

Andrew S. Brown
Sir Stanley Wells Shakespeare Studentship: Final Report
1 August 2017

The 2017 Sir Stanley Wells Shakespeare Studentship allowed me, above all, to continue the ongoing research for my PhD dissertation in a new environment and aided by a new set of archival resources, which together helped me to significantly rethink my aims for the project as a whole. Most concretely, my own research at Yale and at the Beinecke Library typically focuses on the relatively narrow span of time covered by my dissertation: that is, from William Shakespeare's early career in the 1580s and 1590s to John Milton's late writings in the 1660s and 1670s. However, the Trust's particularly strong holdings in performance history encouraged me to begin thinking beyond these rough historical parameters to consider how the work of Shakespeare and his fellow dramatists have been adapted, altered, and performed in later centuries and, indeed, down to the present day.

While my research largely focuses on how these playwrights engaged with the beginnings of what we would now recognize as "representative government," especially as embodied in the institution of Parliament, Shakespeare's moment is of course one that antedates more fully developed form of republicanism or democracy: the franchise was limited by gender, age, and property qualifications, and the vast majority of local elections are better described as "selections"—that is, as token popular approvals of a single, uncontested candidate for office. The Trust's strengths in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century materials, particularly those relating to the editing and reception of Shakespeare, encouraged me to think more deeply about how these political dimensions of his plays were interpreted by later authors and audiences. In particular, the archival holdings in playbills and other performance records offered a unique look at changes in how the plays were marketed to spectators across a period that witnessed the American, Haitian, and French Revolutions. I hope to explore these ideas in greater detail in the future—perhaps in a later project that builds upon my dissertation—but the research completed at the Trust has already formed an important foundation for such work.

One of the most admirable features of the Studentship in its current form is the extent to which it allows participants to set their own goals and schedules during their time in Stratford-upon-Avon, which makes it particularly well-suited to students who are at the dissertation stage of a PhD program and who are therefore conducting research that is largely self-directed. I was also particularly grateful, however, for the opportunity to meet with members of the Trust (Sir Stanley Wells, Paul Edmondson, Catherine Fannin-Peel, and others) on several occasions. These meetings helped provide a basic structure of accountability and collegial discussion around which I could build my own individual plans. I believe that additional meetings and events of this kind could be added to future iterations of the Studentship without compromising the essential freedom of the program.

Although the Trust's online and card catalogues were convenient and easy to navigate, additional guidance on particular highlights from the library and archives could enable future participants to make greater use of the available resources by focusing their inquiries on a specific collections area or set of items early in their stay. To this end, the Trust might encourage students to set up an informal meeting with a librarian or curator, with whom they could discuss their research goals and receive advice on how to proceed. Similarly, the Trust itself is a particularly prominent example of an institution that helps Shakespeare scholars convey their

specialist knowledge effectively to other researchers and to the general public. Additional meetings to discuss how students might engage with such a public-facing mission—whether by writing for a wider audience as academics, or by taking positions in cultural industries more broadly after completing their degrees—could thus be a particularly good use of the Trust’s unique resources.