

Institution: University of Roehampton		
Unit of Assessment: 27 – English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Embedding Diversity in Early Modern Performance		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2014-2020		
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:
Dr Andy Kesson Professor Clare McManus	Reader Professor	2013 - present 2005 – present
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>Embedding Diversity in Early Modern Performance has expanded opportunities and developed histories for cis female, transgender, queer, disabled and BAME performers, their audiences and play readers. The research of Professor Clare McManus and Dr Andy Kesson into the histories of these identities across forgotten early modern performance modes has effected material change and provided personal benefits to individuals and companies staging performances of and beyond Shakespeare, by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> informing the production of plays featuring major cis female, LGBTQI+, and BAME roles by independent companies and theatremakers; transforming casting practice, theatre performance and interpretive material of major cultural institutions including the Victoria & Albert, Royal Shakespeare Company, National Archives, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre (UK) and the Stratford Shakespeare Festival (Canada); and contributing to, and shaping, scholarly and public discourse in relation to inclusive practices. <p>Ultimately, the research has reshaped audience and industry understanding and use of early modern theatre history, changing processional theatre practice and providing economic, commercial and personal benefits to individuals and companies staging performances of and beyond Shakespeare.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Over the course of six years, McManus and Kesson have helped reshape the understanding of gender, sexuality, and theatre history through research into the social contexts and performance modes of early modern England. Their research has shown that features such as female entrepreneurship, physical skill, trans identity, race, or disability need not be 'imposed' upon plays from a modern point of view but are present in the original texts and their contexts (see R1-R4, G1-G2).</p> <p>Professor Clare McManus (2005-present) and Dr Andy Kesson (2013-present) have worked across literary studies, archival research, performance, and archaeology to explore the history of playhouses and plays in early modern England and the diverse forms of representation that were inherent features of theatrical practice. Their research now coalesces around two major overlapping projects: phase one, Before Shakespeare (G1, 2016 onwards) and phase two, Engendering the Stage (G2, 2018 onwards). Both the research and impact are the result of dialogue with each other: McManus' work on female performers (G2) was a key influence on Before Shakespeare (G1), whilst performance work devised by Before Shakespeare (G1) in turn influences Engendering the Stage (G2). Both projects have identified new ways to understand the period's performance and its close connection with London communities and other forms of 'play' (rope-dancing, combat, bowling, acrobatics), and have thereby expanded both popular and scholarly notions of early modern performance beyond the ostensibly archetypal dramatic form of a Shakespearean play. Their research has been supported by three substantial grants and one smaller grant (G1-G2) from UK and Canadian research bodies.</p>		

McManus's work formed and continues to shape the field of early modern women's performance studies (**R1-R2**). Her research identifies and analyses the evidence for previously ignored kinds of performers, such as women, girls, mixed casts and, in today's terms, gender nonconforming performers (**R1-R2**). She is PI on Engendering the Stage (**G2**), a collaboration with researchers at Canada's McMaster University and King's College London (KCL); the project reappraises a central period of European theatre history through primary research and Practice-as-Research.

Kesson's research has afforded a new understanding of the relationship between gender, queerness, performance and authorship (**R3**). In his role as PI on Before Shakespeare (**G1**) he has demonstrated the unacknowledged diversity of early modern performance history and uncovered new evidence about the broad social contexts and management of Elizabethan playhouses and of overlooked Elizabethan plays, working closely with theatre professionals to drive co-production of both research and creative work (**R4**). The project has identified the central role of women in building and running London's first playhouses as well as the central role of female characters in early plays that have subsequently been marginalised.

These researchers have used practice-research and fresh archival research to contest deeply embedded paradigms that have restricted focus to the male player and neglected the far-reaching questions about gender and representation posed by performance activities across the gender spectrum. Research has been conducted through archaeological enquiry (**G1**), performance practice-research (**G1-G2**) and archival exploration (**G1-G2**) to uncover new documentary evidence and consider its relationship to playtexts (**R1-R4**). This included international research trips to and fellowships at the Folger Shakespeare Library and the Huntington Library, and sustained archival research in London and Surrey archives. In addition to academic publications, their work has generated a large body of fresh transcriptions of documents, a working database of primary references, performance-as-research events and a host of open-access materials and media. This research has opened new opportunities for theatre performers, producers and audiences to tell stories, seek out representation and build careers.

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

R1 McManus, C. (2015) 'Sing it Like Poor Barbary': *Othello* and Early Modern Women's Performance, *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 33(1), pp.99-120 in McManus and Munro (eds.) *Shakespeare Bulletin* special issue, *Renaissance Women's Performance and the Dramatic Canon*. <https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2015.0013>.

R2 McManus, C. (2015) Early Modern Women's Performance and the Dramatic Canon: Theater History, Evidence, and Narratives, *Shakespeare Bulletin* 33(1), pp.1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1353/shb.2015.0015>

R3 Kesson, A. (2014) *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. ISBN 9780719088247. Listed in REF2.

R4 Kesson, A. ed., with substantial introduction (2017) Forum: Drama of the 1580s, *Shakespeare Studies*, 45, pp.19-128. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Playhouses, Plays, and Theater History: Rethinking the 1580s.-a0509723467>.

G1 Before Shakespeare: The Beginnings of London Commercial Theatre, 1565-1595. PI Andy Kesson. Arts and Humanities Research Council; Early Career Grant. April 2016-March 2018. £259,561.74.

G2 Engendering the Stage: The Records of Early Modern Performance. Funded in three stages:
G2a: PI Clare McManus, Co-I Lucy Munro (KCL). Leverhulme Trust Research Project Grant. January 2020-December 2022. £314,137.

G2b: Stratford Festival residency. PIs Peter Cockett and Melinda Gough (McMaster University). Canadian SSHRC Connection/Connexion Grant. September 2018. £14783.26.

G2c: Engendering the Stage. PI Lucy Munro (KCL). KCL Seed-fund for Research in Action event. April 2019. £3,000.

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

In keeping with the aim of the projects (**G1** and **G2**) to diversify the performance of classical theatre, the researchers have focused on working with often marginalised and emerging theatre professionals who specialise in early modern performance research and innovative casting practices. Through this work, the research (**R1-R2**) has informed the production of plays featuring major cis female, LGBTQI+, and BAME roles by independent companies and theatremakers which have in turn provided economic, commercial and personal benefits for these companies and practitioners.

From April 2016 to April 2018, Kesson collaborated with theatremaker and prominent trans activist Emma Frankland and the research (**R3**) led her to *'pursue [her] current project on John Lyly's Galatea'* (**IMP1**). This included a week-long residency at Jerwood Studios (August 2016) and two weeks in Cornwall (October-November 2017), funded by the Before Shakespeare Project (**G1**), working with a cast of trans, BAME and deaf actors. This work resulted in invaluable wider international exposure for Frankland across arts and academia, including invitations to author publications and a week of paid development work at Stratford Festival, Canada. Frankland credits the research (**R3**) with highlighting *'what we can learn about trans history'* and how the industry can *'explore casting practices in classical drama that are rooted in historical precedent and reclaim diversity as a centrepiece of Elizabethan drama—not an historical anachronism'* (**IMP1**). The research and activities have therefore created diverse spaces and opportunities for performers new to and often alienated from classical drama—including generating trans performance histories with powerful personal and professional benefits.

For the artistic director of Larking Arts, who was producer on Kesson's collaboration with Frankland, *'Before Shakespeare [G1]... has been an inspiration... [Kesson]'s attention to inclusive spaces, fair pay and respect for practice as research has enabled a diverse range of artists and arts organisations to contribute some of their best work. In return, without patronising or dictating he offers research-based knowledge [R3-R4] in accessible and wide reaching formats... [H]is invaluable insights challenging preconceptions about historical representations of gender and sexuality in the arts have been freeing and empowering'* (**IMP2**).

In 2017, Before Shakespeare's (**G1**) work with Dolphin's Back exploring issues raised in Kesson's article (**R4**) and monograph (**R3**) reached around 1,000 audience members and multiple online engagements, deemed *'crucial'* by the Artistic Director to the company's economic survival and development (**IMP3**). The work's new commercial potential led Shakespeare's Globe to commission *The Woman in the Moon*, a play central to Kesson's research (**R3-R4**) in a full-scale production seen by 608 people, which the Artistic Director attributes to Before Shakespeare's *'funding and exposure, as well as collaboration ... with Shakespeare's Globe'* (**IMP3**). In an interview for the Before Shakespeare website (**G1**), the cast of *The Woman in the Moon* expressed their excitement at exploring female characters with the ability to both *'create and destroy'*, the rehearsal workshop on deities, destiny and human agency offering a unique opportunity to connect female power with movement (**IMP4**).

As Kesson's and McManus' work with fringe independent companies and theatremakers took place, larger cultural institutions became aware of the research and began work with the two researchers. Through this extension of its reach, the research (**R1-R4**) has transformed the casting practices, theatre performances and interpretive materials of major cultural institutions including the Royal Shakespeare Company, V&A, the National Archives, Shakespeare's Globe (UK) and the Stratford Shakespeare Festival (Canada). For example, Kesson's work on non-canonical writers like Lyly (**R3**), which amplified and brought new perspectives to understandings of early modern performance, was key to his being asked to advise the Royal Shakespeare Company on their productions of *Doctor Faustus* (2016), *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (2017), and *The Duchess of Malfi* (2018), introducing performers to their theatrical and research contexts and writing an essay for each production's programme (print runs of at least 30,000). For the director of *Doctor Faustus* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, Kesson's work on the *'forgotten histories of these plays'* and *'the way they champion working-class and female characters'* (**R4**) was an important discovery for the company, shaping production choices and the rehearsal process for the plays (**IMP5**).

Before Shakespeare's (G1) and Engendering the Stage's (G2) collaboration with Stratford Festival, North America's largest classical repertory theatre company, has explored non-canonical texts and diverse casting practices. As a result of Engendering the Stage's residency at the festival in 2018, several of the same practitioners were recalled in 2019 for a further week-long Before Shakespeare (G1) workshop with trans performers: both residencies reshaped the institution's attitudes to casting and commissioning. An Associate Producer of the Festival stated in an interview on the Engendering the Stage (G2) website that both projects (G1 and G2) made her newly '*interested in the [wider] canon of early modern English plays... giving them to artists who maybe have these questions around gender identity closer to their own experience*'. They must be '*in consideration for future productions, as much as the Shakespearean canon currently is*' (IMP6), testifying to a major directional change in attitudes to casting and commissioning based on the research (R1-R4).

In 2018 and 2019, Kesson was consultant on the V&A's exhibition space on the site of the historic Theatre in Shoreditch; according to the Exhibition Project Manager, his research (R3-R4) encouraged the museum to shift focus from Shakespeare to the diverse figures and plays associated with the playhouse, providing '*new narratives about the involvement of women in playhouse ownership and management*', thereby significantly shaping the exhibition's overall interpretation, curation and promotion strategies (G1, IMP7). This manager also acknowledged that Kesson's research reshaped narratives in London's Shakespearean heritage industry at the Shake It Up Festival in August 2019 (attended by 744 members of the public), providing essential '*historical background and contexts*' whilst also modelling workshop practices (IMP7).

Following a talk at The National Archives on 1 August 2018, Kesson was invited to develop two online course packs for A-level and GCSE students for their education department, shifting focus away from Shakespeare towards other spaces and individuals (especially women) while making documents discovered in the research (R4) freely available to the 1,048 viewers of the resources (IMP8).

McManus' work with Shakespeare's Globe in 2019 has identified a gap in the institution's casting policies for trans performers. In May 2019, Engendering the Stage (G2) ran a Research in Action workshop at Shakespeare's Globe (supported by G2c), attended by 93 people. The event engaged professional actors and a paying public audience with McManus' work on gendered embodiment (R1), focusing specifically on the intersections of gender, race and rage, and '*showed how gender issues that were present in period drama are just as present today*' (IMP9). As a result, the Globe Research Fellow records that this prompted '*significant reflection about casting practices*' and previously unnoticed '*inequities of access*' for performers (R1-R2), whilst it '*caused us to think in a new way about the casting of "female" and "male" roles in early modern drama, and [...] open doors to trans performers*', leading to '*the first major role to be taken by a trans actor in the Globe's history*'. This shift in casting policy benefited both the Globe and trans artists (IMP10).

Finally, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kesson launched A Bit Lit, a new online platform for research and creativity of all kinds, with a strong emphasis on scholars and performers marginalised because of their identity, which in its first six months reached audiences of 17,000 (<https://www.youtube.com/c/ABitLit/videos>). It includes series on race, trans and cis history and disability, shaping scholarly and public discourse in relation to inclusive practice and demonstrating ongoing commitment to positive impact in the face of negative change, especially around inclusion and diversity.

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

IMP1 Testimonial from theatremaker and trans activist dated 3 May 2018, showing the role of Kesson's research (R3) in development work on John Lyly's *Galatea* between 2016 and 2018.

IMP2 Testimonial from Artistic Director of Larking Arts dated November 2019, illustrating the effects of the company's collaboration with Kesson from 2016-2018.

- IMP3** Testimonial from Artistic Director of Dolphin's Back dated 5 May 2018, illustrating the role of Before Shakespeare (**G1**) to provide research support and access funding to allow the company to fulfil its mission of bringing neglected early modern writers into contemporary performance.
- IMP4** Interview with the cast of *The Woman in the Moon*, published on 14 December 2017. Full text of the interview can be found at <https://beforeshakespeare.com/2017/12/14/the-woman-in-the-moon-interviews-with-the-cast/>.
- IMP5** Testimonial from Royal Shakespeare Company Director of *Doctor Faustus* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, dated November 2019, about the new insights gained by the RSC due to collaboration with Kesson from 2016 to 2018.
- IMP6** Interview with the Associate Producer of the Stratford Festival 2018 on the changed attitudes towards casting resulting from the residency of Engendering the Stage (**G2**). A video of this interview can be found at <https://engenderingthestage.humanities.mcmaster.ca>.
- IMP7** Testimonial from V&A Exhibition Project Manager dated 17 April 2019, describing the role of Before Shakespeare (**G1**) as informal advisers in June 2017 to 'The Theatre Courtyard Gallery' exhibition space.
- IMP8** Data Document from the National Archives on education course packs produced by Kesson based on **R4**.
- IMP9** Responses to evaluations of the Research in Action Event held by Engendering the Stage (**G2**) at the Globe on 13 May 2019.
- IMP10** Testimonial from Research Fellow and Lecturer at Shakespeare's Globe dated 18 December 2020, showing new insights about the casting of trans performers in response to the Research in Action event held by Engendering the Stage (**G2**) at the Globe in May 2019.