

Institution: University of Warwick		
Unit of Assessment: D27 – English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Shakespearean Environments: Festival Ecology, Activism and Adaptation		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-April 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Paul Prescott	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor (Reader)	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: August 2005-September 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Prescott has engaged Shakespearean performance with environmentalism since 2014. Extending and broadening the concept of Shakespeare's 'Environments' through archival research, fieldwork, and global festival organisation, he has reached diverse publics and professionals (school children, professional actors, heritage officers, park rangers). Through vanguard initiatives such as 'Shakespeare On The Road' and 'Shakespeare in Yosemite', he has shaped the attitudes of thousands of people towards their local environments, practices of conservation, and cultural heritage. Introducing new performance spaces through festivals in under-served regions, Prescott has deepened and influenced public awareness of climate change through community activism.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Prescott is a leading expert on Shakespeare festivals and performance across the world and has published widely on the subject. As a scholar-practitioner, he has collaborated with many festivals, generating adaptations and conceptual reworkings that bring the plays to new life for audiences in a range of locations from Havana, the Bahamas, Prague, and in non-traditional settings such as HMP Leicester. This case study is focused primarily on Prescott's work in the US, especially Yosemite National Park, California.</p> <p>Prescott's research interrogates the complex practices of production and reception in live performance, especially the importance of the political and social uses of Shakespeare's works in contemporary contexts. These questions have been explored in (1) project work; (2) scholarly publications; and (3) dramaturgical and creative writing.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Project work: 'Shakespeare on the Road' (2014) partnered with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and 14 US Shakespeare festivals to create an oral history archive and to raise public awareness of the role Shakespeare plays in contemporary American culture and environmentalism. The project also built the first comprehensive database of extant companies and festivals, allowing the scope and significance of the US Shakespeare festival phenomenon to be fully appreciated for the first time (3.1; 3.4). The project was described by esteemed Professor James Shapiro (Columbia) as 'not only a boon to scholars, but also a major contribution to public awareness, on both sides of the Atlantic'. 2) Scholarly publications: Prescott's co-edited collections (3.2; 3.3) are two landmark studies of the World Shakespeare Festival, the unprecedented and unrepeatable international Festival that formed a key part of the Cultural Olympiad across the UK in 2012. Prescott's solo-authored chapter in 3.3 offered the first ever account of the relationship between Shakespearean festivity and the spirit of Olympism. Subsequent articles and chapters have focused on Shakespeare festivals in the US, specifically reflecting on celebrations marking 		

the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth in 2014 (3.4). Prescott's publications analyse the environmental principles of 'Shakespeare in Yosemite' and that festival's reception by audiences of visitors to Yosemite National Park (3.6).

- 3) Prescott's **dramaturgical and creative writing** output includes new stage versions of Shakespeare's texts and an original play designed for a site-specific festival in Yosemite with Katherine Brokaw (University of California, Merced) (3.5). This creative work has enabled Prescott to spotlight Shakespeare's environmentalism through original archival research on the writings of John Muir and the history of Yosemite National Park; and sparked a collaboration with climate change scientists and Park Rangers on performance sites. The performances have been described by prominent eco-critic Randall Martin as a 'captivating example' and model for the eco-dramaturgical adaptation of Shakespeare (see Introduction to 'Eco-Shakespeare in Performance', p.385).

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

Prescott's research includes a co-edited volume, articles in peer-reviewed journals and adaptations of Shakespeare's plays for performance at Yosemite:

1. **Prescott, Paul** and Edmondson, Paul (2013-15) *Shakespeare on the Road Archive Materials*. www.shakespeareontheroad.com and Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Archive: Stratford-upon-Avon, reference number DR1414. <http://collections.shakespeare.org.uk/search/archive/arch-95577>
2. Edmondson, Paul and **Prescott, Paul** and Sullivan, Erin, eds. (2013) *Year of Shakespeare: re-living the World Shakespeare Festival*. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare. ISBN: 9781408188132 (Described as 'a treasure trove for the student, the scholar, the reviewer but above all for the spectator' (de Carles, *Cahier Élisabéthains* 2014, 86, p.144)).
3. **Prescott, Paul** and Sullivan, Erin, eds. (2015) *Shakespeare on the Global Stage: performance and festivity in the Olympic year*. Arden Shakespeare (Critical studies). London; New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare. ISBN: 9781472520333
4. Edmondson, Paul and **Prescott, Paul** (2015) *Shakespeare on the Road: celebrating Shakespeare in North America in 2014*. In: Jansohn, Christa and Mehl, Dieter, (eds.) *Shakespeare Jubilees, 1769-2014*. Berlin; Boston: Lit Verlag, pp. 301-315. ISBN: 9783643905901
5. Steele Brokaw, Katherine and **Prescott, Paul** (2017-2019) Stage adaptations: *John Muir and Shakespeare: One Touch of Nature* (2017), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2018), *As You Like It* (2019), *Love's Labour's Lost* (2020). <https://yosemiteshakes.ucmerced.edu/>. These adaptations were performed in Yosemite National Park, California, USA: *Muir and Shakespeare* 22-23 April 2017; *Dream* 20-22 April 2018; *As You Like It* 26-28 April 2019.
6. Steele Brokaw, Katherine and **Prescott, Paul** (2019) *Shakespeare in Yosemite: applied theatre in a National Park*. *Critical Survey*, 31 (4). pp. 15-28. doi:10.3167/cs.2019.310403

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

Prescott's work is driven by the conviction that in order to maximise the social and environmental impact of Shakespeare we have to create new and more diverse Shakespearean environments. His ground-breaking work in Yosemite National Park builds on his earlier experience making and taking Shakespeare into unique locations, reaching new audiences, building archives and expanding the reach, legacy and transformative capacities of Shakespearean theatre, particularly in the US. Across the trajectory of this work, detailed below, he has also informed the work of professional theatre practitioners and facilitated meaningful cross-national collaborations

between theatrical and professional cultural and environmental organisations, focusing on engaging issues and promoting action for change.

Shakespeare on the Road (SOTR)

Prescott led the SOTR project, a collaboration between the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT), Misfit-Inc, the Shakespeare Theatre Association, and 14 Shakespeare festivals across the US. The project [website](#) catalogued and disseminated the discoveries, including an archive of 50 hours of interviews with over 100 Shakespearean theatre practitioners. Prescott presented original research on Shakespeare festivals to a combined audience of approximately 10,000 festival-goers (5.1) throughout the project and attracted widespread media coverage in publications across the US (5.2). The project was selected as the only Shakespeare-related event in the UK's first ever Being Human Festival of the Humanities (November 2014), and formed the basis of a photographic exhibition at Harvard House, Stratford-upon-Avon (Nov 2014–Feb 2015). A two-hour radio documentary, 'Shakespeare on the Road with Maxine Peake', told the story of the project through first-hand accounts and practitioner interviews. It was co-authored and presented by Prescott, and aired on Classic FM on July 4th 2016 (5.2).

The project brought immediate and long-lasting cultural, pedagogic and economic benefits to the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT). According to the then CEO of SBT, SOTR enabled them to 'grow our presence in the US, something that is critical to our long-term fundraising and international profile' (5.1). The SOTR team, under direction by Prescott, shared SBT's work at each festival location, which was particularly valuable to SBT because 'most Americans have never heard of the SBT but these events enabled us to explain our mission and unique responsibilities to a combined in-person audience of c.10,000 people' (5.1). SOTR had 'tangible impacts on the way the SBT engages with the public': SBT adopted the Nashville Shakespeare Festival's model of regular public readings of Shakespeare plays, which has 'led to a highly successful and ongoing series' (5.1). Furthermore, through a connection with the New Orleans Shakespeare Festival emerging from SOTR, SBT invited musicians to perform a jazz funeral, 'one of the highlights' (5.1) of a series of events marking the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death.

As a result of SOTR, the SBT has formed an ongoing collaboration with Debra Ann Byrd, founding artistic director of the Harlem Shakespeare Festival (HSF), which was formed in 2013 with a social justice mission. Byrd has been an Artist-in-Residence in Stratford 3 times, and premiered 'Becoming Othello: A Black Girl's Journey' in Stratford and Warwick in October 2019. Her show was inspired by research made available in the SBT archives. As quoted in the *Stratford Herald*, Byrd 'saw her performance as a way of bringing Harlem to Henley Street, as [...] Paul Edmondson and Paul Prescott had brought Henley Street to Harlem in their epic journey around North American Shakespeare festivals in 2014' (5.4). For the SBT, 'this collaboration has done much to increase [their] profile as an institution invested in inclusion and diverse responses to Shakespeare' (5.1). Byrd also remarks that Prescott's SOTR helped HSF to raise its profile, enabling its mission to 'foster understanding and unity' and 'giving opportunities to women, young people and classically trained actors of colour', and in so doing raise 'the public's awareness of often untold stories of African-American's creative engagements with Shakespeare' (5.3).

During the project, SOTR collected 100 hours of audio recordings that are now held in the SBT archive. Their CEO described how these now 'comprise an unprecedented oral history archive about the status of Shakespeare in America in the early twenty-first century... they have been regularly consulted by student researchers and others' (5.1). An additional vital component of the research was the construction of a database listing all extant festivals in the US; this was the first database of its kind and has been of great benefit to the Shakespeare Theatre Association (STA), the umbrella association for over 100 Shakespearean theatre companies and festivals in North America. The STA's Executive Director attests that the project 'shone a light on then-young companies like the Harlem Shakespeare Festival, raising the profile of those festivals in the wider theatrical community.' He added that the database 'has given us a better

understanding of performances of Shakespeare in North America...Most significantly, Shakespeare on the Road has had an impact on the profile of our organisation and has helped us to recruit new members. Having the unpublished database of all extant US festivals and companies has enabled us to identify, contact and recruit companies to our membership' (5.5).

Shakespeare in Yosemite (SY)

Drawing on research into the history and function of North American festivals, and his experience in SOTR, Prescott co-founded a new annual Shakespeare festival in Yosemite National Park, California, in collaboration with Katherine Brokaw (UCLA, Merced) and the National Park Service. To date, 'Shakespeare in Yosemite' is the only Shakespeare festival to take place in a US National Park. The inaugural production in 2017 explored Shakespeare's influence on the writings of pioneering environmentalist and 'Father of the National Parks' John Muir, drawing on Prescott's research into Muir's archive at the University of the Pacific, California. Over 700 park visitors attended the free event, which was featured in media publications including Yahoo! and Broadway World LA (5.6). The 2018 festival featured an eco-themed production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, reaching 1,000 in person attendees. It was featured in the *LA Times* (print readership: 1,200,000) and on NPR member stations CapRadio and Valley Public Radio, which cover Bakersfield, Fresno, Sacramento, Tahoe, Reno, Stockton, Modesto and Quincy (5.6). The adapted text produced by Prescott had site-specific references including words drawn from Native American languages (with the blessing of representatives of the South Sierra Miwok and Paiute peoples) and introduced a plot strand relating to the World Earth Day 2018 theme to 'End Plastic Pollution'. Feedback demonstrated audiences became more aware of the problems of plastic and waste: 'plastic water bottles are a no no'; 'it made me more open minded of all the litter and trash scattered across the park'; 'reminded me to pick up trash in park w[hen] I see it' (5.7).

The 2019 production of *As You Like It* also foregrounded environmental themes, including species extinction and animal welfare, tracking that year's World Earth Day theme, 'Save our Species'. It played to diverse audiences, including 100 secondary school students bussed in from under-served communities in the Central Valley (5.8); for many of them, this was a transformative first exposure to both a National Park and live theatre. Performances will resume in 2021 with a production of *Cymbeline* filmed in Merced and Yosemite.

Yosemite National Park attests the performances have created 'an educational opportunity to connect the works of Shakespeare with ecological and historical issues relevant to Yosemite' (5.8). All 3 productions demonstrated the continued relevance of Shakespeare's texts and their flexible utility for social thinking and activism in the present cultural and environmental moment. The productions have given a platform to Park Rangers and climate scientists from UC-Merced to disseminate research on anthropogenic global warming, amidst controversial reports of a policy of tempered mediation of such knowledge by the Trump administration.

More generally, the Festival has revived outdoor theatre in Yosemite Valley, dormant since the 1960s, reinvigorating spaces such as the Lower River and Curry River Amphitheatres. A statement from Yosemite National Park repeatedly emphasises that SY has helped achieve core Park objectives by introducing many new visitors to the site, many from 'underserved' and 'disproportionately disadvantaged' communities who have never visited Yosemite or a national park before, nor experienced outdoor theatre (5.8). One visitor commented that they had been 'unaware that Yosemite had two outdoor amphitheatres. I hope that they will be used more often in the future.' Another noted that although they have 'lived and worked in Yosemite' they 'don't often find myself in the HDV [Half Dome Village, now called Curry Village] amphitheater, and I found it be a wonderful location to both watch the play and enjoy the view' (5.7). A number of visitors indicated that the performance was the reason for their visit to the park: 'We actually planned a trip to Yosemite around this. We wouldn't have come otherwise... and it was completely worth it' (5.7).

Between 2017 and 2019, the total audience for these productions was over 2,500 (5.8) and comments from the audience demonstrated its unique blend of entertainment and environmental education. A Yosemite regular wrote: 'We have been coming to Yosemite four times a year our whole lives, and we have never seen anything like this...We learned so much about Shakespeare and Muir!' (5.7). Audience surveys clearly show that for many people, SY changed the way they saw both Shakespeare and Yosemite:

- My first time here and now I'm inspired to get more involved in the environment. One world and we need to look after it.
- Made me realize how beautiful Yosemite is and how great it is to have words to describe it.
- I had seen a *Midsummer's Night Dream* before and hadn't liked it. This play completely changed my view point. It made my trip to Yosemite that much better.
- Loved how you made Shakespeare entertaining and funny, it was also easy to understand. Even young kids enjoyed it!
- I didn't see any connections between Shakespeare and the natural world before this performance!
- Made me think about the many forms of love, especially the love of nature. (5.7)

These reinforce Yosemite's National Park's statement that SY 'both revives the tradition of outdoor entertainment and has transformed that entertainment into something that deepens visitors' engagement and understanding of park resources and ecological issues' (5.8). The eco-theatrical practices and research findings of SY have generated widespread interest from theatre and policy-makers, leading Prescott and Brokaw to co-found the EarthShakes Alliance in 2020, an international collective of Shakespeare theatres and festivals (including Shakespeare's Globe) committed to centring environmental issues (5.9). The Alliance will enable the sharing of resources and best practices, building a collaborative momentum for environmental activism. It invites festivals and theatre companies of all sizes to pledge to a set of principles and commitments to change their policy and practices. Delayed by the pandemic, the full project is due to launch in 2021.

Prescott's work has impacted a range of organisations, audiences, and individuals, both locally and internationally. It has significantly influenced both the performance and reception of Shakespeare, diversifying the ways and spaces in which plays are performed and making them accessible to new audiences. At a crucial turning point in our current climate crisis, Prescott's work has vitally raised public awareness and understanding of the crisis we are facing and is at the forefront of creating, and galvanising, sustainable and socially active theatre practice across the world.

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

1. Statement from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
2. Shakespeare on the Road events and publicity: Articles from US newspapers; Being Human Festival Webpage and Evaluation; Article about photographic exhibition in Harvard House; Classic FM Webpage.
3. Statement from Harlem Shakespeare Festival
4. Stratford Herald Article
5. Statement from the Shakespeare Theatre Association
6. Media Coverage of Shakespeare in Yosemite
7. Shakespeare in Yosemite audience feedback 2018 and 2019
8. Statement from Yosemite National Park
9. EarthShakes Alliance Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/EarthShakesAlliance/> and Screenshot