

**American Friends of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust**  
**Stanley Wells, CBE Fellowship**  
**Journal – Summer 2016**

*28 June:*

I write my first entry from the room of a guesthouse in Stratford-upon-Avon, where I've just arrived after traveling from Yale to begin the fellowship. There's an appealing symmetry to my trip, which took me on the MetroNorth train from New Haven to New York City for my flight; after setting down again in London, I've taken another train to the Warwickshire town that, in many ways, serves as a mirror of my starting point. I'm reminded of how, during Shakespeare's lifetime, London largely remained on the cusp of becoming the undisputed world city into which it would later transform, while New York was still merely one part of the loose congeries of "New Netherland". Even while only briefly passing through its borders, however, I can easily imagine the intensity and gravity of the pull that London exerted on a young Shakespeare who was born and raised at a tantalizing middle distance from this booming metropolis.

*29 June:*

Spent the morning acquainting myself with the basic layout of the town before visiting the Reading Room at the Shakespeare Centre, part of the larger Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, to begin my research. After dodging the rain and the tourists, I found the space inviting and unfussy: small but surprisingly strong holdings are kept on the shelves, with many more resources that can be called up in advance. I confess somewhat guiltily that I spent the first part of my visit editing a forthcoming journal article on John Milton (though I wholly recuse myself from taking on the title question of Nigel Smith's *Is Milton Better Than Shakespeare?*) before beginning a look into the RSC performance records relating to *Coriolanus*, the topic of my current dissertation chapter.

Milton's influence was brought back to me, however, when I took a late-afternoon trip to Holy Trinity Church, where Shakespeare is interred. Though I'm sure I've encountered this information in my reading, I was nonetheless surprised to see not only Anne Hathaway but also Shakespeare's son-in-law John Hall and the first husband of his granddaughter Elizabeth, Thomas Nash, buried alongside him; any notion one might have had of the author existing solely in the sphere of poesy, remote from the ties of kinship or his contemporary world, was swiftly dissolved. But it was also impossible to take in this sight without the opening lines of Milton's "On Shakespeare. 1630" echoing through my head: "What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones, / The labor of an age in pilèd stones, / Or that his hallowed relics should be hid / Under a star-ypointing pyramid?" It is, for better or worse, nearly impossible now to say whether Shakespeare's self-conception or final wishes would be better represented by the monument on the church wall (which the scholar J. Dover Wilson once acidly claimed made the playwright look like "a self-satisfied pork butcher") or by Milton's vision of the author as soaring above such mundane concerns. More than ever, it seems to me that it is these fissures and frictions in how we interpret Shakespeare's legacy that continue to make him worth studying.

*30 June:*

A full day of research: I returned to the Shakespeare Centre Reading Room in the morning and then made my first visit to the library of the Shakespeare Institute in the afternoon. This collection is truly extraordinary for anyone working on early modern literature, for two reasons. First, its holdings of virtually all books in the field allow for extended and uninterrupted stack-browsing, a process that allowed me to see the intellectual genealogies linking various modes of inquiry across the decades and centuries—an experience not replicable, in my experience, by

browsing an online catalogue. Second, even my initial visit acquainted and re-acquainted me with many older works of scholarship lying well beyond the roughly thirty-year span consulted in much contemporary academic writing. In attempting to write a dissertation on Shakespeare, I feel bound both to say something new about the playwright (challenging as that may seem) and to present an accurate picture of what has come before: goals for which these resources will be invaluable.

One of the major concerns of my chapter on *Coriolanus* is to consider precisely what kinds of labor, expertise, rhetoric, and, to borrow a phrase from the sociologist Erving Goffman, “forms of talk” are essential both to the operation of politics in Shakespeare’s play—which famously opens with the patrician Menenius quelling a revolt among the plebeians of Rome by telling them a “fable of the belly”—and to the ways that politics operated in Shakespeare’s own world. To that end, I spent most of the afternoon re-reading several books that will be central to my argument, including Lynn Enterline’s *Shakespeare’s Schoolroom*, which focuses on the kind of education the playwright would have received at the King’s New School in Stratford, and Lynne Magnusson’s *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*. While I was more than usually regretful that the local records from Shakespeare’s time in grammar school do not survive, these authors still offered many useful insights for my topic.

*July 1:*

This morning was spent in a series of meetings with members of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, which did much to clarify my sense of the organization’s key role in public sector support for the study of the playwright. A conversation with the Director of Cultural Engagement, Delia Garratt, focused on the question of curating the Trust’s holdings for a general audience of visitors from around the world, as well as on the challenges of communicating specialist research in ways that these audiences can easily appreciate. My talk with Head of Research Paul Edmondson followed a similar course, and I remain impressed by the extent to which he and the other members of the Trust have managed both to encourage research and collaboration among scholars and to translate this research into public engagement via symposia, exhibitions, and speaking tours. Finally, I had the pleasure of meeting with Stanley Wells—a scholar whose influence on the ways in which students encounter Shakespeare is frankly unparalleled. I am grateful for the fruits of his immense expertise every time I consult a modern edition of Shakespeare, and it was wonderful to have the opportunity to speak with him about these matters. Buoyed by these conversations, I spent the rest of the day at the Shakespeare Institute, where I delved into recent studies on seventeenth-century Parliamentary politics.

*July 2:*

Following the cue of some unusually felicitous weather, I decided to devote today to finally touring the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust properties. Starting, naturally, at the birthplace on Henley Street, I was impressed once again by capacity of the exhibition materials to convey the playwright’s broad appeal without diluting the specifics of his life and work. As I joined small clusters of visitors to take in the guides’ descriptions of the house, I was struck once again by the fact that the Trust relies on visitors’ fees for roughly 80% of its support, and immediately understood why; the interpreters’ commentary was smart, accurate, and most importantly *individualized*, highlighting different aspects of the property’s history each time—an experience that I, even having read numerous biographies and life sketches, could not hope to replicate without visiting them in person. I particularly enjoyed learning about the long family history behind the Hathaway cottage, which highlighted the deep continuities between the lives of tenant farmers in the late sixteenth century and those in the early twentieth century.

Later in the day, I met with the curator for Early Modern Books and Manuscripts at Yale’s Beinecke Library, who I hadn’t seen since her departure for a year-long fellowship at Cambridge

University last fall—a lovely opportunity for catching up and reflecting on my time here so far. Joined by several colleagues, we attended the RSC production of Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* at the Swan Theater. The production, which maintained a (mostly) consistent period setting in the play’s date of 1610, took obvious joy in the complexity of Jonson’s language, with the “venture tripartite” of Doll, Subtle, and Face rattling curses at each other like rifle volleys. At times this was a clear success: spectators were at once delighted and disgusted by Sir Epicure Mammon’s almost hallucinatory speeches about the meals he could conjure using the Philosopher’s Stone. But the speed of the delivery sometimes meant that the repartee between the central conspirators lost its keen specificity and indeed its slightly tragic quality, especially when their enterprise finally fell apart. Nonetheless, I spent the rest of the evening thinking about how Jonson’s characters wield language and knowledge as clubs to beat each another with—a topic with clear relevance for *Coriolanus*.

*July 3:*

A quiet day of research. Still feeling inspired by the RSC production of *The Alchemist*, I returned once again to a book I read only recently: Andras Kisery’s *Hamlet’s Moment*, which argues that English drama at the turn of the seventeenth century was newly concerned not just with portraying specific political institutions or scandals but also with articulating a more general “politic style” of thinking, speaking, and disseminating expertise. After the library closed in the early evening, I headed to the Stratford River Festival for fish and chips, fireworks, and a walk along the banks of the Avon.

*July 4:*

Back to the Institute Library for a productive day of reading and mapping out the current chapter of my dissertation. I’m more appreciative than ever of the long opening hours and stack browsing privileges that come along with this fellowship, as I was able to get through a number of important sources and discovered several others I would likely not have located in an online catalog.

*July 5:*

Day trip to Kenilworth Castle today. Beyond the obvious historical interest for a scholar of Shakespeare, throughout the trip I was frankly dumbstruck at the sheer size and majesty of the buildings, ruined as they are—a feeling that never quite left me even as I browsed the gift shop. One can only imagine the awe they instilled in visitors during those periods when they, and the nearby abbey, were the only complexes of comparable size for miles. Although I’m currently immersed in research on Shakespeare’s Roman plays, one projected chapter of my dissertation will analyze his history play *King John* in the context of two earlier works on the same subject: John Bale’s *Kynge Johan* and the anonymous *Troublesome Raigne of King John*. Part of my interest in these works is fueled by the ways in which all of these writers incorporate their perceptions of the Tudor dynasty into plays that are ostensibly about the Plantagenets—especially Shakespeare and the anonymous author of *Troublesome Raigne*, who have a substantially longer history of Tudor rule to consider. This palimpsestic quality is prominently on display in the castle complex itself; the Renaissance additions constructed by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester in his attempt to woo Elizabeth are a fascinating, ersatz mirror of the earlier buildings commissioned by John of Gaunt and King John.

As I listen to the audio guide on a walkie-talkie-like device draped around my neck (I’m a little surprised that nobody’s yet created a Kenilworth Castle smartphone app), I’m encouraged to virtually reconstruct the floors, tapestries, and furniture of great halls and chambers in which events ranging from the forced abdication of Edward II (the subject of a Christopher Marlowe play) to Henry V’s final decision to invade France over a gift of tennis balls (famously portrayed by Shakespeare) transpired. It puts me in mind of how these playwrights themselves were engaged in

very much the same enterprise: working with the technologies of their own time, and those they had inherited, in an attempt to re-present the past for their viewers, a process that would not be possible without manifold acts of interpretation, negotiation, and elision. This thought was nicely capped off by a final visit to the castle's Renaissance garden, based on the one that Dudley intended to reserve for himself, Elizabeth, and a few choice courtiers. With freshly blooming flowers twining near statues of bears and ragged staffs (a device adopted by the ascendant Dudley family) that gleamed under new white paint, I was keenly reminded that the space now belongs to visitors like me, as much as it does to the long centuries that came before.

*July 6:*

Today I attended perhaps the ideal play for someone immersed in the simultaneously rewarding and vexing process of poring over obscure books: the RSC production of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* at the Swan. Though I've long enjoyed the play, this was the first time I'd ever seen it staged, and the experience was at times surreal. The moments that most stood out to me in past readings—most obviously, the Faustian speech about Helen of Troy lambasted in an early scene of *Shakespeare in Love*—were here largely on the margins of my reception of the play. Sometimes this was due to a deliberate production decision, like that of having Mephistopheles (rather than Faustus) deliver these lines in a half-whisper. But at other times it was the result of the play's own embrace of pageantry, noise, and physical display, all elements that are somewhat diminished in the medium of print but enlivened by the stage.

To be sure, the early verbal exchanges between Mephistopheles and a wheedling, inquisitive Faustus—who awkwardly transitioned from an impassioned decision never to repent his sins to the question “Tell me, are there many heavens above the moon?”—retained all of the humor and bite I'd expected from the playtext. But unlike in the production of *The Alchemist* I attended recently, here the apparent interest in Marlowe's language mostly faded away over time, replaced by an infectious glee in the visuality of scenes like the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins, staged as a *Nightmare Before Christmas*-style cabaret. My mild annoyance at losing track of just which part of the playtext had been excised or doctored slowly dissolved as a group of actors successively playing devils, friars, and the Emperor's henchmen pulled off an impressive array of acrobatic feats. Upon some reflection, I wonder if this might not be truer to the ‘feel’ of early performances of Marlowe's play than some scholarship might suggest. Although much of the pleasure of reading *Faustus* stems from its masterful transformation of the academic discourse of the Renaissance into a rich source of humor and grotesquerie, an equal portion of delight must have derived, for many early audience members, from the bodily excess and slapstick that the play provides.

*July 7:*

A mostly quiet day today, spent re-reading several plays set in ancient Rome that I hope will help complicate my reading of *Coriolanus*: I primarily focused on Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* and Shakespeare's own *Julius Caesar*. I also met with the Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Diana Owen, with whom I had an informative conversation about the management that goes into hosting events like the upcoming World Shakespeare Congress.

*July 8:*

Another day trip today, this time to the University of Oxford, where I spent most of my time touring the campus and visiting the Museum of the History of Science and the Ashmolean Museum. The collections at the Ashmolean were surprisingly expansive, calling to mind New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art; however, I would have appreciated more information on the museum's own history, especially its origins in seventeenth-century antiquarianism and curiosity

cabinets like John Tradescant's "Ark". Beyond the manifest pleasures of visiting Oxford itself, I also had a more pragmatic reason for coming to the university. I hope to bring my research on drama together with my interest in the history of natural philosophy through a later dissertation chapter on Margaret Cavendish, whose work freely ranges across these genres. To that end, I finished the day by applying for a Reader card at the Bodleian Library, where I will look into several manuscripts associated with Cavendish and her family on a future visit.

*July 9:*

Back to research at the Institute. Shakespeare's Coriolanus famously figures the Roman plebeians as a kind of "Hydra," a many-headed multitude that cannot be controlled once it has been loosed, and I confess that lately I find myself feeling the same way about the reams of criticism that have been written on this flinty and difficult play—I read one book, and two more spring up in its place. Appropriately, then, I spent most of the day reviewing two important texts on Shakespeare's portrayal of politics in *Coriolanus* and other works: Oliver Arnold's *The Third Citizen* and Annabel Patterson's influential *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, which take nearly opposed views on the question of how sympathetic Shakespeare was toward republicanism or democracy of the kind we'd recognize today. My current chapter hinges on the idea that there is a middle ground between these two approaches, one in which Shakespeare is deeply ambivalent about the very capacity of drama to portray questions of political philosophy in this way. But I'll need to keep tracing the intellectual work that has already been done in order to refine my claims further.

*July 10:*

With my head still filled by these research questions, I spent much of today exploring the public footpaths that traverse Stratford-upon-Avon, including part of the suggestively named "Shakespeare's Way". This trail presents itself as a hypothetical version of the path that the playwright would have taken from his birthplace to the site of the original (and now the restored) Globe Theater in Southwark. On a different kind of visit I might have been tempted to travel the route, nearly 150 miles, by bicycle. As it stands, however, my walk only reminded me once again of the formidable distance between Shakespeare's place of origin and the site of his most fruitful creative work.

*July 11:*

Following up on yesterday's excursion, I decided to take my first day trip to London—incidentally, also the first time I've ever really been in the city itself (excepting a few brief stops in airports and train stations). I headed first to the British Library to register as a Reader and to investigate some manuscripts relating to the seventeenth-century playwright William Davenant, the subject of another putative dissertation chapter. The early biographer John Aubrey notes that Davenant claimed, perhaps facetiously, to be the illegitimate (not merely poetic) son of Shakespeare. And much of my experience of London on this visit was taken up by thinking through what the city has inherited from Shakespeare, and in what ways it has been radically transformed since his death. After spending the morning and early afternoon examining materials on Davenant's role in the rebuilding of English professional theater after the Restoration, I toured the British Museum before heading to Trafalgar Square and St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. Finally, I walked down the Mall to the Victoria Monument and Buckingham Palace before catching the last train north. I hope to have more to say along these lines after further visits to London, but my overall impression was of a post-Great Fire and indeed a post-imperial city, one in which the architectural traces of a country on the cusp of its rise to global prominence were much less apparent than in Stratford itself.

*July 12:*

Moving imaginatively from one empire to another, I returned to the library and to several other Roman plays I hope will shed light on *Coriolanus*, this time reviewing Jonson's *Catiline* and *Poetaster*. The more I read over these roughly contemporary works, the more I'm struck by how much Shakespeare's late tragedy diverges from them, especially in their portrayal of politics. Compared with these other plays, *Coriolanus* seems to have little interest in questions of how advisors and officials should best counsel the ruler they serve, or in the kind of factional court intrigues that appear to have interested Jonson. The camps are much more clearly divided, with plebeians and patricians defined in opposition to one another from the very first scene, and political change (if it can be said to happen at all) seems only to emerge out of the bloodied friction between classes—a reading of this period in Rome's development that would have been shared by both the ancient historian Livy and Machiavelli, and one with which Shakespeare may have been directly familiar.

*July 13:*

Another day of research, compiling notes and mapping out potential outlines for the first draft of this chapter. I also realized that the rough halfway point of my projected stay in England has recently passed, so I spent the evening booking tickets and making plans for the coming weeks—a process that reminded me of just how valuable it has been, particularly for progress on my academic endeavors, to have such a generous span of time to spend here.

*July 14:*

Back in London today. Following up on my last visit, I started with perhaps the most recognizable icon of the city in the years after the 1666 Great Fire: St. Paul's Cathedral, designed by the architect Christopher Wren. I've visited a number of significant cathedrals in the past (including St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, Quebec, which features a comparably sized dome), but the scope of the structure was truly breathtaking. As one symbol of the intense struggles for religious toleration within and without the national church in the eighteenth century, the cathedral offers a fascinating example of the expansive aspirations of Anglicanism in this period.

I then made a quick dash across the Millennium Bridge to the reconstructed Globe Theater, where I met up with a friend and former colleague for a matinee of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Although a Renaissance groundling would have put down cash for a boat ride across the Thames rather than dodging other tourists on a steel footbridge, my late arrival and subsequent crowding into the pit of the theater nonetheless felt like fairly accurate field research on the conditions of Shakespearean performance. I've read and taught the play a number of times, but it was still easy to imagine an apprentice or shopkeeper of Shakespeare's time choosing, on a whim, to attend a performance and attempting to pick up the story as it went along. The performance itself was perhaps the best I've seen of this play, with a setting in the Irish revolutionary period allowing the actors to draw connections between that period's popular songs and dances and the Italian folk culture so commonly made use of by Shakespeare. The most impressive aspect of the performance, however, was the character of Kate, whose 'shrewishness' here manifested as a potent amalgam of fin de siècle, New Woman assertiveness and earnest radical politics. In this light, her final speech read as a wonderfully ambiguous rehearsal of conventional misogynist rhetoric—one that conveyed a clear weariness with these sentiments even as it tentatively sought the possibility of genuine equality and solidarity across genders.

*July 15:*

This was a day for scholarly work, reviewing notes and continuing to plan out my argument. I find that I'm beginning to crave stretches of time like this, where I have the freedom to pursue lines of inquiry across multiple days (and piles of texts) until some new insight reveals itself.

*July 16:*

Another day in the library, making use of the holdings in more obscure drama to look through two other contemporary Roman plays: Thomas Lodge's *Wounds of Civil War* (which, depending on the date of its first performance, is either an imitation of or an influence on Marlowe's better-known *Tamburlaine*) and the anonymous *Claudius Tiberius Nero*. After closing time, I took a longer hike down the Avon to record my thoughts. Once again, I'm grateful for the opportunity to delve into these questions at such length, and I truly feel as though—through reading and playgoing combined—I'm beginning to have a deeper understanding of the experience of being a regular attendee of the theater in Shakespeare's London, one with the opportunity to compare and reflect on trends in the way certain ideas or historical periods were portrayed over time, in much the same way that we might do with popular films today. It's clearer to me than ever that, just as authors like Jonson or Shakespeare thought carefully about how their plays would be received in light of earlier works by their peers, so too could some audiences and readers cultivate a sophisticated ability to think about politics and other issues through the medium of the stage.

*July 17:*

More reading and reviewing notes at the Institute today. With just over a week left in my fellowship visit, I'm eager to make the most of my final days here.

*July 18:*

I returned to Oxford today in order to consult a manuscript miscellany of potential interest for a later chapter of my dissertation. The volume, MS Rawlinson Poet 16, was created by Jane Cavendish (daughter of William Cavendish, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Newcastle) and Elizabeth Brackley, and it combines a series of commendatory poems on family members and members of the royal household with two longer dramatic pieces: a masque-like entertainment called simply "A Pastorall" and a play entitled "The Concealed Fansyes". One question I hope to answer in this chapter concerns the better-known Margaret Cavendish (wife of William) and her relationship to the dramatic canon that was emerging in the later seventeenth century, especially her engagement with the kind of textual practices (especially the printing of plays in large, prestigious folio collections) that had helped foster Shakespeare's rise to literary prominence. The concatenation of works produced by Cavendish and Brackley will hopefully have broader insights to offer on how drama was incorporated into the private and social lives of people throughout this period. After the Bodleian closed, I took a tour of the Oxford Museum of Natural History and the Pitt Rivers Collection before winding up at the Eagle and Child, once the meeting place of C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the other members of the Inklings literary club.

*July 19:*

Back in Stratford on England's hottest day of the year thus far. Beyond my continued productivity in the library, very little to report except to reflect on what the character of Orion calls the sweltering "dog-days" of summer in Thomas Nashe's play *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. For Elizabethans like Nashe, the English summer was a time of bounty and flourishing—and, potentially, a time for plague and general unrest. Luckily, things today are considerably more subdued.

*July 20:*

In an effort to fill out my personal roster of performances, today I attended the Globe's production of *Macbeth* in London. Perhaps fittingly in light of the play's mention of Macbeth's coronation at Scone, I arrived at the theater after a visit to Westminster Abbey, the site of a long line of English coronations. What struck me most immediately about the performance, however, was a nagging feeling that it was somehow *unsuitable* to the open, public environment of the Globe, particularly in the midst of a sweltering heat wave. Having previously seen the play in an indoor, black-box production (with lavish production values and special effects) as well as in a low-budget outdoor setting (where a thunderstorm atmospherically broke over our heads just as Macduff returned to the stage with the tyrant's head), I found it difficult to be wholly bewitched by the dry ice and shimmering fabrics deployed by the weird sisters—especially when my eyes were continually drawn to the mass of spectators fanning themselves with programs and pulling urgently on the straws of their lemonade.

Similarly, where a long tradition of scholarship has read Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as deeply psychological figures—and the play itself as interested in questions of memory, thought, action, and ethics—the sonic and architectural qualities of the public theater forced this usurper to bellow (not whisper) lines like “a flood of scorpions is my mind” and to stomp, Tamburlaine-like, across the stage searching for his “dagger of the mind”. Perhaps this model of the mind externalized, made corporeal and spatial, is more faithful to the medical and philosophical knowledge of Shakespeare and his contemporaries (as a counter-tradition of academic work has recently claimed). And the choice to have Macbeth and Lady Macbeth return to the stage in the final scene as placid spectral observers, suggesting a latent cosmological harmony or a vision of Scottish unity that could not be overturned by their abortive reign, certainly made the traditional ‘jig’ with which the performance ended seem less incongruous with the close of this bleak tragedy. What the experience made clear above all, however, was the unique challenge faced by the Globe: given the complicated history of Shakespearean performance both during his own lifetime and in the intervening centuries, how can a single space hope to offer anything resembling a ‘reconstruction’ of the stage’s original practices (especially for a play, like *Macbeth*, that likely did not originate in the public theaters)? The answer, of course, is that it cannot—but the many substitutes it presents for audiences remain a wonderful gift.

*July 21:*

In a pattern that, if the claims of anti-theatrical writers are any indication, must have been familiar to many Elizabethan playgoers, I shirked my labors this afternoon by attending the RSC production of *Hamlet*. The performance, put on by a nearly all-black cast, made excellent use of its loosely postcolonial African setting. Claudius appeared either in western-style military dress or in pastel polo shirts and oversized sunglasses, while the ghost of Old Hamlet rose from beneath the stage in a richly patterned traditional robe. This apparent rift between old and new ways of life—present in the playtext as a conflict between the chivalric single combat of Old Hamlet and Old Fortinbras and an apparently elective system of kingship that allows a mob to claim Laertes as their ruler—nicely underscored that the murder of Hamlet's father is a rupture not just of familial but also of geopolitical significance, with its effects spreading throughout Denmark and beyond.

These staging decisions also foregrounded how the issues of action or indecisiveness are bound up in the play with various models of masculinity, a phenomenon most visible in *Hamlet* when the title character laments in gendered terms that he “Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words, / And fall a-cursing, like a very drab”. Beyond the two opposing models of sovereignty and success presented by Old Hamlet and his brother, the costuming of male characters in nearly

every scene contained an interplay between military uniforms, street clothing, and ceremonial garb (particularly in the final duel between Hamlet and Laertes) that displayed the many potential avenues by which Hamlet might choose to fashion the external markers of an interior self. That in his “antic disposition” he ultimately chose to don a graffiti-adorned white suit and sneakers, looking like something out of a Basquiat piece, only deepened my sense that clothing was in this production both a kind of protective armor against the world and a means of engaging with and influencing it, as when the aesthetic of Hamlet’s costume was extended to the entire stage for the decisive performance of *The Mousetrap*. There is much more I could say about the production’s keen attunement to characters’ literal self-fashioning, especially in relation to Ophelia, but in the spirit of playgoing diarists like Samuel Pepys I’ll stop here and leave future readers wanting more.

*July 22:*

I devoted part of this day to a tour of Stratford’s The Other Place, a space for experimental theater that complements the RSC and Swan theaters by the riverside. Unfortunately, I’ll be leaving England shortly before the opening of the venue’s “Making Mischief” festival, featuring new writing by a number of contemporary British playwrights. But my longstanding interest in North American experimental theater (such as that of New York’s Wooster Group) made learning about the history of this intimate, interactive performance space a real pleasure. Although engagement between players and spectators was, of course, always a latent possibility on Shakespeare’s stages, I’ve nonetheless continually been surprised at those moments where this opportunity was explicitly taken advantage of in the performances I’ve seen here—whether it be an extended bit of clowning during the Globe’s *Shrew*, or the tendency of Mephistopheles to weave through the shadowy ranks of audience members before presenting himself to Faustus at the Swan. The whole experience has given me a much better sense of the manifold ways in which drama, especially before the advent of the proscenium arch (which by some accounts served in part to frame and thereby distance onstage events from the space of the theater), could connect with spectators.

*July 23:*

I commemorated what will be my last day in Stratford with one more visit to the Shakespeare birthplace on Henley Street, before finding my way again to Holy Trinity Church—a fitting end to my stay here. With the RSC’s *Hamlet* still fresh in my mind, I can’t help but adopt something of Hamlet’s detached and multifaceted view of the labors of memorialization, encapsulated in his speech to Horatio about how even the corpse of Alexander the Great has been reduced to anonymous dust. To have stood in the very room where William Shakespeare was born to John and Mary, regardless of how many physical elements of the structure have been substituted, Argo-like, over the centuries, instills in me an awe that will not soon fade. But as I stand looking up at the house, I think not only of Shakespeare’s life but of the works that constitute his legacy. The lines that present themselves to my mind in this moment, such as Hamlet’s “The readiness is all” or even Coriolanus’ bitterly sanguine “There is a world elsewhere,” have long served for me as a comfort in adversity or a spur against doubt. And even in the act of searching for parallels between the playwright’s life and the works, I’m aware that I am following in a rich tradition of scholarship and performance that extends back to David Garrick, Edmond Malone, Margaret Cavendish, Heminges and Condell, and many others. The old truism that Shakespeare is “not of an age, but for all time,” that he has always been our contemporary, feels now more than ever like an affirmation that to study this material is to embark on the work of a lifetime and more, a prospect for which I am immensely grateful.

*July 24:*

I spent the final full day of the fellowship in London, walking along much of the Thames' south bank between the reconstructed Globe and a bed & breakfast near the former site of the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. Now comprised of a small but pleasant park and community farm, the Gardens were in the Restoration and the eighteenth century an extraordinarily innovative environment for mass entertainment, visited and commented upon by Samuel Pepys, John Evelyn, James Boswell, and G. F. Handel, among others. The glittering pavilions, lit by thousands of glowing lamps—and the unlighted 'close walks,' designed for assignations of various kinds—are long gone from this place (which has more recently experienced London's explosive nineteenth-century population growth and the slum clearances of the later twentieth century). In their place stands a looming ring of glass and steel condominiums, flanking and shading the vegetation that remains.

This palimpsestic space feels like the most appropriate backdrop for the end of my time in England, containing traces of medieval and early modern London even as it is inextricably shaped by the demands of a modern economy. From my experience as the Stanley Wells, CBE Fellow for this year, I hope to draw a deeper understanding of what it will mean to continue to work on Shakespeare, and on English literature more generally, in a time of such immense growth and change. And especially with the progress that the fellowship has already allowed me to make on my dissertation research, I am eager to continue pursuing this goal over the coming months and years.