

## M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

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| <b>PROJECT TITLE</b>   |  |  |                                   |                                    |
| Decolonising and Digitising the Royal Shakespeare Collection   |  |  |                                   |                                    |
| <b>LEAD INSTITUTION</b>  |  |  |                                   |                                    |
| Name of HEI institution  |  | Birmingham City University                         |                                   |                                    |
| Lead regional city   |  | Birmingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>     | Coventry <input type="checkbox"/> | Leicester <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>PARTNER ORGANISATION</b>  |  |  |                                   |                                    |
| Name of organisation   |  | Royal Shakespeare Company                          |                                   |                                    |
| Website  |  | <a href="http://www.rsc.org.uk">www.rsc.org.uk</a> |                                   |                                    |
| <p><b>Project:</b> The first sustained investigation of the Royal Shakespeare Company’s “Fine Art and Sculpture” collection in Stratford-upon-Avon, this project analyses an internationally significant theatre collection through a decolonial lens. By exploring the archive’s colonial connections and how these might be understood, it will develop a critical and historical approach to the RSC’s holdings. Its final outputs include work towards the digitisation of the collection.</p> <p>The collection holds publicly donated materials from the sixteenth century to the present, including props, costume and furniture. By presenting a case study on the history and potential use of the collection, the project places the RSC in important contexts related to widening participation and equality and diversity, and reflects on the potential of cultural institutions and their collections, and what it means to be a theatre with a museum.</p> <p>This project is anchored in Shakespeare studies but situates itself only partially in any established field of Shakespeare studies. As well as focusing on objects and cultural heritage, its theoretical emphasis on decolonisation reflects growing imperatives to critically examine English literature, especially Shakespeare, in light of issues related to race, colonialism, and postcolonialism. The focus on narrative history builds on recent reception studies of Shakespeare, but with the RSC and its collection as the focal point.</p> <p><b>Process:</b> The initial exploration of the collection uses object theory to identify key items and approaches to analysing the collection. The candidate will create a historical narrative about the collection, taking a decolonial approach that examines Shakespeare’s works critically in light of race, colonialism, postcolonialism, and anti-ableism.</p> <p>In the first phase, the candidate will spend time in Stratford-upon-Avon, familiarising themselves with the primary research material, to which they will have privileged access. The artefacts themselves will help to prompt more research questions and scope out further creative possibilities. In the second phase, they will give shape to the scholarly thesis, engaging a historical and analytical narrative about the collection, its provenance, and its links to Shakespeare. The final phase sees the completion of the thesis and wider dissemination of creative expressions, including digitised re-presentation of a scalable collection and proposals for best practice.</p> <p><b>Place:</b> The candidate will be embedded in several communities of expertise and practice including the RSC’s Collections and Archives team, Birmingham City University’s School of English and Centre for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Arts and the University of Birmingham’s School of English,</p> |  |  |                                   |                                    |

Drama and Creative Studies, which includes the Shakespeare Institute. RSC collections are also held at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, with whom BCU shares a Memorandum of Understanding. At BCU, they may also consult the Birmingham School of Art and the Institute of Jewellery, Fashion and Textiles.

They will benefit from a supervisory team with expertise across the various aspects of the project. The primary HEI supervisor, Prof. Islam Issa, has produced award-winning outputs on the reception and global position of canonical English literature, with experience in exhibition curation and Digital Humanities. The secondary HEI supervisor, Prof. Tom Lockwood, is academic lead for the University of Birmingham's long-standing partnership with the RSC, with expertise in the material form of texts from the early modern to the present, from manuscript through print to digital afterlives. At the RSC, the student will be supported by a team with extensive professional and academic experience in a range of areas including professional archiving, artefact handling, cataloguing, digital development, interpretation methods and participatory practice. The student will be supervised by Rachel Sharpe, Head of Co-Curation, and Robyn Greenwood, Collections Manager, also Chair of the Association of Performing Arts Collections, the national network for performing arts archival practice.

The student will have opportunities for professional development at BCU through PgCerts in Research Practice and in HE Teaching, and at the RSC through professional training in artefact handling, catalogue consultation, and digital methods.

**Person:** The successful candidate will ideally be familiar with one or both of a) Shakespeare and Shakespeare studies, including recent trends in the field, such as post- or de-colonisation studies, and b) museum studies and object theory. They should also be familiar with the basic practices and value of early modern or cultural heritage research methods, especially archival enquiry

They will be ready to familiarise themselves in detail with object theory, museum studies, digital humanities and curation methods, and to learn or enhance skills such as professional archiving, artefact handling and cataloguing.

They should be excited at the prospect of working with a team of varied expertise at a cultural institution and museum, motivated to delve into a hitherto unexplored collection, and passionate about the wider responsibility and impact of cultural institutions towards the public.

**HOW TO FIND OUT MORE.** Please email the lead university supervisor if you want to find out more about this CDA project.

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| Lead HEI Supervisor:       | Prof. Islam Issa     |
| Lead HEI Supervisor Email: | islam.issa@bcu.ac.uk |