "rather than being seen simply as 'documentation' and as the inferior traces of theatrical originals, these productions might more productively be regarded as doubled adaptations. That is, they can be understood as adaptations for the screen of a text ... that was previously, as a staged performance, an adaptation in itself" [3]. Developing such findings, Wyver has since 2013 been producing his own highly innovative live-to-cinema broadcasts of Shakespeare performances as Director, Screen Productions for the RSC. Beginning with <i>Richard II</i> with David Tennant in November 2013, these are directly informed by his many years of research into the history of adaptations of stagings of Shakespeare's work,</p> | | |

as well as previous television film adaptations produced by Wyver himself for the RSC. Wyver's creation of the broadcasts – the 'RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon' [6] – has resulted in the development of a pioneering production workflow deriving from this research that has generated innovative and creative responses to key issues in the adaptation of stage productions for the screen. Academically, this is a process that Wyver has critically explored in, for example, outputs [5] and [3], which examine the history of transmissions of previously staged performances and set these within “the context of the rapidly developing contemporary form of live cinema” that “recreates as spectacle in a social context many of the approaches and concerns of television's adaptations of Shakespeare stagings” [5].

As the sole creative producer for the 'RSC Live...' series, Wyver is responsible for all of the creative and logistical aspects of each broadcast. Wyver frames the artistic vision of each screen version, working in collaboration with both the theatre and screen directors, assembles a team of around 50 crew for each, co-ordinates each phase of rehearsals, broadcast and post-production, and ensures that the screen version responds to, respects the integrity of, and where appropriate extends the stage production. This process has been used in 25 live broadcasts and two “as-live” recordings of Shakespeare stagings to date, with a further 9 adaptations planned before the end of 2023 [6]. These will constitute the first full cycle of First Folio productions created for the screen by any theatre company, as well as the first full cycle overseen by a single screen producer.

As research-based creative practice, the 'RSC Live...' series is at the cutting edge of new forms of adaptation, employing the latest forms of technology while crucially relying on academic understandings and archival knowledge developed in the 'Screen Plays' AHRC research project, Wyver's 2019 monograph and various peer-reviewed articles since 2013.

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

Publications

- [1] Wyver, 'Scenes from *Cymbeline* and Early Television Studio Drama', in *Shakespeare on Screen*, eds. Hatchuell and Vienne-Guerrin (Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- [2] Wyver, “‘A Profound Commentary on Kingship’: the Monarchy and Shakespeare's Histories on television, 1957-1965”, in *The New Elizabethan Age: Culture, Society and National Identity after World War II*, eds. Morra and Gossedge (I.B. Tauris, 2016).
- [3] Wyver, “‘All the trimmings?’: the transfer of theatre to television in adaptations of Shakespeare stagings”, *Adaptation* 7:2 (2014). Peer-reviewed article.
- [4] Wyver, *Screening the Royal Shakespeare Company: A Critical History* (Arden/Bloomsbury, 2019). Positively reviewed in the *TLS* by Sir Stanley Wells (Oct 4 2019), and e.g. in *Shakespeare* 16.1 (2020).
- [5] Wyver, 'Screening the RSC stage: the 2014 *Live from Stratford-upon-Avon* cinema broadcasts', *Shakespeare* 11:3 (2015). Peer-reviewed article.

Screen Adaptations of Shakespeare:

- [6] 'RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon', 25 productions, Nov 2013 – Jul 2019, for live cinema broadcast; BBC Four broadcasts of 6 of these (2020), also released via BBC iPlayer and on DVD and Blu-ray and via streaming services; plus 2 productions recorded Sep – Dec 2019, screened online for RSC Members and awaiting cinema release.

Funding

AHRC. £316,209 'Screen Plays: Theatre on British Television' (AH/I004262/1) PI: John Wyver.

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

Impacts on the activities and planning of the Royal Shakespeare Company

Described by the CEO of Trafalgar Releasing, the main distributor of event cinema productions in the UK, as “the leading creative producer in Britain of Shakespeare performances for the screen”, Professor Wyver's academic and practice-based research has transformed the creative practice of the Royal Shakespeare Company in its approach to screen adaptations, benefitting it both artistically and commercially [a-i]. Under his leadership, the 'RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon' series has become, with NTLive, one of the two most successful 'event cinema' projects in the UK, reaching, since 2013, a combined cinema audience of [text removed for publication]. The impact generated by Wyver's research is thus an exemplary instance of the benefits of research-

led collaboration with a cultural institution in innovating new forms of artistic expression for substantial public audiences.

Gregory Doran, Artistic Director of the RSC, testifies that: **“John’s research and expertise has ensured that the RSC Live... adaptations have consistently respected the integrity of the stage productions in their adaptation to the screen”** [a-ii]. Doran notes that this collaboration has been especially “important” to the RSC since, in his academic work, “John’s archival exploration and writing has also uncovered the ways in which this was not always the case in past engagements by the company with the film industry and television” [a-ii]. As Wyver’s 2019 monograph documents (output [4]), while in the early 1960s the RSC enjoyed a productive partnership with BBC Television, from the end of that decade onwards the RSC was able only to make occasional arrangements for adaptations (including some produced by Wyver), in deals that allowed the company varying levels of creative control and neither ownership nor continuing revenue generation from these works.

Wyver’s establishment and operation of ‘RSC Live...’ has **allowed the company to produce their screened productions in-house for the first time**. The result is that, as Doran confirms: “John’s work has facilitated the RSC now being able to ... retain full creative control” over its adaptations [a-ii]. “Moreover”, Doran continues, “the production processes that John has co-ordinated has meant that the company has been able to create screen adaptations of the highest quality at a significantly lower cost than was previously the case” [a-ii]. Crucially, thanks to the rights framework established by Wyver at the start of the series, which was informed by his recognition of previous problems uncovered in his research (output [4]), **the RSC is now able to commercially exploit the productions in all media in perpetuity**, subject only to agreed royalty provisions for cast and stage creatives, significantly increasing the company’s potential future income [a-ii].

Increasing audiences for Shakespeare’s works

The artistic and commercial impact of ‘RSC Live...’ under Wyver’s leadership also underpins its **creation of a significantly expanded audience for the RSC and for Shakespeare’s work** more generally. As Doran states: “With John as producer, these recordings have opened up vital new ways of the RSC reaching wide audiences both within the United Kingdom and internationally” [b-i]. The audience for a single live broadcast of a Shakespeare production by the RSC is about the same as the audience for an entire year at the Royal Shakespeare theatre in Stratford. Indeed, as the RSC’s Deputy Artistic Director Erica Whyman puts it, the “exponential reach [is] so great that we can change who the audience is” [b-ii]. Between November 2013 and early 2020, each of the broadcasts produced by Wyver was shown in 479-746 cinemas with a total of 18,416 screenings and audiences of [text removed for publication] for each production in Britain and abroad, resulting in a combined cinema audience of [text removed for publication]. ‘RSC Live...’ has also been widely screened in schools, via streaming services, and released on DVD and Blu-ray [b-iii].

This contribution to the extension of the RSC’s audience reach has helped it to fulfil its remit as a publicly subsidised organisation and further enhance its status as one of the most creatively important and admired theatre companies globally. In Doran’s words: **“The RSC’s mission is ‘to inspire and captivate audiences and transform lives through amazing experiences of Shakespeare’s plays and of great theatre.’ Under John, the RSC Live... series has been central to achieving this mission**, and as a consequence John has had a significant impact on the company’s operations both internally and in relation to its audiences” [b-i].

One important benefit for UK cultural life has been the preservation of a very significant part of British literary and theatre heritage and thus its availability to future generations, since the series has allowed the RSC to create a high-quality archive of their performances of all the Folio plays. Indeed, as Doran confirms, Wyver’s “unparalleled research on the history of screen adaptations of Shakespeare stagings, which I am confident in saying he knows better than anyone”, was itself **“instrumental in the RSC’s decision to commit to and invest in a planned series of 36 new screen adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays”**, and thus to broadcast on screen all the Folio plays for the first time anywhere in the world, and to record these for future audiences [b-i].

Wyver has further succeeded in contributing to the expansion of audiences for Shakespeare by his contribution to the innovative presentation of RSC performances in other formats also. To take one significant example: in April 2016, Wyver was RSC screen producer on the 2-hour live broadcast ‘Shakespeare Live! From the RSC’, a special event scheduled to coincide with

Shakespeare's 400th birthday, which was shown simultaneously on BBC Two and in cinemas, and then broadcast on PBS (Public Broadcasting Service) in the USA and other international channels [b-i; b-iv]. This major television and cinema event (which had a spend of c.£550k within the UK creative industries) presented extracts from Shakespeare plays mounted on stage and for the screen, and featured Helen Mirren, Judi Dench, David Tennant and Paapa Essiedu, among others, including HRH Prince Charles. The success of 'Shakespeare Live!' in achieving what Tony Hall, then Director-General of the BBC, described as "Our ambition ... to **get more people excited about Shakespeare than ever before**" [b-v] is demonstrated by its audience reach of [text removed for publication], and [text removed for publication] [b-vi; b-vii, p.5].

Impact on secondary school teaching and learning

Wyver's research-led adaptations have made a very significant contribution to **aiding the RSC in fulfilling its educational remit and in expanding its reach**. As Jacqui O'Hanlon, Director of Education at the RSC, writes:

"the RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon recordings produced by Professor John Wyver have been of considerable importance for the company's education work over the past seven years ... reaching in total around 376,000 pupils. We know from extensive feedback from teachers how much these [free] presentations have meant to pupils ... Teachers tell us that the Broadcasts '...are now a regular part of our annual curriculum.' And schools regularly tell us that the broadcasts are having a significant impact on the engagement of low attaining children; they talk about how **accessing the broadcasts is extending the vocabulary of children through listening to, seeing and then using Shakespeare's language**" [c-i].

For example, when "observed in a discussion with a colleague having watched the broadcast of *Julius Caesar*", O'Hanlon reports, a Year 3 child who was "withdrawn and raised concerns relating to low self-esteem ... was transformed into a lively, vocal and happy [pupil] and she demonstrated her understanding ... with expression and competence" [c-i].

Each of the RSC free Schools' Broadcasts takes place at a set time and date, with schools from all over the country logging in to a special website. BSL interpreted versions of the broadcasts are provided to make sure they are accessible to D/deaf, deafened and hard of hearing students. The broadcasts include educational activities for students and an accompanying range of Teacher Packs, as well as live Q&As with the actors [c-ii]. In the words of pupils from one school: "It helps you understand the plot, because when you're reading it it's just words"; "You can learn from other questions that are being asked"; "It's really helped with my GCSE" [c-iii]. O'Hanlon further notes that the RSC "has also benefited enormously ... in a range of other ways" from the 'RSC Live...' productions, including through their "acting as the focus for the collaborative creation of education materials with BBC Learning and others" [c-i].

As an article by Dr Taryn Storey for Learning on Screen notes, the school broadcasts are "**the first time 87% of the children watching will have seen an RSC production, and the first time 57% of them will have seen a Shakespeare play**. 82% of schools said that as a result of the broadcast they would now consider taking children to see an RSC production in a theatre" [c-iv]. As one teacher commented: the broadcasts "gave our kids the opportunity to see the RSC for the first time in their lives ... [and] to access the creative heart of the production – instead of being outside looking in, noses pressed against the window pane, the window was opened and we felt like we were in the room" [c-iv].

Impacts on the RSC's operations and finances during the COVID-19 lockdowns

At the start of the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 the RSC partnered with the BBC as part of the Corporation's 'Culture in Quarantine' project to make six of Wyver's 'RSC Live...' productions available on BBC iPlayer, as well as via BBC Four broadcast [d-i]. The choice of plays was made specifically on the basis that they were part of the current UK education curriculum, enabling continuation of the pedagogical impact described above at an especially difficult time for both teachers and learners [d-i].

This collaboration has significantly broadened the RSC's audience in the UK during the pandemic. The combined audience reach of the six plays via BBC services was [text removed for publication] [b-iii]. The initiative was also central to **ensuring that the RSC remained in touch with its audiences in the UK during the most challenging months of lockdown**.

The 27 productions to date have further been made available internationally on the subscription-on-demand (SVOD) services Marquee TV, BroadwayHD and Digital Theatre, and the educational SVOD service Drama Online. Revenue from sales of the productions to the BBC and from DVDs and SVOD services are shared with cast members on an agreed royalty split basis. This income has been crucial in **providing financial support for both the RSC and individuals during the COVID-19 emergency.**

The RSC Development office, which raises monies from sponsorship, gifts and the like, has also been using the ‘RSC Live...’ recordings as a key part of their relationship building with patrons and donors throughout the lockdown. The previously unreleased *King John* and recording of *Timon of Athens* were, for example, screened online in a private Development Office event to around 400 Patrons and Donors. As Rebecca Preston, Development Director at the RSC, attests: “the RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon recordings produced by Professor John Wyver have been of considerable importance to the Company during the Covid-19-enforced closure of our theatres during the past year. Prior to 2020 the RSC Live... broadcasts were already **very significant to our work in extending our relationships and our fundraising with RSC Members, Patrons, donors and stakeholders.** Since 2014 we have organised a series of successful cinema screenings of the broadcasts especially for these key supporters both in the UK and, notably, regularly in the United States with our supporters based there. Once our theatres closed last March it was essential to remain in touch with all of our audiences here and abroad, and ... [the RSC Live...] was a vital element of this connection” [d-ii].

Contributions to UK economic prosperity in the creative sector

Kevin Wright, Head of Commercial Development at the RSC, confirms: “Investment by the RSC in the RSC Live... series has been very significant, approximating [text removed for publication]. **This financing has all been spent within the creative industries in the United Kingdom.** In addition, a number of the productions have realised net profits and these funds have been shared on the agreed terms with cast members and stage creatives” [b-iii]. Such spending provides vital funding for various parts of the UK creative sector, including actors, designers, stage crew and editors, as well as support services such as equipment hire companies.

As Wright also notes, **the RSC itself has further “benefited from significant income from exploitation of [Wyver’s] productions** by way of cinema screenings, sales to broadcast television, sales of DVDs and, increasingly, from revenue from streaming services. ... We expect the revenue from streaming services especially to increase significantly in the coming years, greatly benefitting the company” in the future [b-iii]. Gross income worldwide to the RSC, a significant employer of over 700 staff in the UK creative sector, from DVDs and streaming to end of 2020 was [text removed for publication] [b-iii].

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

- a) i. Marc Allenby, CEO, Trafalgar Releasing, Letter, 29/1/2021; ii. Gregory Doran, Artistic Director, RSC, Letter, 27/1/2021.
- b) i. Gregory Doran, Artistic Director, RSC, Letter, 27/1/2021; ii. Lyn Gardner, ‘To beam or not to beam? How live broadcasts are changing theatre’, *The Guardian*, 6/5/2015 [[link](#)]; iii. Kevin Wright, Head of Commercial Development, RSC, Confidential Letter, 1/2/2021; iv. ‘Shakespeare Live! From the RSC’, BBC programme page [[link](#)]; v. ‘RSC and BBC collaborate on a celebration of Shakespeare ...’, BBC Media Centre, 20/4/2015 [[link](#)]; vi. ‘Shakespeare Live!’ audience figures, internal RSC slide, 3/2/2021; vii. ‘BBC Audience Information. Context & Glossary’, 2013 [[link](#)].
- c) i. Jacqui O’Hanlon, Director of Education, RSC, Letter, 2/3/2021; ii ‘Schools’ Broadcasts’, RSC website [[link](#)]; iii. ‘About our Free Schools’ Broadcasts | RSC Education’, RSC YouTube, 23/10/2018 [[link](#)]; iv. Taryn Storey, ‘Opening the window on Shakespeare’s biggest classroom’, *Viewfinder Magazine*, Learning on Screen, 11/12/2015 [[link](#)].
- d) i. ‘BBC announces new programmes for Culture in Quarantine’, BBC Media Centre, 25/3/2020 [[link](#)]; ii. Rebecca Preston, Development Director, RSC, Letter, 29/1/2021.