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NCACE MICRO COMMISSION

Birmingham City University and the Shakespeare
Birthplace Trust

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Supporting Overview: Findings of the Doctoral Research and Key Terms

The doctoral research project that was undertaken from 2017 to 2021 with Hopkins and Birmingham City University (BCU) examined the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's (SBT) international collection items to bring forward hitherto undisclosed narratives of Shakespeare's global legacy. The aims of the project were to answer the straightforward question of what was there, and the less straightforward question of how it might be useful in present-day discourses of representation, inclusion, and diversity in Shakespeare studies, higher education, and the culture and heritage sectors in the UK.

The study found that Shakespeare has been used in nations outside of Britain to address issues of cultural identity and diplomacy through acts of gift giving and communication with the SBT from the mid-nineteenth century through to the present day. As such, it serves to emphasize the role of the SBT as a space of international diplomacy through which nations perform their cultural affinity in accord with Shakespeare's establishment as the pinnacle of world culture.

The study also revealed that the **imperialistic** narratives of English cultural supremacy of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries were being played out through the SBT's interpretation of its collections. Indeed, such narratives are implicit in the establishment of Shakespeare as the pinnacle of world culture and the ways in which the SBT relies on that idea. Imperialistic narratives were especially noticeable in international items which were exhibited with a distinctly **Orientalising** curatorial stance. That is to say, some of the interpretation reinforced cultural stereotypes of the rational, progressive, and supreme global North/West and the mystical, primitive, childlike global South/East. The imperialistic stance was demonstrated in Anglocentric interpretation panels and in catalogue descriptions that used racialised language.

In some places, the Trust's unwitting imperialism emerged in interpretation that aimed for a neutral political stance. A prime example is in the interpretation of the bronze bust of Rabindranath Tagore that currently stands in the garden of the Birthplace. In an accompanying blog post (to be reached through a QR code on the interpretation panel) Tagore's renunciation of his knighthood in 1919 was accounted for as a 'protest at British policy in the Punjab' in order to circumvent the role of the Amritsar Massacre in Tagore's rejection of the British Establishment. As such, by the decision to avoid drawing attention to inhumane Raj activities the SBT helped to maintain some of the ideological supremacy of the British Empire. The questionable aspect of 'neutrality' itself is thus revealed, as avoiding criticism of oppressive regimes maintains and even enhances the oppression.

The Trust's interpretation of the Tagore bust provides an opportunity to open discussions not only about how to avoid misplaced 'neutrality' in future interpretation, but to notice and correct Anglocentrism in museum and digital output. This includes consideration of the implications of its reliance on the notion of Shakespeare's 'universality': a concept that is harmful in its elision of different experiences of Shakespeare – from lack of access to the

sense of not belonging to the 'right' class, culture, race, or nation to engage with him/it – and its elision of the ways in which Shakespeare was established as universal in a mode of imperialism that simultaneously classified other forms of culture as inferior – especially those of the colonies of the British Empire. The evident connection between the two forms of elision described here illustrates the fact that Shakespeare's so-called universality relies on assumptions of cultural supremacy that may be found to be exclusory to many members of the international and migrant communities that the SBT would like to attract.

The following reports offer suggestions for development based on the recommendations made in the thesis, including a plan for the reinterpretation of the Tagore objects, as well as an outline for how an audience engagement survey might be conducted and a list of recommendations for a successful partnership between a Higher Education institute and a cultural institute, based on the experience of the collaborative PhD project. The list of key terms that follow are included for clarity and can be located by the use of bold type through the attached reports.

SBT/BCU Specific Key terms:

Anglocentrism: statements, expressions, or descriptions that are driven by an English perspective and fail to acknowledge or include the possibility of different perspectives. An expression of hegemonic power - asserting dominant narratives over cultural 'Others'. Ultimately, oppressive and exclusory.

EDI: Equality, diversity, and inclusion. Any way in which the SBT represents or discusses race, disability, religion, gender, sexuality, non-British cultures, nations, and nationalities would be an EDI issue for consideration in terms of sensitivity (guarding against Anglocentrism and exclusory or otherwise inappropriate language) and inclusion (whose perspective is being represented, or not represented).

Imperialism: expressing ideas about white and/or Western supremacy specifically over people and places in/from the global South and East. Often relying on **Orientalist** positive/negative binary oppositions of West (Occident) and East (Orient) as Self (or norm)/**Other**, civilised/uncivilised, rational/mystical, comprehensible/incomprehensible, fit to rule/unfit to rule. Reductive, homogenizing, exclusory and, ultimately, grounded in white supremacy.

Meaningful work: projects and/or interpretive practices that produce material that is inclusive of all communities; projects and exhibitions that challenge exclusory narratives and are embedded in future practice through an established ethos and methodology across the SBT's cultural engagement; opposed to tokenistic or cursory gestures of inclusivity or anti-

racism (for example). Good practice for any project that aims to benefit communities, but also establishes the partnership as one with long-term aims that embeds the partnership itself in both institutions.

Object Narrative: an object's provenance, including place and persons and techniques involved in its production, ownership, the circumstances of its arrival in the SBT collections, uses and interpretation by the SBT and collaborators.

Shakespeare's legacy: his afterlife, and how he has been used, appropriated, and marshalled by individuals and cultural or state agencies through today in creative, political, and social contexts.

Working Plan for PhD Recommendations

| Recommendation | Activity | Strategic outcome/s |
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| #1. Seek funding to enable the Trust to establish the below projects. Initially, for at least another 6 months developing the plans and partnership with Hopkins (BCU), eventually for a 3-to-4-year partnership project. | <p>Timeframe: Immediate to 6 months</p> <p>Apply to funders that are interested in cultural projects that promote HEI collaboration, EDI, and community building E.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UKRI Knowledge Training Partnership (KTP) • National Archives Testbed Fund • National Archives Collaborate and Innovate/Networks for Change Fund • ACE National Lottery Project Grants • National Lottery Dynamic Collections Grant (engagement or re-interpretation option) • National Lottery Heritage Funding • Peter De Haan Charitable Trust • Esmée Fairbairn Foundation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining momentum with Hopkins's work and the key relationship with BCU • Funding that supports developmental experimentation limits the risk to the SBT in this difficult financial period and builds in flexibility during recovery from COVID-19 closures. • Funding that supports the collaboration between BCU and SBT will deepen the mutually beneficial relationship and assist with achieving impactful outcomes for the institutions and communities. |
| #2. Institute a clear interpretation policy for collection objects with 'difficult' histories. Where the history of Empire or British imperialism intersects with an object narrative , to present a | <p>Timeframe: Immediate - 6 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of a policy document in consultation with Hopkins (BCU) and her doctoral thesis and the guidance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A basis for re-education of Trust-wide understanding of Shakespeare's implication in exclusory colonial narratives (see recommendation #2) |

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| <p>nuanced text (in the catalogue and on display) that includes, where relevant, details of imperial harms and challenges rather than maintains ideas that may be found to be exclusory to any visitors.</p> | <p>offered here by the Museums Association</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear ethos that is coherent and consistent through the organisation and speaks to the SBT’s commitment to anti-colonial, anti-racist, meaningful work. |
| <p>#3. Institute a re-education programme throughout the Trust on the ways in which Shakespeare has been implicated in exclusory imperialistic narratives of cultural supremacy and the consequent implications of the notion of Shakespeare’s universality as the main contingent of the Trust’s interpretative and marketing strategies.</p> | <p>Timeframe: Immediate - 6 months - ongoing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with Hopkins (BCU), to produce training packs that clarify and elucidate the interpretation policy stance on Anglocentric and Imperialist language and ideas about Shakespeare for all colleagues who present or produce any form of information to visitors/guests/public. • Institute an EDI forum – to meet monthly to discuss good practice and work together to solve emergent or historic EDI issues. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticolonial philosophy will become integral to all aspects of the SBT’s work- strengthening diversity and inclusivity through the eradication of potential moments of exclusion for in person and online visitors. • Contribution to broader efforts to ‘decolonise’ Shakespeare in HE networks and in line with the work of anticolonial movements in the museum sector. • Building credibility through integrity, the first step in building relationships that will kickstart the Trust’s relationship with the minoritised local/national/international communities it wishes to engage |
| <p>#4. Institute a clear policy for racist, Anglocentric, and exclusionary</p> | <p>Timeframe: Immediate - 6 months – ongoing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce a policy document for cataloguing and revising catalogue | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherent and consistent policy contributes to the meaningful work of the Trust by eradicating |

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| <p>language in archival documents and catalogue descriptions.</p> | <p>descriptions with sensitivity to the effect certain content, wording, and references may have on users of the digital catalogue.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer the opportunity for users of the digital catalogue to highlight inappropriate language for revision (a 'take-down' policy, as suggested by MA guidance here) • Apply for funding for a project to first strategized an approach to the vast catalogue then work through it checking language and descriptions. | <p>the reproduction of racist/colonial language of White/British/European supremacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making the spaces of the SBT inclusive and welcoming to all visitors |
| <p>#5. Reconfigure the SBT's properties as a 'world stage' on which Shakespeare's cultural capital is used for positive representation of 'other' cultures; especially those that have been 'Othered' through imperialistic narratives of Western cultural supremacy. In these representations, Shakespeare's cultural predominance must not be a factor in the interpretation unless it is an important aspect of the object narrative. In which case, the complexities and infelicities must be acknowledged in order that the cultural specificity and value of the</p> | <p>Timeframe: 1-2 years Tagore project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove Tagore bust to Anne Hathaway's Cottage, create sculpture garden • Revise all interpretation of Tagore-related collection items through engagement with experts on Tagore and community groups with Bengali connections or heritage as advisory panels and partners, and without centring Shakespeare • Reconfigure AH's Cottage as a centre for world art and poetry, with workshops, courses, and tours that | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revives and revivifies the opportunities of the SBT's museums to present different stories of literatures and poets of the world. • Utilises Shakespeare's cultural capital to redress some of the harms Shakespeare was used to inflict through imperialism. Shakespeare's status is used to promote and celebrate poets and cultures that have suffered from the 'Othering' of imperialism. • Contribution to broader efforts to 'decolonise' Shakespeare in HE networks and in line with the |

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| <p>Othered culture in representation is not subdued, stifled, or marginalised.</p> | <p>make poetry and art the centre, rather than Shakespeare</p> | <p>work of anticolonial movements in the museum sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps to reach and welcome visitors, partners, and stakeholders from marginalised communities to increase the diversity of the Trust’s audience base • Highlights the relevance of the SBT’s international collections as inspiration for continued creative work • New source of income from creative courses and workshops and extra visitors drawn to AH’s Cottage |
| <p>#6. Institute a clear policy for the accession of all international gifts with a dedicated accession form that offers space for information on the cultural specificity of the object, a decisive policy about what should be accessioned, and clear guidelines for what to do with items that will not be accessioned.</p> | <p>Timeframe: Immediate – 6 months</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with Hopkins (BCU), decide on questions for the form based on what would have been useful in the doctoral study as well as for future interpretation. • Determine what constitutes a gift rather than a standard donation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assures a Trust-wide understanding of the role that international gifts play in cultural diplomacy, and the importance of the Trust acknowledging the cultural significance of each offering in the terms set by its cultural specificity. • A key element in the renunciation of concepts of British cultural supremacy that is integral to an anti-colonial, anti-racist ethos. |

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| <p>#7. Continue to research the SBT's international collections, especially for African countries, Australia and New Zealand, South America, Central Asia, and Russia.</p> | <p>Timeframe: 2-3 years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In consultation with collection teams, cultural programming, and upcoming global events, design a project to focus on the representation of thus far unstudied global regions in the SBT's collections. • Apply for funding for a research project to undertake the work and produce scholarly and publicly accessible outputs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the cultural significance of the SBT's collections • Provides outside funding for a deeper understanding of the knowledges, narratives, and potential of the collections • Provides opportunities for a wide range of SBT events: research conversations, live and digital exhibitions, publications, workshops, media engagements (potentially in line with relevant global events) |
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Audience Engagement Enquiry Plan

In light of the recommendations of the PhD thesis regarding the potential contained within its international collections, the Trust is keen to better understand the hopes and expectations of visitors to its properties in Stratford-upon-Avon and its online offering.

In line with current cultural movement towards equity, diversity, inclusion, and representation the survey will explore responses to inform future proposals for projects by focusing on several key topics.

- The survey will seek to establish whether visitors are interested in the broader literature and culture of the Early Modern period, beyond Shakespeare, and whether they would like to understand the when, why, and how of the creation Shakespeare's cultural significance
- The survey will ask how interested visitors are in interpretation, exhibitions, and events that offer broader representation of poets and artists of the world
- The survey will also aim to establish the appropriate amount of information to offer to visitors, and how it can best be presented.

The objective of such a survey is to establish the best way of broadening the demographic of future visitors while also maintaining the satisfaction of current visitors. As such, the Trust will need to decide where to place such a survey for the most useful outcome:

- a. in person at SBT properties in Stratford-upon-Avon
- b. in person in Stratford-upon-Avon town centre
- c. in-person and digitally circulated among SBT staff, volunteers, and trustees
- d. in-person/digitally circulated to users of the Reading Room
- e. digitally circulated on SBT websites (including Discover Shakespeare, for researchers accessing collections)
- f. digitally circulated on social media
- g. in-person/digitally circulated among key partners, advisory groups, and stakeholders, including those with specific interests in the inclusion and representation of marginalised groups and communities
- h. digitally circulated among students in FE and HE institutions, locally, nationally, and/or internationally
- i. in-person/digitally circulated among theatres and other cultural institutions

The benefits and risks of each option will need to be weighed carefully, in order to avoid the results veering too sharply towards the interests of one group; for example, it is possible

that the predominately white, middle-class populace of Stratford-upon-Avon will vote against the introduction of 'decolonial' ideas, while the corresponding responses of students, academics, and advisory groups may replicate the polarisation of society that the media represents as a 'culture war'.

The series of questions listed below are suggestions for surveying non-specialist visitors about interests and expectations in terms of decolonial topics and content the SBT might offer in the future. The Trust will also need to carefully consider the implications of presenting the option of choosing not to know more about the colonial uses of Shakespeare, and how it will use the responses it receives to shape its future output.

Suggested questions

Shakespeare was one of many busy and exciting playwrights working, writing, directing and performing in the lively Elizabethan period.

1. Would you like to know more about the other men and women writing plays and poems in the 16th and 17th century? (circle as appropriate)
 - a) I would like to know some more about other writers, but mostly about Shakespeare
 - b) I would like to know equally about Shakespeare and the people writing at the same time as him
 - c) I am more interested in other writers
 - d) I am only here to find out about Shakespeare

2. Would you like to know more about: (circle all that apply)
 - a) Which of Shakespeare's plays were collaborations with other playwrights
 - b) What ideas were shared or borrowed between the playwrights, including in Shakespeare's plays
 - c) Who were the women writing plays and poetry during the early modern period
 - d) How different playwrights, including Shakespeare, wrote about issues like gender, sexuality, disability, nationality, and race
 - e) None of the above

Shakespeare was very important to the establishment of an English national identity in the 18th and 19th century. Would you like to know more about: (circle all that apply)

- a) David Garrick's Jubilee, and how Stratford-upon-Avon became a 'shrine' for Shakespeare
- b) Which stories about Shakespeare, and objects supposed to be connected to him, were created in this period
- c) Which aspects of Shakespeare's plays were most useful to those thinking and writing about national identity at this time, and what made Shakespeare stand out in comparison with all the other writers (including those still alive!)
- d) None of the above

Shakespeare was also a very important part of the British colonial project. Would you like to know more about: (circle all that apply)

- a) Performances of Shakespeare's plays in the British colonies
- b) How Shakespeare was used as an example of 'superior British culture' to colonial subjects, and the effect this had on local cultures
- c) How Shakespeare was taught in colonial schools
- d) How Shakespeare was used to assert the importance and authority of the English language, and the effect this had on local languages
- e) How the ideas about Shakespeare that were established in the colonial period are still used today, and the effect this has on inclusion in society
- f) None of the above

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust regularly receives gifts of dedications and memorials for international poets and writers. Would you be interested in: (circle all that apply)

- a) Finding out about the gifts, when and why they were given?
- b) Finding out about the artists, when, where they wrote?
- c) Finding out about different forms and styles of world literature?
- d) None of the above

How important is it to you that everything you discover through the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust's museums and websites relates directly to Shakespeare? Answer on a scale of 1 to 5 (circle your choice):

- 1 Very interested – I'm here to find out about Shakespeare
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Not at all – I'm here with general interests

When visiting a museum, how likely would it be that you would access further information about a given topic via a QR code? Circle your choice:

- 1 Very likely
- 2 Possibly
- 3 Not at all likely

When visiting a museum, how likely would it be that you would seek further information about a topic in the gift/book shop?

- 1 Very likely
- 2 Possibly
- 3 Not at all likely

Partnership List of Recommendations

The collaborative PhD project conducted by Hopkins (BCU) with the SBT from 2017 – 2021 indicated the benefits of future collaborations between higher education (HEIs) and arts and cultural institutions (ACOs). For the SBT, these include the development of the cultural institution's understanding of its own history; its role in the creation of cultural discourses; and the academic and broader potential contained in its international collections to impact in national and international circuits today. For BCU, these included a deeper connection to the Trust and the communities both institutions serve, a platform from which BCU research can be disseminated in a public as well as a scholarly context, and the opportunity for unencumbered access to the SBT's resources to produce the world's first scholarly account of the material history of Shakespeare in Germany, the US, Subcontinental India, and China, as revealed by the SBT's collections. Unencumbered access incorporates not only access to the strongrooms that house the Stratfordian history of Shakespeare in the world, but to the experts who work with the books, documents, and objects every day. Both institutions have benefitted from the establishment of the working relationship, as a second collaborative PhD is now underway with BCU's Centre for Human Rights on top of forthcoming scholarly and public presentations and publications from the initial doctoral project.

This list of recommendations draws on that experience to emphasise the successful elements and suggest further improvements and potential benefits of future collaborative projects between arts and cultural organisations and higher education institutions.

1. Seek funding

- Minimises risk for both partners
- Enables greater opportunities for the participant/student/researcher – conferences, networking, research trips
- Increases potential for an output that is high in cultural and monetary value through its quality and opportunities for exposure at academic and cultural and public events.
- For doctoral research: The AHRC funded doctoral training partnership Midlands4Cities funded Hopkins's project. This minimalised the financial burden to the institutions and the candidate, who was able to focus on the project full time. It also enabled local, national and overseas trips for conferences and other networking opportunities. Such opportunities led to a bank of expert native readers to comment on the chapters of the thesis. This enriched and qualified the analysis of the meaning of the collections and confirmed the usefulness of the research. Midlands4Cities emphasises the benefits of partnering HEIs and ACOs through funded research to the local communities that each partner serves, especially in fostering the development of skills and knowledge.

- For post-doctoral research #1: Knowledge Training Partnerships (KTPs) are a UKRI funding initiative for creating positive impact and innovation by building partnerships between businesses (ACOs) and knowledge bases (HEIs). A KTP aims to provide the opportunity for knowledge developed through research to make practical changes in businesses with an emphasis on innovation and growth. Such funding would be ideal to translate Hopkins's PhD recommendations into SBT practice. An application might emphasise the potential to develop the Trust's community links through the 'Tagore Project' (see the 'Working Plan' document) and the related plans for Anne Hathaway's cottage as a creative hub.
- For smaller exploratory projects: see accompanying document 'Working Plan for PhD Recommendations'
- Explore options for an established research collaboration fund between the partners, aimed at supporting researchers and staff members to develop knowledge, events, and interdisciplinary research skills

2. Design the project

- Any project should have clear benefits to each institution. This can be managed by projects having a defined remit and/or research questions agreed between the HEI or candidate and ACO before commencement.
- Projects should have outcomes that constitute **meaningful work**: they add to the ACO's offering in a long-term sense: evaluating and improving practices; having the potential to branch off into further projects. They should produce changes to practice that can be embedded in the ACO's work.
- The contributions of the HEI, through consultation, research, or students projects, can be built in to the ACO's practice, while the HEI will benefit from the ways in which ACOs broaden the learning experience of their students and develop the careers of staff.
- Projects will penetrate the HE 'bubble' by
 - identifying vibrant research opportunities by the experts available to each institution
 - identifying opportunities for the ACO to bridge the gulf between academic knowledge and public understanding in exciting ways, including in discussions of complex and divisive issues. The collaboration of curators, artists, and writers in public engagement and communication can guide academics on filtering and transforming inaccessible academic jargon, as well as providing a generative platform to do so.

3. Best practice for a generative collaborative project

- Participants/students/researchers should have dedicated spaces to work in both institutions. It is important to feel like part of the community to be able to ask the questions of the right people and be involved in the working processes to get the most out of the collaborations.
- Participants/students/researchers should have IT accounts and passes for both institutions, including for libraries and archives.
- Project should begin with the participants/students/researchers being introduced to key people who will mentor/advise/ be a sounding board for them: those who will talk them through the ACO's processes and quirks, or who will supervise their academic development and output (HEI).
- There should be regular one-to-ones with the cross-institutional supervisory/advisory team, using digital platforms when necessary.
- Career development skills should be built into any project. For example:
 - Teaching at HE
 - Administrative skills
 - Research and/or specific skills (museum methodologies e.g.)
 - Training opportunities/qualification
 - Presentation of research – public/staff talks, conferences/symposiums, exhibitions
- Establish a Memorandum of Understanding that will outline the commitment of each institution towards common intentions and mutual outcomes: for example, to support the participant/student/researcher in the listed ways, and to maintain the partnership for the foreseeable future. This will also ensure that partnerships are established on an institutional basis and do not rely on individual representatives to maintain them.

Project possibilities

- General: a post-doctoral/research project.

SBT/BCU specific: a project to develop and further Hopkins's research on the international collections.

- General: a collaborative PhD

SBT/BCU specific: a project that targets areas in need of dedicated research, e.g. translations, European and/or post-colonial collections, visitor experience through history.

- General: Placements/internships – work placements and internships could benefit students through personal and skills development and the cultural partner through their contributions to day-to-day business or specific projects.

SBT/BCU specific: students might contribute positively to the SBT from a broad range of departments, including English, Media, History, Theatre, Business, Marketing, Jewellery, Architecture and Design (Conservation of Historic Buildings), Music (the Conservatoire), Education, Computing and Digital Technology. BCU's ethnically and culturally diverse student base might provide participants for advisory panels for the future exhibition of its international collections or contribute to the ongoing effort to translate titles, dates, and inscriptions from the SBT's collection of Shakespeare translations. Other projects might include creating exhibitions, researching towards a blog or vlog post for the SBT website, or the work placement module that undergraduates can take in their second year.