

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: University of York
Unit of Assessment: 29 English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Silents Now: Renewing Silent Cinema for Contemporary Audiences
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Many silent-era films have slipped from public view and lie neglected in archives. Drawing directly on her own research in silent cinema, Judith Buchanan works with arts cinemas, film companies, schools, community groups, festivals, artists and musicians to revivify audiences' access to and experiences of these films. The local, national and international impact of her research is evident in: 1) preservation of silent cinema as an endangered piece of cultural heritage; 2) increased public and commercial availability and visibility of the films; 3) renewed public participation in the films; 4) creative responses to the films prompted by her work; and 5) expansion of university curricula.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This case study draws on research conducted since 2005 by Judith Buchanan (joined HEI 2000; made Senior Lecturer 2005; Professor 2011). Drawing on a wealth of primary archival materials, Buchanan's ground-breaking research has generated and extended critical interest in the culturally influential body of pre-1927 films based on biblical, literary, theatrical and artistic subjects. Her studies on Shakespearean, Dickensian, biblical, literary and artistic films of the silent era uncover and explore the creative and cultural contexts in which such films were made, distributed, exhibited, received and discussed. Prior to her work, many of these films had disappeared not only from public consciousness but also from scholarly view. Buchanan's work puts many of these culturally rooted films (or 'qualities' as labelled at the time) back on the map. Specifically, her work has illustrated: 1) the formal characteristics of (and viewing pleasures afforded by) particular films and clusters of films; 2) the confluence of economic and cultural ambitions that combined to make 'quality' subjects attractive material for the early film industry; 3) the creative approaches (technical, performative, interpretive) of particular production companies, filmmakers, historic moments and national film industries; and 4) the varied styles of presentation for such films, including live lecturer and actor collaborations, across early exhibition venues.</p> <p>The extensive primary research for her Cambridge University Press monograph <i>Shakespeare on Silent Film (SOSF)</i> was supported by an AHRC research leave term (2005) and a Fellowship at the Folger Shakespeare Library (2007). In <i>SOSF</i> Buchanan discussed silent Shakespeare as both cultural phenomenon and spur to (prolific) creative practice. Through diverse case studies, the book demonstrated the films' significance as fascinating repositories of aspects of Shakespearean performance history (acting styles, interpretive trends, habits of editorial selection) and of cinema history (cinematography, editing, scenography). Key findings focused on: 1) how some of the c.300 silent Shakespeare films made were sold to distributors and to the public; 2) the societal claims made about their potential for edifying the masses; 3) the anxieties they provoked in some communities; 4) the interpretive and performance characteristics of individual films and individual actors; and 5) the striking legacy of 'silent Shakespeare' in 21st-century stage performance practice.</p> <p>Within the wider field of early cinema's cultural placement and aspirations, Buchanan has also recently published on: the relationship of early cinema to fine art ('Un cinéma impur'); the figure of the live lecturer in early cinema ('Now, where were we?'); the evolution of adaptational approaches across the industry's silent era ('Literary Adaptation in...'); early cinema adaptations of female biblical characters ('Judith's Vampish Virtue'); and silent-era configurations of writers and literary process (<i>The Writer on Film</i>). All have contributed to the impact documented here.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>* = item supplied by HEI on request. Others listed in REF2 or DOI given</p> <p>J. Buchanan, <i>Shakespeare on Silent Film: An Excellent Dumb Discourse</i> (CUP, 2009, pbk 2011). J. Buchanan (ed.), <i>The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship</i> (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). <u>Sample chapters</u> *""Now, where were we?": Ideal and Actual Lecturing Practices in Early Cinema', in Davison, A. and Brown, J. (eds.), <i>The Sounds of the Silents in Britain</i> (OUP, 2013), 38-54. ""Un cinéma impur": Framing Film in the Early Film Industry', in Allen, S. and Hubner, L. (eds.), <i>Framing Film: Cinema and the Visual Arts</i> (Intellect, 2012), 237-60. 'Gospel Narratives on Silent Film' in Cartmell, D. and Whelehan, I. (eds.), <i>The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen</i> (CUP, 2007) 47-60.</p>

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*'Literary Adaptation in the Silent Era', in Cartmell, D. (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to Literature, Film and Adaptation* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 17-32.

Buchanan's work is published by major university presses and peer reviewed. *Shakespeare on Silent Film* received positive reviews 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*.

4. Details of the impact

Routes to Impact

Through Buchanan's '**Silents Now**' project [cs 12] - improving contemporary audiences' access to silent cinema and enriching their experience of it - her research has impacted on cultural life, economic activity, creative practice and the preservation of cultural artefacts. In collaboration with partners she has exhibited silent films publicly and in performatively innovative ways; encouraged new forms of creative engagement with them; and enhanced viewers' understanding of them through expert commentary. Thus she has transformed films that might otherwise have seemed remote and inaccessible into both historically illuminating viewing experiences and touching, funny and inspiring parts of our continuing cultural landscape.

One key partnership, with Thanouser, usefully illustrates the project's quality of impact and range of local, national and international beneficiaries; it is cited here as a stand-alone, first section. Thereafter the impact is detailed by specific category of beneficiary - viz: cinemas, theatres and festivals; children; industry professionals; higher education institutions beyond York.

The Buchanan/Thanouser partnership: economic and creative practice enhancement

Thanouser, an influential early American film production company, made 'qualities' from 1910 to 1916. Having researched the work of Thanouser for many years, in 2012 Buchanan formed a multi-faceted partnership with Ned Thanouser, founder and President of Thanouser Company Film Preservation, Inc. and grandson of pioneering filmmaker Edwin Thanouser. This has facilitated a range of collaborative activities which have helped to preserve, promote and interpret Thanouser's unique early film archive. The Thanouser President writes: 'Judith has used her research expertise to make a variety of silent films, including Thanouser films, **more accessible and intelligible to contemporary audiences**...Through [the Buchanan-Thanouser partnership], more UK audiences were given access to the work of the Thanouser studio, were able to take pleasure in these wonderful surviving films...and were provided with helpful ways of understanding the place of these films in the development of the film industry.' [corroborating source (cs) 1].

In June 2013, Buchanan organised a **2-date tour of 'Thanouser's Early Cinema**

Adaptations' - a public screening of films from the fascinating but little known Thanouser archive. Event venues: 1) British Film Institute (BFI)'s prestigious National Film Theatre (NFT) on South Bank (London) (attendance: 96 paid + 16 comps = 112) [cs 3.i, 3.iv, 3.v]; 2) Hyde Park Picture House (HPPH), Leeds - one of the oldest and most beautiful working cinemas in the North of England (founded 1914) (attendance: 98) [cs 3.iv, 3.vi]. A Q&A with Ned Thanouser about the company preceded the screenings. Buchanan introduced each of the films which were also animated by specially commissioned live musical accompaniment. In a mixed-media performance strategy, for one title, *The Winter's Tale*, Buchanan had scripted and rehearsed professional actors in **live, synched 'voice-to-screen' performances** - a performance strategy whose innovative quality is confirmed by both BFI and HPPH [cs 3.v, 3.vi]. The Thanouser President writes: 'The way in which Judith choreographed the actors to work in collaboration with the film **brought it to life in a genuinely new way and made the film both more intelligible, and more touching for contemporary audiences** as a result' [cs 1]. Audience feedback cards are universally enthusiastic and appreciative. Sample comments, illustrating impact on the audience, include: 'An exceptional opportunity to see rare footage'; 'Introductions/commentary + Q&A were very insightful. Really enjoyed!!!'; 'Thrilling to have Thanouser grandson actually present'; 'Terrific to have introductions given with such knowledge, detail - and passion!'; 'Brilliant idea for *The Winter's Tale*; opened up a real area of imagination of interpretation'; 'I knew nothing of these films before this. Fascinating & enlightening' [cs 2.i]. Buchanan's interview about Thanouser films for BBC Radio Leeds was picked up for 'Best of BBC Local Radio' show and subsequently aired on 27 further stations around the UK [cs 5], further widening the reach of impact of the events. This media coverage, writes the Thanouser President, 'gave an **enhanced profile to the work of Thanouser** in recuperating

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and preserving these early films thereby contributing to the aims of the Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc.' [cs 1] HPPH report that in the process it helped to raise their profile too [cs 3.vi].

Buchanan recorded **expert voice-over commentaries** to *The Winter's Tale* and *Cinderella* for the 'Thanhouser's Early Cinema Adaptations' DVD on sale at the event [cs 3.ii]. These films, with accompanying Buchanan commentaries, have been posted for **free-to-view online access** [cs 3.iii]. Her expertise on the Thanhouser qualities has been harnessed for a **50-min TV documentary** entitled 'The Thanhouser Studio and the Birth of American Cinema' - for the Pordenone Film Festival, and transmission on television (USA) in 2014 [cs 6]. Impact claimed here is on the work of Thanhouser, Inc. not on future viewers of documentary.

Impact achieved:

- i) *London & Yorkshire audiences delighted, enriched and educated by screenings* [cs 2.i].
- ii) *profile of Thanhouser Company Film Preservation, Inc and of its archive enhanced through public screening events and media appearances to publicise* [cs 1, 3.i, 3.iv, 3.vi, 5, 6].
- iii) *audiences' viewing of the films enhanced through expert interpretive aids in the form of in-person introductions and Buchanan commentary for DVD & online publication* [cs 1, 3.ii-iii, 6].
- iv) *creative new ways of presenting and appreciating the films for contemporary audiences developed by Buchanan in collaboration with actors and musicians* [cs 1, 2, 3.v, 3.vi].
- v) *BFI's mission to curate film from the full historical range assisted by rare event showcasing very early cinema* [cs 3.iv]; *and programme of both BFI and HPPH broadened and enriched through the pioneering multi-media presentation combining silent film with live actors* [cs 3.v-vi].
- vi) *HPPH's profile and heritage credentials raised via enhanced media exposure* [cs 3.vi, 5].

Other Beneficiaries**1. Cinema, Theatre and Festival Programming**

In addition to her work with arts cinemas (York City Screen, Leeds Hyde Park Picture House, NFT South Bank), Buchanan's silent film work has impacted separately on York Theatre Royal's (YTR) and on the Festival Shakespeare Buenos Aires's (FSBA) programming for the 2013/2014 season. YTR commissioned Buchanan to rehearse the actors from its stage production of *Richard III* for a multi-media 'performance' of a silent film of *Richard III*, for which she wrote the voice-to-screen script and commissioned a new John Sweeney score [cs 10]. FSBA has programmed a silent Shakespeare show for its 2014 Festival line-up, which constitutes 'a welcome expansion in the activities of the Festival'. The FSBA Director accounts for the inspiration for this thus: **'we are glad to have become aware of...this possibility for festival programming through Judith Buchanan's work'** [cs 4]. The impact claimed here is not for the shows themselves (which fall post 31.7.13) but on YTR (vision, programming, contracting of actors), on FSBA (programming) and on Sweeney's musical composition - all within the designated impact period.

Impact achieved: *Expanding regional theatre's & international Shakespeare Festival's multi-media vision and specific programming to include silent Shakespeare events* [cs 4 & 10].

2. Industry Professionals

- i) Industry Professionals *Shakespeare on Silent Film* is appreciatively cited in multiple blog posts by John Wyver (producer of the David Tennant *Hamlet* DVD, Anthony Sher *Macbeth* DVD, RSC *Julius Caesar* DVD). He cites her work specifically and in detail to historicise his discussion of prospective Shakespeare Quartercentenary celebrations, of the Doran/Tennant *Hamlet* he was then producing and of contemporary biblical releases [cs 7].
- ii) Filmmakers Filmmaker Kit Monkman (*The Knife That Killed Me*) with innovative production company Green Screen are making a short documentary film **'inspired,'** as they write, **'by Judith Buchanan's research work on silent cinema** and contemporary audiences' participation in silent cinema' [cs 8.i-ii]. In Spring 2012 **Green Screen invested £5k in this project.** The resulting short will be released in 2014 for the short film festival circuit and for Pordenone. As part of its subject, Buchanan (co-producing) has commissioned a cinematic reworking of particular silent film scenes employing a modern, creative sensibility and the full technological resources of contemporary filmmaking. Green Screen reports that **Judith's work has enabled us 'to intervene upon, and collaborate with...early film in stimulating and provocative ways.'** [cs 8.i] Impact claimed here is on Green Screen (within designated impact period), not on future viewers of film.

Impact achieved:

- i) *Buchanan's work informs contemporary discussion by industry practitioners* [cs 7].
- ii) *Her work inspires contemporary filmmakers in both documentary and (re)creative projects in which they*

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invest creatively and financially [cs8].

3. Children

i) School Curriculum: Buchanan has run a series of Shakespeare workshops incorporating silent film activities for children from local state primary and secondary schools. The impact is evident in the children's and teachers' universally enthusiastic reviews of **the eye-opening effects of positive exposure to an unfamiliar medium**. Sample student and teacher comments include: 'Really helped me think about what is sensational about the end of Othello & why this is important'; 'Thank you for giving our pupils such a rich experience, many new things to think about...& exposure to material they would certainly never have encountered elsewhere! We have all really...benefited from...all the wonderful new material on silent cinema' [cs 2.ii].

ii) Leisure-Time Activities: As part of the York Festival of Ideas, 'Silents Now' ran '**Voicing Villainy**', a participative silent film workshop for York families. Community participants of all ages developed their own villainous performances in touching, earnest and/or skittish collaboration with famous on-screen silent 'villains' (including Richard III, Count Orlok and Fantomas). Participants' feedback was very enthusiastic. Parent comments include: 'Really good to...[get] involved with [the films] rather than just thinking them a little weird'; 'Terrific to see so many children taking pleasure in old, silent films'. Workshop numbers across afternoon: 67 [cs 2.iii].
Impact achieved: i) *Deepened learning experiences of performance interpretation and historical understanding through multiple schools workshops* [cs 2.ii]. ii) *Rendered silent films accessible, educative and fun for all ages through 'Voicing Villainy' workshop* [cs 2.iii].

4. Higher Education Institutions beyond York

Buchanan's introduction to and expert voice-overs for the 7 films on the 2004 BFI DVD *Silent Shakespeare* [cs 9] (BFI sales figs: c.3k in UK, c.4k in North America) and her CUP monograph *Shakespeare on Silent Film* have together provided primary and secondary materials sufficient to make silent Shakespeare now a viable inclusion on university syllabi. As **selective illustration of curriculum expansion in area**, silent Shakespeare, drawing on Buchanan DVD and/or monograph, is now on syllabi at: Birmingham, Nottingham, KCL, de Montfort, Leicester, Roehampton, Keele, Sheffield, Lancaster, Malaga, Cologne, Cornell, UPenn, Cornell College, Notre Dame [cs 11].
Impact achieved: *expansion of 'Shakespeare in Performance', 'Screen Shakespeares' (etc) syllabuses in UK and international HEIs to incorporate silent Shakespeare* [cs 11].

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

1. Impact-corroborating letter from President of Thanouser Company Film Preservation, Inc.
2. Feedback cards archived from: i) Thanouser show at National Film Theatre (12.6.2013) and Hyde Park Picture House (13.6.2013); ii) workshops for local state schools: Y6 Lord Deramore's Primary (3.12.2012); Y12 Huntington Comprehensive (19.3.2013); Y8 Fulford Comprehensive (18.6.2013); iii) 'Voicing Villainy' workshop (15.6.2013); iv) 'Voicing Villainy' programme.
3. i) Thanouser Facebook: NFT event www.facebook.com/events/626264610736377/
ii) Thanouser DVD with Buchanan voice-overs; iii) Buchanan v/o for *The Winter's Tale* and *Cinderella* online at: thanouser.org/films/winter_tale.htm & thanouser.org/films/cinderella.htm; iv) BFI & HPPH events posters & BFI programme note; v) corroborating letter re BFI event from John McKnight (Events Co-ordinator, NFT); vi) corroborating letter re HPPH event from Oliver Jenkins (Hyde Park Picture House Administrator).
4. Impact-corroborating letter from Director, Festival Shakespeare Buenos Aires: Patricio Orozco.
5. i) Recording, Buchanan interview about Thanouser films, aired on 27 BBC stations; ii) media log of all radio transmissions.
6. Thanouser documentary viewable in preview at: vimeo.com/56134447 (password: tco). Buchanan appearances at: 15:35 - 16:26, 17:56 - 18:40, 30:20 - 30:59.
7. John Wyver (leading Shakespeare film producer) blog posts on Buchanan. www.illuminationsmedia.co.uk/blog/index.cfm?start=1&news_id=451 See also =453 & =651
8. i) Letter from Green Screen Productions confirming impact of, and investment in, partnership;
ii) www.greenscreen.co.uk/post-production/current-projects/silents-now/.
9. Buchanan-voiced BFI Silent Shakespeare DVD: filmstore.bfi.org.uk/acatalog/info_127.html.
10. York Theatre Royal silent film event (scripted and rehearsed by Buchanan): www.yorktheatreroyal.co.uk/shows/Richard_3_silent_filming.php#.UgTRrVFLHzi
11. Table of sample modules with Buchanan primary/secondary silent Shakespeare materials.
12. 'Silents Now' webpages: www.york.ac.uk/hrc/engagement/silents-now/#tab-2