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| Institution: Swansea University | | |
| Unit of Assessment: 27 | | |
| Title of case study: 'Dylan Live': Influencing Artistic Practice, Public Knowledge, Arts Strategy and Educational Outreach Through Research-Based Multi-Media Performance. | | |
| Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003 - 2015 | | |
| 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: |
| Daniel G. Williams M. Wynn Thomas | Professor Professor | 2000 - present 1967 - present |
| Period when the claimed impact occurred: 13 August 2013 – 31 December 2020 | | |
| Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No | | |
| 1. Summary of the impact <p>Commissioned by Literature Wales and supported by the British Council, 'Dylan Live' was a touring multi-media performance based on Williams' research on Dylan Thomas. Creative artists developed collaborative practices and benefitted from career-enhancing new material and performances. Audiences in Wales, London and New York gained an awareness of the bilingual contexts of Thomas' work and a new understanding of his influence on American culture. The show resulted in Wales' national literature promotion agency developing an arts strategy that emphasised global collaborations based on creative practice. The Welsh Government featured 'Dylan Live' in its educational platform leading to KS3 and KS4 pupils' knowledge of Thomas' transatlantic impact.</p> | | |
| 2. Underpinning research <p>The underpinning research on Dylan Thomas' reception, impact and influence on the United States built on Williams' research on transatlantic culture. While anecdotal evidence of Thomas' influence on the America of the 1950s and 60s was plentiful (from John Berryman sitting vigil at Thomas's deathbed to Robert Zimmerman adopting the Welsh poet's name in creating his stage persona) it had never been fully collated, documented nor explored.</p> <p>Professor Daniel G. Williams began this work with Professor M. Wynn Thomas in a publication of 2003 [R1]. From the outset, their research had a creative dimension for they contacted living poets, from W. S. Merwin to Ishmael Reed, and American critics such as Helen Vendler, who testified to Thomas's impact on their work. This work led Williams to pursue (in [R2] and [R3]) the connections between Charlie Parker and Dylan Thomas, the 'two ruined Titans' who American poet Kenneth Rexroth believed were the 'heroes of the post-war generation'. Williams, a semi-professional saxophonist, drew on his musical and literary expertise to document the many instances where Thomas was compared to the alto saxophonist Parker, and to explore the ways in which both artists were viewed as romantic primitives, sources of Celtic and Black revitalisation for an 'over-civilised' United States. Drawing on musical, oral and literary sources held at the National Library of Wales and the Harry Ransom Centre in Texas, Williams traced the ways in which Thomas' ground-breaking recordings were connected to the rise of spoken-word poetry and explored the affinities between this Anglophone son of Welsh-speaking parents and the Jewish-American Ginsberg, Breton-American Kerouac, and African American Baraka. The 'American' Dylan was simultaneously a poet of the universal (of love, death, birth and sex) and a poet whose voice - especially in recording and performance - seemed to embody a yearning for ethnic authenticity [R3].</p> | | |

Based on this research, Williams was invited by Literature Wales to arrange an evening included in their tourism programme ('Writers on Tour'). The well-attended performance at 'Wrights Food Emporium', Carmarthenshire, on 20th July 2013, combined a lecture on Dylan in 1950s New York with performances of the period's music by Williams' quintet 'Borum'. Williams sought to relate aspects of Thomas' poetry to specific compositions by Charlie Parker in preparation for the event, thus gestating the interdisciplinary methodology of 'Dylan Live'. The Literature Wales Chief Executive and staff in attendance recognised the potential that this work had to establish synergies between the academic and creative worlds, and to engage non-academic and younger audiences. The July 2013 performance-lecture thus became the prototype for the 'Dylan Live' creative-critical collaborative show commissioned by Literature Wales as part of the Welsh Government 'Dylanwad/Developing Dylan 100' programme of educational engagement established during Thomas's centenary year of 2014. (GBP21,000, with further funding from the British Council, Arts Council of Wales and Welsh Books Council).

Drawing on their experience of arranging and hosting literary events Literature Wales brought Williams into collaboration with the Welsh-language poet Aneirin Karadog, the Young People Laureate for Wales (2013-16) Martin Daws, spoken word poet Zaru Jonson, jazz bassist Huw V. Williams, Beatbox musician Ed Holden and animator Ewan Jones Morris. In a series of workshops and a live audience trial (Millennium Centre, Cardiff, December 17, 2013) the 'Dylan Live' team developed a compositional methodology which brought moments of intercultural interaction drawn from Williams' research [R2 and R3] to life via readings, new poems, music and animation.

3. References to the research

The underpinning research is based on **substantial book chapters** [R1, R2] and a **peer-reviewed monograph** [R3] that was **long-listed for 'Wales Book of the Year 2016'** (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-36332069>) and positively reviewed in the following peer-reviewed journals: *Welsh History Review*, 28:2 (December, 2016), pp. 395-399; *Journal of British Studies* 55:4 (2016), pp. 863-64; *International Journal of Welsh Writing in English* 4:1 <https://doi.org/10.16995/wwe.4.4>

R1. Thomas, M. Wynn and Williams, Daniel (2003). "A Sweet Union?": Dylan Thomas and Post-War American Poetry'. In Gilbert Bennett et al. (Eds.), *I Sang in My Chains: Essays and Poems in Tribute to Dylan Thomas* (pp. 68-79). Swansea: The Dylan Thomas Society of Great Britain.

R2. Williams, Daniel G. (2014). 'Wales-Bird: Dylan Thomas and Charlie Parker'. In Hannah Ellis (Ed.), *Dylan Thomas: A Centenary Celebration* (pp. 151-164). London: Bloomsbury.

R3. Williams, Daniel G. (2015). 'Blood Jumps: Dylan Thomas, Charlie Parker and 1950s America'. In Daniel G. Williams, *Wales Unchained: Literature, Politics and Identity in the American Century* (pp. 47 - 72). Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

R4. Key online resources:

- Full recording of the **PEN World Voices Festival** show:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taY1jLh0E6Y>

- **Rock and Roll Poet.** Dylan Thomas Educational Site. <http://www.rockandrollpoet.co.uk/> (See especially 'videos' for 'Dylan Live' and interviews with Daniel Williams).

- *New Welsh Review* interview with Caroline Stockford. <https://vimeo.com/94318020>

4. Details of the impact

'Dylan Live' has enriched artistic practice, enhanced public knowledge, influenced arts strategy, and resulted in educational outreach.

Artistic practice. The innovative interdisciplinary model developed by Williams and his

collaborators during autumn 2013 and described in Section 2, enhanced the careers, incomes and practices of the artists commissioned to work on 'Dylan Live' (initial budget, GBP21,000) [C1]. Cultural practice is generally divided linguistically in Wales. 'Dylan Live' broke this mould, allowing poets to **speak to different constituencies** and to reach wider audiences. The Welsh and Breton poet Karadog has emphasized how 'my understanding and knowledge of Thomas's life and work deepened through working on Dylan Live', confirming that 'this, in turn influenced my writing'. Karadog's volume *Bylchau* (2016) - containing the poems 'Llythyr i Dylan' and 'Llaregub' written for the 'Dylan Live' show - won the Welsh Book of the Year Poetry Award 2017 [GBP1000]. While Karadog developed an appreciation of Wales's Anglophone tradition by working on the show, Englishman Daws's involvement facilitated a sense of **integration** in Wales as an artist and citizen: 'As an English incomer to Wales this has been of great personal and professional value to me. Much of the benefit I have been fortunate to draw from our collaborative work is evident in my collection of North Wales poems *Geiriau Gogs* (2016)'. For the bilingual Jonson working on Dylan Live 'gave me a very tangible and in-depth sense of a cultural legacy and wider fate which I was falling into by doing what I'm doing in Wales'. [C2] The emphasis on 'crossing', 'depth' and 'cultural legacy' speaks to **a creative process that transformed self-identification and poetic practices**.

Public knowledge. 'Dylan Live' reached 2,300 people via 11 performances in Wales, London and New York (in addition to over 700 views on YouTube) [C1 / C3]. All performances generated responses on social media with the initial impact of the show indicated by those tweeters who were 'still buzzing' or having not 'quite got over the "Dylan Live" performance' that was 'a multimedia gem' [C4]. Critics and reviewers recognised the scope and intent of the performance. *New Welsh Review* was one of several to observe that the layered, hybrid performance 'operates as much to explode our ideas about form as to challenge our idea of who Thomas was' and a critical overview of the Centenary activities described 'Dylan Live' as a 'major highlight' resulting in an awareness of 'Thomas's legacy on Wales and the USA' [C5]. The other UK performances in 2014 were at festivals: the Fitzrovia Festival (London); the Dinefwr Festival (Carmarthen) where it was part of a diverse programme that resulted in the event being named **Best Small Event at the National Tourism Awards for Wales in 2015** [C1]; the UK-wide Being Human Festival, where 'Dylan Live' was central to the series of funded [GBP1,000] 'rediscovering Dylan' events at Swansea University being **shortlisted for the Times Higher Education award** for 'excellence and innovation in the arts' [C6]. The show's broader impact was indicated by it being chosen **and featured by the Welsh language magazine programme Heno** as one of the highlights of 2014 in its end of year overview broadcast on New Year's Eve [watched by an audience of 38,600, approximately 15% of the total Welsh-speaking population] where it was noted that the show resulted in new ways of understanding Dylan's influence on America [C7].

The **British Council**, who attended the live audience trial in December 2013, incorporated 'Dylan Live' into its major **international programme** for the Dylan Thomas Centenary, allocating a 'significant proportion of the overall budget of GBP729,375' on the basis that it 'offered an opportunity for the British Council to complement the work and investment of national partners in Wales, while reaching new global collaborators and audiences.' [C3]. 'Dylan Live' was selected as part of the British Council's contribution to the **PEN World Voices Festival** in New York (2014) The eminent Irish poet **Paul Muldoon** introduced the show reflecting its status in the festival and the cast worked with Sarah Montague (Senior Producer, WNYC Radio) who praised the performance's 'adventurous and innovative mode', noting that it sparked her to visit Williams' website, 'to look for your books' [C8]. Critic Laurie Muchnik was among the audience of 200 at the New York performance and celebrated the 'multimedia Dylan Thomas' in the leading American book magazine *Kirkus Reviews*. She noted that the performance resulted in an **enlarged understanding of the different forms literature could take in the contemporary world, thus preparing the ground for new texts and audiences** [C5].

Arts strategy. 'Dylan Live' had a far-reaching impact on the arts strategy of Literature Wales. Chief Executive Lleucu Siencyn reports that the 'tri-lingual (English-Welsh-Breton) explorations of "Dylan Live" **inspired and informed** Literature Wales's involvement in Celtic language events

during the UNESCO Year of Indigenous Languages (2019)' and that the New York performance of Dylan Live '**enabled Literature Wales to establish an ongoing working relationship with PEN** festival, which resulted in further collaboration with Welsh authors, including former National Poet of Wales Gillian Clarke'. [C1]. Furthermore, the experience of commissioning 'Dylan Live' **influenced the strategic direction of Literature Wales**: "Dylan Live" schooled Literature Wales in the management and production of experimental cross-arts production, and was instrumental in a shift in our role, from the funder of events to a facilitator and innovator, supporting and enabling collaborative projects'. The success of the show 'coupled with the shift in strategy' that its success engendered 'led to our successful push for the feted Roald Dahl centenary event two years later'. [C1]

Education. 'Dylan Live' features prominently on the **Welsh Government-commissioned web** platform and app (<http://www.rockandrollpoet.co.uk/>) which provides Dylan Thomas materials for primary and secondary schools (Key Stages 2-4). Williams acted as adviser and the name of the site is inspired by Williams's research [C9, C10]. The production company who created the resources, Telesgop, report that 'Williams played a major role in live events that we filmed', including several interviews with him in English and Welsh. Telesgop 'incorporated parts of [Dylan Live]' in order to show the transatlantic connections of Thomas and Williams's 'creativity and ability to communicate with the target audience' had 'been a huge benefit' to the project which has since **provided a model for further educational resources** on canonical Welsh writers produced by Telesgop [C10]. The 'Rock and Roll Poet' has been well-used by schools and the wider public with 23,598 visitors, 27,490 sessions and 47,627 page views. The three apps aimed at KS2-4 have been downloaded a total of 11,411 times. [C10] **Schools have welcomed the resources** which enable them to explore key concepts in the new Curriculum for Wales such as **understanding cultural contexts and identities** and particularly valued the 'simultaneously bilingual approach' of the resources and the way that 'Dylan Live' places 'a clear emphasis on how Thomas's verse is shaped by his Welsh identity and aural traditions which are firmly rooted within Welsh culture'. [C10] The resources have been used in KS3 and KS4 in secondary schools, leading to, for instance, one Welsh-medium school in Swansea to **collaborate with a school in Boston MA** as well as conducting a project on Thomas's Swansea roots. The Head of English reports that 'learners frequently reference and use the Rock and Roll poet website when undertaking their own research on Dylan Thomas.' [C10] *The Guardian* newspaper reported the enthusiasm that educator Hannah Ellis - who is also the granddaughter of Dylan Thomas and Manager of the Dylan Thomas Trust - expressed for the 'Dylan Live' show [C5] and she notes that it 'provided **a new appreciation of my grandfather's writing to a younger generation**' and 'helped develop a public and academic interest in his work' [C10].

The impact of 'Dylan Live' is ongoing. As a result of the show, Professor Kurt Heinzelman, University of Texas at Austin, invited Daniel Williams to lecture and teach on Dylan Thomas in America in February 2017. Heinzelman notes that 'Dylan Live' 'illuminated my own research in Welsh writing generally and Dylan Thomas in particular', and as a result is collaborating with Williams on a co-taught '**global classroom**' initiative centred on Thomas, and on a **landmark transatlantic project** to digitize the Thomas papers held at Swansea University and the Harry Ransom Centre that will **open this material to a worldwide audience**. [C10]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[C1] Literature Wales: Project Report; Letter from Chief Executive.

[C2] Artist Testimonials

[C3] British Council: Project Report. Letter from Head of Arts, British Council Wales.

[C4] Collated Twitter Testimonials.

[C5] Collated Reviews and Notices: *New Welsh Review*, *Kirkus Reviews*, *The Guardian* etc.

[C6] Being Human: corroboration of grant and THES award.

[C7] Media. Letter from Executive Producer, 'Heno'. Collated Online Resources: 'Making of' video, PEN Festival performance etc.

[C8] NY PEN Event: collated publicity and testimonials including Director, PEN World Voices Festival

[C9] Education: Resource Web Links

[C10] Education: Testimonial Letters: Manager of the Dylan Thomas Trust; Managing Director, Telescop; Head of English, Bryn Tawe Comprehensive School; Professor of English and Executive Curator at Harry Ransom Centre, University of Texas at Austin.