

<b>Institution:</b> University of York		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 – English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Out of the archive: bringing silent Shakespeare back to life		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2000 - 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>
Professor Judith Buchanan	Professor of English Literature	1/08/2000 - 31/08/2019
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014 - 2019		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Buchanan's research has brought many little-known silent Shakespeare films out of the archive. A large body of silent Shakespeare films from the early twentieth century exists, but they have too often been inaccessible, both physically and intellectually, to those unfamiliar with this previously little-studied body of work. Buchanan's research has enabled and informed the dissemination and publication of Shakespearean silent-era films in commercial DVD form and in free online form; has inspired a new BBC radio documentary feature; has determined the creative framework of a major new <i>Macbeth</i> feature film; has informed a landmark exhibition for the British Library; has given educative pleasure to many public silent film audiences in the UK and internationally; and has inspired a range of creative engagements with the films by actors, dancers, composers, musicians and filmmakers.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Most of the archival prints of silent Shakespeare films with which Buchanan has worked had previously received little or no attention. In her Cambridge University Press 2009 monograph, <i>Shakespeare on Silent Film: An Excellent Dumb Discourse</i> [3.1] and in a series of articles on silent Shakespeare published since then [3.2, 3.3, 3.4], she has traced the processes of their production, the conditions of their original exhibition, the character of their original reception and the material histories of the prints themselves. She has brought the films into dialogue with other cultural, artistic, social and political events of the moment and mapped the differences in tone, aesthetics and emphasis in the films produced across different national film industries. In <i>Shakespeare on Silent Film</i> [3.1], Buchanan demonstrated the films' significance as fascinating repositories of aspects of Shakespearean performance history and of cinema history. She uncovers how some of the c.300 silent Shakespeare films made were sold to distributors and exhibited to the public, identifying claims made at the time about the films' potential for edifying the masses but also exploring the anxieties they provoked in some communities. The monograph also made a substantial investigation of the interpretive and performance characteristics of individual films and individual actors.</p> <p>In subsequent research publications, Buchanan has (1) contextualised an understanding of silent Shakespeare films as part of wider adaptational approaches across the industry's silent era [3.4, 3.6] and (2) considered silent Shakespeare as spur to contemporary creative practice [3.2]. Most recently, she has contributed a new chapter on silent Shakespeare to the <i>Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Screen</i> [3.3], filling a gap in this seminal textbook on the genre. Her research during the past two decades has established silent Shakespeare as much more than a risible curiosity in the histories of Shakespeare performance and of the film industry. She reads silent Shakespeare films in the context of the other outputs from the same production companies and national film industries, and therefore as part of a broader history of film of the era. She also places the interpretation of the plays that is legible in the films alongside other readings of the same plays from a similar moment, on stage, in print and in other art forms. In this way, she shows how the films contribute to a broader history of Shakespearean interpretation of the era. As a result of her research, she is the leading world authority on silent Shakespeare. Her research publications on silent cinema, on Shakespearean performance histories and on the two in combination are the direct source of the impact cited in this case study. She has also created a virtuous circle in which her research fuels creative projects and public engagement work [3.5] which generate impact, and in turn feed back into her ongoing research. The direct benefits to the</p>		

ongoing research of the impact-generating work are directly in evidence in her recently published research article addressing the implications of her public engagement work: 'Collaborating with the dead, playing the Shakespeare archive' [3.2].

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

- 3.1 *Shakespeare on Silent Film: An Excellent Dumb Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, hbk 2009; pbk 2011). [Positively reviewed in key journals: Shakespeare Survey, Shakespeare Quarterly, Shakespeare, Times Literary Supplement, Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance, Literature/Film Quarterly, Journal of British Cinema and Television. Review comments include: 'meticulous, informative and critically sophisticated' - Russell Jackson, University of Birmingham; 'a major contribution to both cinema studies and Shakespeare studies' - Roberta Pearson, University of Nottingham; 'instantly the standard work on its subject' - Luke McKernan, British Library].
- 3.2 'Collaborating with the Dead, Playing the Shakespeare Archive; Or, How to Avoid Being Pushed from Our Stools' in Cronin, Bernadette, MagShamhráin, Rachel and Preuschoff, Nikolai (eds.), *Adaptation Considered as a Collaborative Art: Process and Practice* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2020) 323-67.
- 3.3 'Shakespeare and the film industry of the pre-sound era' in Jackson, Russell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Screen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 9-25. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108367479.003>
- 3.4 'Literary Adaptation in the Silent Era', in Cartmell, D. and Whelehan, I. (eds.), *Blackwell Companion to Literature, Film and Adaptation* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp.17-32. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118312032.ch1>
- 3.5 **DVD: *Play On! Shakespeare in Silent Film*** (London: British Film Institute, 2016). <https://shop.bfi.org.uk/play-on-shakespeare-in-silent-film.html#.XE8brRicY1g> (A commercial DVD release from the British Film Institute National Archive, with a filmed Buchanan introduction and Buchanan expert voice-over commentaries for the eleven films featured).
- 3.6 "'Un cinéma impur": framing film in the early film industry' in S Allen & L Hubner (eds.), *Framing Film: Cinema and the Visual Arts*. (Bristol: intellect, 2012), pp. 239-260. [Submitted to REF2014].

Buchanan's work is published by major university presses and peer reviewed.

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

#### Out of the archive: bringing silent Shakespeare to life

Buchanan's research on silent Shakespeare films from the early twentieth century is a model of how to give a neglected archive a new life in the public sphere. The recovery, exhibition and interpretation of these films, alongside the contemporary creative engagements with them which she inspires and curates internationally, illustrate how an archive can be invested with refreshed cultural agency in ways that can benefit many. Buchanan's silent Shakespeare research and research-informed advocacy for these films has changed: the **accessibility of this previously little-known body of work** through the release of commercial DVDs and the free-to-access on-line publication of films, each featuring a Buchanan expert voice-over commentary; the **cultural programmes of several major public institutions**, including The British Film Institute (BFI), BBC Radio 4 and The British Library; and the **creative thought and practice** of many individual artists, including filmmaker Kit Monkman, dance choreographer Richard Chappell and Australian composer Ashley Hribar.

#### 1. Impact on cultural organisations and public discourse

##### The British Film Institute

In 2016 the BFI released *Play On! Shakespeare in Silent Film* [3.5], a DVD featuring Buchanan's filmed introduction to, and expert voice-over commentaries on, 11 silent Shakespeare films. Since July 2016, the DVD has sold c.600 copies in the UK, with international sales expected to be still higher, and the live events on its "release tour" through a British Council scheme were attended by 7,000 people in 14 countries, including Russia, China and Brazil [5.1]. The **BFI's lead silent**

**film curator reports** that Buchanan's 'world-leading research into these films, and her inventive creative explorations around them...helped to build the appetite and interest in this unusual body of work'. Her 'filmed introduction was crucial in contextualising the film material in terms of Shakespeare scholarship...Judith's unparalleled expertise in this area helped to clarify both the meaning and the importance of the films and to shed light on the wider silent film industry for the DVD's viewers.' The BFI are in no doubt that 'Judith's research on silent Shakespeare films and her own profile-raising work informed by her research' broadened and nurtured the public appetite in ways that made the *Play On* project a 'viable proposition'. The BFI see Judith's pioneering research as a key contributor to the 'upsurge of interest in silent Shakespeare films' in recent decades, and also confirm the impact on themselves as an organisation: 'the BFI's own aim to further access to, and interest in, such materials has been strengthened by partnering with her on a range of productive and interesting silent Shakespeare-related projects' [5.1]. The DVD is both evidence of the impact of Buchanan's research and has, in turn, generated further impact through creative and critical engagement with the newly accessible films.

#### **BBC Radio 4**

Buchanan's research impacted on BBC Radio 4's cultural presentation of Shakespeare. For the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 2016, Buchanan was commissioned to make a 30-minute BBC Radio 4 documentary specifically about Shakespeare in silence [5.2]. This challenged and expanded ideas about both what Shakespeare is and which art forms are most suitable to be celebrated and discussed through the particular medium of radio. The resulting documentary 'An Excellent Dumb Discourse', written and presented by Buchanan, with actor Sam West, was first transmitted on 17 April 2016 (with repeats).

#### **Public Screenings**

The six 'Silents Now' silent film shows (each with live creative input) that Buchanan has mounted internationally since 2014 (including in the UK, Ireland, US and Australia) have reached a live audience >1,000 and generated c.390 individual pieces of audience feedback (in feedback cards and online survey responses), all notably positive [5.8]. Attendees confirm that attendance has "re-stimulated" existing interests, "completely changed my opinion of the whole genre" and "really changed my understanding of this aspect of our film culture". A number specifically comment on how the experience altered a previously-held scepticism: "I couldn't quite believe Shakespeare could be done without words. I was wrong." Some felt inspired to pursue their interest further, reporting that they had gone on to watch more such films: "It was the best lecture I've been to and I'm now truly inspired to see more silent films. It's awakened in me an interest in the genre which I hope to take forward" [5.8].

#### **British Library**

Buchanan was a key contributor to the 'Shakespeare in Ten Acts' exhibition at the British Library (15 April – 6 September 2016) as both a member of its Advisory Board and as principal advisor to one of the 10 "Acts", which centred on Shakespeare film and included silent film. She proposed and provided film clips for the montage, including silent material and pre-release material, and wrote the final chapter for the exhibition volume. The exhibition and Buchanan's role in it served as a conduit to bring silent Shakespeare to a wider public audience and her research impacted substantially on how the British Library curated and presented the film aspect of its exhibition, contributing to the exhibition's success [5.3].

## **2. Impact on creative practice**

### **Composers, actors, dance choreographers**

Through her long-standing public engagement project 'Silents Now' [5.8], Buchanan invites international creative artists (professional actors, musicians and dancers) to respond to silent Shakespeare films to generate new and illuminating collaborations with the old work. Since 2016, she has mounted multi-media silent film shows with live collaboration from creative artists in many places around the world including Adelaide, Chicago, London, Dublin and York. Contemporary audiences have thus encountered the films in fresh ways and creative artists have been challenged about their own practice. Three of these are taken as illustrative for these purposes.

**Australian composer and concert pianist Ashley Hribar reports:** 'Judith's deep knowledge of

these films helped me see the 1910 *Richard III* differently and understand its tonal shifts with a sensitivity that then shaped my musical responses to it. My reading of her work on the film and our discussions about it together were invaluable in my compositional practice. The unusual wonders of the film itself also prompted me to expand my own musical vocabulary as I reached for new musical effects and ideas in my collaborations with the on-screen action' [5.4]. **Actor Dan Wheeler reports:** 'Judith's expertise about the films has directly informed each of these creative collaborations...embracing one's part in the long and rich performance history of a play can be a powerful and liberating thing. Working with Judith on *Richard III* helped me develop these ideas as a practitioner: watching (and indeed collaborating with) actors from over 100 years ago as they wrestle with the same performance choices we make today has thoroughly enriched my enjoyment of working on classical texts.' **Dance choreographer Richard Chappell reports that** 'working collaboratively and responsively with the old silent film and with the performances on screen challenged me to think about my choreographic practice in fresh ways. The unusual on-screen/off-screen interaction was both comic and touching and helped me draw out some beautifully eloquent work from our dancers. I'm delighted to have been introduced to the film and its imagery is still very much with me almost four years later' [5.5].

#### **Feature film *Macbeth* (Goldfinch Studios/Viridian; dir Kit Monkman, 2018)**

The most high-profile of the creative outputs directly influenced by Buchanan's research has been the 2018 innovative green-screen **feature film, *Macbeth***. With a budget of GBP5,500,000, the film employed a cast and crew of 80 on a 7-week shoot and then a post-production team of 12 for a further 18 months building the visual world. Following its West End premiere, it was subsequently released onto 200 screens across the UK, before then being made available online for digital download.

Buchanan's research and expertise played a centrally influential role in the conception, production and marketing of the film and in the public discourse about it post-release. Having read her 2005 book *Shakespeare on Film*, director Kit Monkman approached her to discuss the project [5.6]. She subsequently co-scripted the film with the director-producer team in line with the shared concept that they developed. As part of Buchanan's research-informed scripting input, a largely unknown silent Italian film of *Macbeth* from 1909 (not commercially available) was inserted into the heart of the production as its structuring principle. The silent film-within-the-film is watched throughout the film by an all-knowing porter and given dramatic agency variously within the workings of this dramatic world.

Buchanan's introductions to public screenings and discussions of it, including in Gdansk, at the British Library and in Indiana, and her short essays on the film that were included in its release brochure for public audiences, helped to fuel the public debates sparked by its technological innovations, the mutability of its playing space and its telegraphed involvement with its own performance history. Described by the Chair of the International Shakespeare Association as 'the most innovative rethinking of what it means to put Shakespeare on film for decades' [5.7], the comments and debates across platforms testify to the pleasure it has given audiences across ages and geography, to the stimulating questions it has raised both about the Shakespeare play and the medium of cinema, and to its impact on broader cultural debates across spheres.

**Reach and significance** are evidenced by reviews and responses to the film, in **broadcast media:** 'highly recommended' (John Wilson, BBC Radio 4 'Front Row'); **national press:** 'brings the text to life in an adventurous way' (Tim Robey, *The Telegraph*); 'a fluidly poetic film' (Michael Billington, *The Guardian*); **cultural organisations:** 'a beautiful moving work of art...abounds in original readings' (British Shakespeare Association) [5.9]; and **teachers:** 'I've been blown away by the whole aesthetics of this ... the detail, the time that's gone into this production, there's so much for the student to look at and take and draw from it ... it's just really valuable as a piece of film' (A-Level comprehensive school teacher) [5.7].

Buchanan's research and research-informed input impacted directly on the specific nature of the film made and on post-release public discussion. It also has had an impact on the director's own broader thinking. Monkman reports: 'I am proud of the mutual jostle and the mutual enrichment of our thinking and practice that Judith and I achieved through our collaborative discussions and work. In sum, Judith's research specifically helped to make the film what it is in various ways...and

has helped me to place myself and my work as a filmmaker more consciously within an evolving history of filmmaking' [5.6]. Their work together successfully modelled the reciprocal and beneficial impact of academic-creative collaborations: Buchanan's research on Monkman's practice and vice versa (evidenced by Buchanan's subsequent publication 'Collaborating with the Dead' [3.2] about collaborative work, including Monkman's own, that crosses temporal boundaries).

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

- 5.1 Testimonial from Lead Silent Film Curator, British Film Institute, and DVD sales figures provided by the BFI.
- 5.2 BBC Radio 4 webpage for 'An Excellent Dumb Discourse' featuring Buchanan.
- 5.3 Corroboration from the Head of Culture and Learning, British Library.
- 5.4 Testimonial from Ashley Hribar.
- 5.5 Testimonials from Dan Wheeler and Richard Chappell.
- 5.6 Testimonial from *Macbeth* director Kit Monkman.
- 5.7 Video of schools reaction, with additional comments, to Macbeth film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wy2zRMTFExI>.
- 5.8 Silents Now website [www.silents-now.co.uk](http://www.silents-now.co.uk), and Feedback from Silents Now events and shows.
- 5.9 Press reviews of *Macbeth* film.