

Institution: University of Essex
Unit of Assessment: 29 – English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Communicating the Cultural Legacy of the Eighteenth Century
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Elizabeth Kuti's writing has had an impact on the public's understanding of eighteenth-century literature by bringing an important part of the British heritage alive again for twenty-first century audiences. As an eighteenth-century scholar and a playwright, she works with what performance records tell us were unperformed, or rarely performed, dramas. She creatively restores these forgotten eighteenth-century plays, and has even completed an unfinished comedy from 1764. She also dramatises the lives and writings of well-known eighteenth-century public figures. To these ends, she has collaborated with the Theatre Royal in Bury St. Edmunds, the National Portrait Gallery, and the BBC. Her work has given the public an important opportunity to see rare eighteenth-century plays and to understand this period better through the historically-inspired drama she has written for the stage and radio.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Research at Essex in eighteenth-century theatre has two primary goals: to reveal the significance of hitherto neglected eighteenth-century plays, in the main by women playwrights; and to explore the relevance of eighteenth-century literature to contemporary culture. This research, primarily undertaken by Kuti (who has been at Essex since 2004), also includes joint ventures with Marina Warner and Jonathan Lichtenstein (both at Essex).</p> <p>Kuti has contributed to eighteenth-century Theatre Studies (a) by presenting and publishing academic papers, and (b) by adapting a series of essays and plays from the period for the first time.</p> <p>(a) In June 2010 Kuti and Warner convened a public conference at the Theatre Royal in Bury St. Edmunds – entitled <i>Staging the East: Oriental Masking in the British Theatre 1660-1830</i> – as part of which Kuti presented her academic work on George Colman and Michael Kelly's 1798 production of <i>Blue-beard; or Female Curiosity!</i> This paper has since been published in Warner's edited collection <i>Scheherazade's Children: Global Encounters with the Arabian Nights</i> (Kuti, 2013). Kuti found that Colman and Kelly's production was influenced by a theatrical tradition in which heroines defeat or transform a despotic Sultan. Her paper also explained the way in which the innovative Turkish setting of this production was to become influential in English popular culture for decades to come. This paper is part of Kuti's larger academic project: to recover the rich – if under-appreciated – legacy of eighteenth-century theatrical traditions.</p> <p>(b) Kuti has transformed her knowledge of this period into a publicly accessible medium by dramatising the works and lives of eighteenth-century public figures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In 2005 Kuti wrote <i>Mr Fielding's Scandal-Shop</i>, a radio play about eighteenth-century novelist and dramatist Henry Fielding. The play tells the story of his involvement in the creation of the stage censorship legislation of 1737, which profoundly affected English theatre until the law was changed in 1968. The play was aired on BBC Radio 3 on Christmas Day, 2005. ▪ In 2009 Kuti dramatised 'Mr Spectator', a character Joseph Addison and Richard Steele introduced to their reading public in 1711 as the voice of their daily magazine, <i>The Spectator</i>. This resulted in two series of a BBC Radio drama entitled <i>Dear Mr Spectator</i> (2009; 2010), which highlight parallels between historical events then and now. ▪ In 2009 Kuti also collaborated with the Theatre Royal in Bury St. Edmunds on their production of Elizabeth Inchbald's <i>The Massacre</i> (1792), a tragedy about the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris (never performed during her lifetime because of its inflammatory content – and not performed since) and a new play by Lichtenstein entitled <i>The Requiem</i> as a modern response to it. <i>The Massacre</i> was thus the focus both of Kuti's research and Lichtenstein's playwriting, and was restored for public viewing through their collaboration with the Theatre Royal.

Impact case study (REF3b)

- Kuti's play *Enter A Gentleman* was commissioned in 2011 by the National Portrait Gallery to accompany their exhibition, *The First Actresses: Nell Gwynn to Sarah Siddons*. It dramatised the lives of Restoration dramatist Aphra Behn and Restoration actress Elizabeth Barry.

3. References to the research

- Kuti, E. (2005) *Mr Fielding's Scandal-shop*, BBC Radio 3, broadcast 25 December 2005 [available from HEI on request]
- Kuti, E. (2009) *Dear Mr Spectator, Series 1*, BBC Radio 4, broadcast January 2009 [included in REF 2]
- Kuti, E. (2010) *Dear Mr Spectator, Series 2*, BBC Radio 4, broadcast August 2010 [included in REF 2]
- Kuti, E. (2011) *Enter a Gentleman*, Archola Theatre London. Published in E. Kuti (2013) *Fishkin Trousers*, Nick Hern Books. ISBN: 978-1848423626 [included in REF 2]
- Kuti, E. (2013) Scheherazade, *Blue-beard* and Theatrical Curiosity, in M. Warner and P. Kennedy (eds.) *The Arabian Nights: Encounters and Translations in Literature and the Arts*, New York: New York University Press. ISBN 978-1479857098 [included in REF 2]
- Lichtenstein, J. (2009) *The Requiem*, Theatre Royal Bury St. Edmunds [available from HEI on request]

4. Details of the impact

Kuti's work has brought eighteenth-century plays, largely unknown outside a specialist field within the academy, and new plays about this period, to general audiences. Through completing and dramatising little known writing of the period, staging productions of rarely performed plays, and acting as a consultant on the artistic policy of a National Trust theatre, she has restored the repertoire of eighteenth-century drama and enlivened public interest in an under-represented period in the history of English theatre. She has fostered public interest in the period in collaboration with three major cultural institutions: BBC Radio, the National Portrait Gallery, and the Theatre Royal in Bury St. Edmunds.

Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds: The Theatre Royal is the only surviving Regency theatre in this country, and a National Trust property. It is a unique venue for authentic performances of theatre written in the late eighteenth-century. Kuti's knowledge of this period, together with her talents in playwriting, placed her in an ideal position to be commissioned as a consultant by the Theatre in the development of their 'Restoring the Repertoire' artistic policy. The Repertoire aims to rediscover and revive drama from the period. In her capacity as a consultant, Kuti has worked closely with the Theatre's Board and Artistic Director. In 2009 she attended an English Heritage meeting to advise on how the Theatre might extend its heritage offer while maintaining its high artistic standards. Kuti subsequently submitted a Potential Initiatives Proforma to the Theatre's Artistic Director, Colin Blumenau [corroborating source 1]. This document detailed her suggestions for workshops and events for the 'Restoring the Repertoire' initiative and was accepted in full by the Theatre. She continues to consult with the Theatre Royal on a regular basis [corroborating source 2].

Kuti's work has also informed a number of public events and performances held by the Theatre Royal to contribute to their Restoring the Repertoire project [all Theatre Royal impact has been corroborated by their Head of Participation, corroborating source 2]:

- This includes Kuti's own playwriting. On 3 February 2009 the Theatre staged a rehearsed public reading of *The Whisperers*, based on Frances Sheridan's *A Trip to Bath* (1764) of which only three acts survived. Kuti completed this comedy by furnishing the missing fourth and fifth acts, thus giving a voice to a little-known eighteenth-century playwright. The play was accompanied by her public lecture on Sheridan in the Guildhall in Bury St. Edmunds. Kuti commissioned and produced Lichtenstein's *The Requiem* for a joint-production with Inchbald's *The Massacre* at the Theatre Royal, and wrote a programme note for the latter. The performances were followed by a talk-back session with playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker and Marina Warner. Lichtenstein's play, Kuti's programme note, and Warner's public discussion informed the audience of the contemporary resonance of Inchbald's largely forgotten work.

Impact case study (REF3b)

- Kuti has also contributed to the Restoring the Repertoire project through consulting on their selection of plays and in securing academic funding for a production. In June 2010 the Theatre Royal staged a production of Hannah Cowley's *A Day in Turkey* (1792) as part of the public conference *Staging the East*. She suggested and funded the performance through a British Academy conference grant she obtained with Warner (£8,281).

The overall impact of Kuti's work on the Theatre Royal's activities was summarised as follows by the Head of Participation, Bury St. Edmunds Theatre Royal:

'Through Liz, the work of this theatre has been enhanced by contact with the academy, and academics working and publishing in the field worldwide have been brought in person to the Theatre. In all the ways discussed above, Liz's knowledge and expertise in the field has contributed significantly to our Restoring the Repertoire policy, and through all these projects and events, her work has had a significant impact on audiences and on the work and life of the Theatre'. *Head of Participation, Bury St. Edmunds Theatre Royal*

BBC Radio: Kuti's dramatisation of essays from *The Spectator* (1711) was broadcast in the drama slot for *Woman's Hour* on BBC Radio 4. She wrote two series of *Dear Mr Spectator*, the first broadcast twice daily between 12 and 16 January 2009, the second broadcast twice daily between 16 and 20 August 2010. *Dear Mr Spectator* revealed the historical context and contemporary relevance of the *The Spectator* magazine to a national audience. Typical listening figures for *Woman's Hour* dramas are between 800,000 and 3 million [corroborating source 3]. The success and the effect of the broadcast on its listeners has been confirmed by the producer of *Woman's Hour*: '[the series] highlighted and played with contemporary resonances and ironies for a twenty-first century audience...[and communicated] the eighteenth-century context in a way that ensured it would be relevant, entertaining and informative for its audience. Indeed the first series was incredibly successful and was very much enjoyed by the R[adio] 4 drama commissioner and Radio 4 listeners which led to a second series being commissioned' [source 4].

National Portrait Gallery: Kuti's play *Enter a Gentleman* was commissioned by the National Portrait Gallery (NPG) to support their exhibition *The First Actresses: Nell Gwynn to Sarah Siddons*, which ran from October 2011 to January 2012. The play was performed at a public conference organised as part of the NPG exhibition. The performance was attended by 132 delegates [source 5]. Focussing on the lives of Restoration figures Aphra Behn and Elizabeth Barry, the performance of the play informed public attendees of these women's roles in the world of Restoration theatre. The Curator for the NPG eighteenth-century collection confirmed that 'a number of colleagues and other delegates mentioned how much they enjoyed the play which was a fascinating and fitting conclusion to a day of studious enquiry into [Elizabeth Barry]'. She added that 'Events such as these are really important to the Gallery's reputation as a research institution [and] help demonstrate and extend the scholarship that underpins...an exhibition'. The success of *Enter a Gentleman* prompted the University of California LA to invite Kuti to present an eighteenth-century play at their William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in California. This is due for performance in 2014 [source 6]. The script of the play has been published in the volume *Fishskin Trousers* by Nick Hern Books (2013).

Kuti's own creative writing and her research into a neglected period of theatre has thus changed public awareness of eighteenth-century drama and helped to restore the significance of the period in the eyes of public theatre-goers. With contributions from colleagues in her Department at Essex her research and playwriting has also contributed to the Artistic Policy of the country's only surviving Regency Theatre.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact [All sources saved on file with HEI, available on request]

1. English Heritage and Theatre Royal Bury St. Edmunds, Practitioner Ensemble Potential Initiatives Proforma
2. Head of Participation, Theatre Royal Bury St. Edmunds
3. 'Radio 4 big winner in listener figures' *The Independent*, 29 October 2009
4. Producer, *Woman's Hour*, BBC Radio 4
5. Figure from the Curator of 18th Century Collections, National Portrait Gallery
6. Director, Center for 17th and 18th Century Studies, William A. Clark Memorial Library