

Institution: University of Essex		
Unit of Assessment: 27		
Title of case study: Enabling a new approach to creative interpretation at Hampton Court Palace highlighting the role of women and ethnic minorities		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2005-2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Elizabeth Kuti	Professor in Drama	2004-present
Deirdre Serjeantson	Senior Lecturer in Early Modern Literature	2009-2018
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2018		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Elizabeth Kuti's research into hidden voices from history and Deirdre Serjeantson's work on neglected women Tudor poets, combined to shape innovative cultural experiences, thereby developing the range of representation of historical figures, extending public understanding of the diverse histories of the Palace, increasing visitor numbers, and enhancing visitor satisfaction. Kuti developed scripted, site-specific micro-dramas for Hampton Court Palace (HCP). During the period 2015 – 2018 this helped to support the strategic goals of the Historic Royal Palaces (HRP), enabling a new vision of HCP to emerge: women and people of ethnic minorities came more clearly to the fore as makers and shapers of its history, attracting new and more diverse visitors to HCP and intensifying their experiences. According to the Head of Creative Planning of HCP, these plays appealed to a wider range of visitors than traditional Live Interpretation, with 97% of visitors acknowledging that their visit had been "<i>significantly enhanced by TimePlays</i>". During the summer of 2015 alone 412,500 visitors experienced <i>TimePlays</i> and themed immersive weekends.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The underpinning research for this case study consists of a combination of creative practice in playwriting, and early modern literary studies. Elizabeth Kuti is a playwright, whose creative and critical work over the past 20 years has particularly focused on gender and race; on the erased voices of women and other marginalised figures from history; and on neglected areas of the literary and cultural past. Deirdre Serjeantson's literary early-modern research provided entirely new material about the part played by women and servants in the Reformation.</p> <p>Kuti's scripted dramas were performed on-site at Hampton Court Palace by professional actors in the period 2015-18. The plays allowed new arguments about gender, race and class at court to be brought to a broad mainstream audience, and they also introduced an innovative element of feminist <i>literary</i> history, with micro-plays that examined figures at court such as the playwright Aphra Behn, the 18th century traveller and writer Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and silk-woman Margery Vaughan, the mother of Tudor poet Anne Lock. Ideas about 21st century curation were explored in a verbatim drama crafted from an interview with a young female curator. Both the content, and the form of these dramas, therefore, were a new and innovative approach for HCP and its creative interpretation of the Palace's history from 1515 to 2018.</p> <p>Kuti's research as a dramatist of hidden histories underpins this project. One example of this is her 2005 play <i>The Sugar Wife</i> [R1] about the role of Irish Quaker women in the campaign for the abolition of slavery. This play has been produced in the UK, USA, Germany and Georgia and won the international Susan Smith Blackburn Award 2005-6 (for the best play written in English by a</p>		

female playwright). Kuti's 2013 play *Fishskin Trousers* [R2] uncovered new ways of engaging imaginatively with place and heritage (in this case, Orford Ness, the 'island' off the Suffolk coast, owned by the National Trust). This piece, performed on-site in Orford, has extended to world-wide productions in Australia, Greece, Canada and the USA. It was this piece in particular that caused HCP to ask Kuti to work with them [S5].

Serjeantson's prize-winning literary research on Anne Lock [R3] has given rise to an article on women's authorship of controversial religious texts, and this article in turn has received two academic responses: May, 'Anne Lock and Thomas Norton's Meditation of a Penitent Sinner', *Modern Philology*, 114 (2017) and Arthur, 'Anne Lock or Thomas Norton', *Early Modern Women* (forthcoming), as well as providing material for a public lecture at HCP.

Kuti's scholarly research into the transmission of Georgian culture has been published in both critical and creative form with her essay ("*Blue-beard* and Theatrical Curiosity") [R4a] and play (*The Broken Token*) [R4b], on the late 18th c. melodrama *Blue-beard*; and also the innovative BBC audio series *Dear Mr Spectator* [R5] in which Addison and Steele's Spectator papers of 1710-11, never before dramatized for radio, were turned into innovative, popular drama, and broadcast by the BBC.

These specialisms, in transforming complex historical material into imaginative and verbally rich drama, prompted HCP to seek Kuti out as a collaborator for the project of *TimePlays* (HCP 2015) [R6a] [S1]. This project consisted of 15 short plays, ranging from 20 minutes to 5 minutes in playing-time, each one covering a key event in the story of Hampton Court Palace from the span of its 500 year history (1515 to 2015). The micro-plays were performed throughout the Palace, in appropriate settings for their characters and stories. Early scenes relating to the Tudors include the trumpeter John Blanke, one of the few known black musicians at Court. In plays dealing with later centuries, characters included Aphra Behn, Catherine of Braganza, Henrietta Maria, and, from the 20th and 21st centuries, the Suffragette Princess Sophia Duleep Singh, who lived in a grace-and-favour apartment at Hampton Court, and one of the present-day curators at the Palace, Kerren Harris, who provides the final words of *TimePlays*.

Serjeantson's research [R3] provided the underlying dramatic proposal for the four Tudor scenes that make up the first half of *Encounters with the Past* (HCP 2016) [R6b, pp 4 - 22]. Her work on Lock's mother, the silk-woman Margery Vaughan, showed how she played an integral role in Reformation politics by smuggling contraband books into England, concealed in the bundles of her embroidery brought to the Palace. As dramatised by Kuti, the role of Vaughan and other working-class and middle-class women in Reformation politics was made compellingly clear to visitors to HCP. Part Two of *Encounters with the Past* presents the Georgian period, drawing on Kuti's previous research and expertise in dramatising this period [R4a and b and R5]. Once again, characters often overlooked in accounts of this period, such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Mehemet 'von Konigstreu' (a Turkish servant to George I) are vividly represented.

3. References to the research [can be supplied by the HEI on request]

R1. Kuti: *The Sugar Wife* (Nick Hern Books, 2005; Susan Smith Blackburn Award, 2005-6); ISBN 9781780017846

R2. Kuti: *Fishskin Trousers* (Nick Hern Books, 2013; Finborough Theatre, London, 2013; Park Theatre, London, 2017; Time Out Critics' Choice; Four stars in the *Guardian*; translated into Greek and performed in Crete, Canada and the USA). ISBN 9781780019833

R3. Serjeantson, Deirdre. 'Anne Lock's Anonymous Friend: A Meditation of a Penitent Sinner and the Problem of Ascription' in *Enigma and Revelation in Renaissance Literature*, ed. Helen Cooney and Mark S. Sweetnam (Dublin: Four Courts, 2012), pp. 51 – 68. Winner of the Best Article of 2012, Society for the Study of Early Modern Women. ISBN 9781846822810

R4. Kuti, Elizabeth:

a. Book chapter on Georgian theatre: 'Blue-beard and Theatrical Curiosity', Chapter 16 in *Scheherazade's Children: Global Encounters with the Arabian Nights* in Marina Warner and Philip Kennedy (eds), NYU Press: 2013, pp. 322 – 346. ISBN-13 9781479857098

b. *The Broken Token* (original drama; Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds, as part of *Suffolk Stories*, 2014; also the William Clark Memorial Library, LA, 2014, invited by Felicity Nussbaum, UCLA.)
<http://repository.essex.ac.uk/14788/>

R5. Kuti: *Dear Mr Spectator* (2010-11, BBC Radio 4, two series) (can be supplied by the HEI on request).

R6. Kuti, Elizabeth:

a. *TimePlays* (2015), Hampton Court Palace (can be supplied by the HEI on request).

Promotional video of *TimePlays* on Historic Royal Palaces website:

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=L7vsWnGScho>

b. *Encounters with the Past* (2016), Hampton Court Palace (can be supplied by the HEI on request).

Promotional video of *Encounters with the Past* on Historic Royal Palaces website:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ_1DVtFkQk

G1. Warner, Marina; Kuti, Elizabeth. Staging the East: Oriental Maskings in British Theatre, 1660 1800 conference, held at the Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds, funded by a British Academy Conference Support Grant, £8,281 (2010)

G2. Kuti, Elizabeth. Research on Norwich Comedians, British Academy Small Research Grant, £7,500 (2011)

4. Details of the impact

Historic Royal Palaces sought Kuti out as their playwright of choice to bring something different to their 500th birthday celebrations in the summer of 2015: "*The production in 2015 was an innovative first attempt at 'immersive'-style theatre in a non-conventional theatre building, and our independent evaluation by MHM has shown some remarkable results.*" [S1].

Innovations in form and content, increasing diversity in representation of historical figures and enhancing visitor satisfaction:

Kuti's micro-dramas at Hampton Court Palace brought to the public's attention lesser-known stories of the Palace, and emphasised diversity in gender, class and race – such as the silk-women and their role in the Reformation (based on Serjeantson's research); ethnic minority characters such as John Blanke the black trumpeter, and Sophia Duleep Singh, the Indian princess suffragette activist; the midwives who attended Jane Seymour; the female fool known as 'Jane' who was the favourite of Anne Boleyn; Queen Anne's role in the discovery of the small-pox vaccine; and other lesser-known female literary figures associated with Hampton Court such as Aphra Behn and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. This was all in counterpoint to the well-known and much-trodden path of Henry and his wives. Independent evaluation commissioned by HCP demonstrated that "*visitors picked up on the gender and race issues*" presented in the micro-plays, leading to "*lively debate*" [S1]. The calibre of the scripts provided by Kuti was recognised by professional artists at the Palace, as well as by the visiting public: "*The quality of the writing was favourably commented on in feedback both from public and the participating theatre professionals (actors, directors and playwrights).*" [S1]. The Artistic Director of Sheer Drop Theatre and Co-Founder of Scaffold Shakespeare Company attests that "*[B]oth pieces I worked on were especially innovative in the way they moved the audience around the palace, taking inspiration from the building itself, and the unique blend of historical authenticity and imaginative storytelling they combined.*" [S2].

In contrast to traditional 'third-person' interpretation, often unscripted and improvised by curator-performers, with the emphasis on informing visitors about historical 'facts', Kuti's scripted dramas enabled visitors to engage emotionally and imaginatively in the characters and stories presented to

them. HCP Head of Programming writes: “*This emotional experience, as onlookers (and occasionally participants) in scenes from the past, provided audiences with a different dimension to their visit – not just communicating information, but accessing an imaginative excitement, which in turn enhances their understanding and sense of the history and ‘drama’ of the Palace, and its life in the national imagination.*” [S1]. Visitors particularly appreciated that they were seeing plays written by a playwright, with the nuance and storytelling possibilities, as well as the emotional and imaginative content, that a professional dramatist can provide: “*The quality of the writing and the performances were widely commented on.*” [S1]. A visitor to *TimePlays*, remarked “*It’s also escapism because you come in and you’re escorted to a different period...It’s the performance element that brings a building or scene or a piece of dialogue to life.*” [S3].

HCP could therefore report that the innovative techniques and themes of *TimePlays* yielded very high levels of visitor satisfaction and a change in the response to visitor surveys in the 500th anniversary celebrations of Hampton Court: “*97% of visitors felt that their visit had been significantly enhanced by TimePlays*” [S1]. In devising scenes that encapsulated the “*feel’ and ‘quality’*” of distinct characters and times, Kuti’s contribution meant that “*visitor satisfaction rate for the July weekend was an astonishing 9.9 out of 10, in a statistically relevant survey representing 7,500 visitors of all ages, backgrounds and levels of interest and knowledge.*” [S1].

Innovation led to increasing visitor numbers and ‘returning’ or ‘lapsed’ visitors to HCP:

The Head of Creative Programming acknowledged that “*The plays appealed to a wider range of visitor types than traditional Live Interpretation*” [S1]. Kuti’s micro-plays also benefited HCP by attracting ‘lapsed visitors’ who returned to the Palace: “*Timeplays attracted a mix of UK and international audiences. Roughly half were first time visitors to the palace, but the other 50% lapsed visitors, who had been attracted by the project and repeat visitors, who came back several times to see it.*” [S1]. As one of the visitors to *Timeplays* stated: “*It was a bit of a pull because the Timeplays [were] on...it made [a visit] more appealing.*” [S3].

Throughout the summer of 2015 “*approximately 400,000 people encountered Time Plays, and over 12,5000 also saw and enjoyed our two immersive weekends themed around Queen Anne (August 10-11) and Mary I and Philip of Spain (July)*” [S1]. Surveys showed that Kuti’s work had a beneficial impact on visitor recommendations, and thereby visitor numbers: “*87% of respondents said they were more likely to recommend a visit to Hampton Court Palace having seen TimePlays.*” [S1].

Kuti’s involvement with HCP was extended over a period of over two years, with a range of specially commissioned work:

- *TimePlays* [R6a] April-August 2015; main summer offer. A series of micro-dramas celebrating 500th Anniversary of Hampton Court Palace; directed by Pia Furtado. Over 400,000 visitors [S1].
- Two ‘immersive weekends: *Queen Anne Weekend (August 10-11, 2015) and Mary I and Philip Weekend (July 2015)*. Approx 7,500 visitors [S1].
- *Encounters with the Past* [R6b] April-August 2016; directed by Jo McInnes. Micro-dramas exploring the ‘King’s Great Matter’; the court of George I; and Shakespeare in the great Hall at Hampton Court (rehearsal of *Hamlet*). One visitor shared their experience on Tripadvisor: “*...you’ll be treated to almost 3 hours of top-notch theatre [...] Seeing these real life characters come to life, in such magnificent surrounds is not only entertaining, but also educational.*” [S4].
- *Elizabethan Christmas*, December-Jan 2017 and repeated December 2017- Jan 18. The main ‘family’ Christmas offer, about Elizabeth I and the succession crisis [S6, p. 12].

Supporting the strategic endeavours of the Historic Royal Palaces (HRP): building on their guiding principles

By re-discovering and re-presenting voices that had been neglected in more traditional and mainstream historic representation and re-enactment, Kuti's micro-dramas helped to support and extend the guiding principles of the Historic Royal Palaces: 1) Guardianship, 2) Discovery, 3) Showmanship and 4) Independence [S5, p. 5]:

1) These events encouraged audiences to acknowledge the significance of the role of guardianship of the buildings that were inhabited by these events, the past here in the present. As one visitor witnessing *TimePlays*, remarked: "*experiencing it in the setting...being able to imagine; well, golly these people really did wander these corridors, and touch these very walls.*" [S3].

2) Visitors discovered more about the "*bigger picture*" [S5, p.5], due to the inclusion in these productions of such vivid characters as John Blanke, Aphra Behn and Sophia Duleep Singh.

3) The principle of Showmanship was amply demonstrated in these performances that were scattered through the day, and appreciated by the visitors witnessing them: "*You felt that you were almost part of the Court*"; "*[My favourite aspect was] just that magical feeling...as if you've gone back in time.*" [S4] The Artistic Director of Sheer Drop Theatre and Co-Founder of Scaffold Shakespeare Company affirmed that "*Elizabeth's writing is amongst the most astute, effective and dramatically satisfying work I have been involved in.*" [S2].

4) Independence is understood by HRP as a "*challenge to find new ways to do our work*" [S5, p.5]. *TimePlays* and the other works were clearly commissioned with this in mind: "*The aim of the project was to explore how contemporary theatre forms and techniques might be employed within the context of a heritage site to engage the public in a new and exciting way;*" [S1]. As one visitor remarked: "*So many other places are like Museums. It's just static. Having the live [performance] makes it more interesting.*" [S3].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1. Testimonial letter from Head of Creative Programming and Interpretation at Historic Royal Palaces

S2. Testimonial email from Artistic Director of Sheer Drop Theatre and Co-Founder of Scaffold Shakespeare Company

S3. Collated sample of quotes from visitors reviews of *TimePlays*, compiled by HCP

S4. Trip Advisor review of Encounters with the Past (screenshot)
https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g504169-d187548-r405695610-Hampton_Court_Palace-East_Molesey_Surrey_England.html#

S5. Annual Review (2015 - 16) Historic Royal Palaces

S6. Annual Review (2017 - 18) Historic Royal Palaces