

## QUESTIONS

The first time I ever “met” William Shakespeare was when I read Prospero’s epilogue in *The Tempest*. I remember the day well: I was at my kitchen table reviewing the play before my comprehensive exams. Even though I had read the play before, the grief of Prospero’s final words struck me. The epilogue offers a sad denouement to Prospero’s renunciation of his “rough magic,” his power to cast illusions:

Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be relieved by prayer  
Which pierces so that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.

In these lines, I caught a glimpse of a Shakespeare fully aware that he was nearing his end as an “enchanter” on London’s stages. He would return home to Stratford to live out his days in quiet comfort with his family. The sadness of the words felt palpable, and my eyes blinked back tears. I said aloud, “Here you are. Finally.”

That glimpse had been my only meaningful encounter with William Shakespeare the person. While scholars may suggest otherwise, I’ve always found it difficult to encounter the man amidst his dramatic worlds. Shakespeare’s ability to take no and all positions in his characters offers the most marvelous—and maddening—element of his “art to enchant.” Aware of this lacuna of knowledge, I arrived in Stratford prepared to acquaint myself more thoroughly with Shakespeare and his world.

What most interested me about this world was the conditions of performance, but not simply stage performance. I desired to know about a rival space that commanded even greater audiences than the theaters—the pulpit. Following the Reformation, the pulpit was where Protestant theology intersected with everyday practice. In my dissertation, I analyze how the pulpit and the stage treat emotion and, more broadly, how preachers or players taught their respective audiences to interpret emotions in themselves and amongst each other.

When I reached Stratford-upon-Avon, I decided to set out on an exploratory mission to discover how a performance—either in the pulpit or on the stage—in post-Reformation England would have looked, sounded, or felt. Of course, there are several books on playgoing in Shakespeare’s England (one excellent book is named just that). But very few works exist on the experience of sermongoing. Perhaps it is because churches, unlike the London theaters, still stand. I thus sought to spend my days coupling research with sensory experience. What did the churches Shakespeare worship in look like? What did they sound like? What object might strike person’s gaze during a sermon? How warm do churches become on a hot day? Where might a ray of summer sunlight rest during morning worship? These are questions no book can answer for me, only the experience of being there.