

M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award- Shakespeare and the Articulation of Human Rights in the United Nations

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| Project Title | | | | |
| Shakespeare and the Articulation of Human Rights in the United Nations | | | | |
| LEAD INSTITUTION | | | | |
| Name of HEI institution | Birmingham City University | | | |
| Lead regional city | Birmingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Coventry <input type="checkbox"/> | Leicester <input type="checkbox"/> | Nottingham <input type="checkbox"/> |
| PARTNER ORGANISATION | | | | |
| Name of organisation | Shakespeare Birthplace Trust | | | |
| Website URL | https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/ | | | |
| THE RESEARCH PROJECT | | | | |
| <p>This CDA brings together the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust (SBT) and Birmingham City University's Centre for Human Rights (CHR) to design and deliver a unique investigation into the influence of Shakespeare. The SBT is the world's leading research and resource centre on the works and life of William Shakespeare. Its extensive collection of over 1 million documents celebrates Shakespeare's life and reveals his unique contributions to our understanding of the human condition. The CHR is engaged in a diversity of activities aimed at promoting and protecting international human rights.</p> <p>The project will contribute to the SBT's focus on <i>Shakespeare's creative and global legacies</i>. It will provide a new investigation into Shakespeare's exposition on the human condition, through considering how human rights issues, presented in Shakespeare's works, find their reflection in the institutions, values, and mission of the modern United Nations (UN) and international human rights.</p> | | | | |
| Key Research Questions | | | | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What insights might Shakespeare's work provide for the "foundations of freedom, justice, and peace in the world" (Preamble, <i>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</i>)? 2. How might Shakespeare's work construct a methodology for analysing the reflexivity of the language of human rights within the United Nations? 3. How might we define afresh: 'Shakespeare shows us what it is to be human'? 4. What impact might readings and analyses of Shakespeare have on the study and interpretation of human rights? | | | | |
| Methods | | | | |
| <p>The researcher will undertake a close reading of Shakespeare's works and responses to them in relation to the discourses at the UN. This will involve a theoretical enquiry into the infrastructure and ideology of the UN's organs, reflected in Shakespeare's works. Examples include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sovereignty in the UN. Through, for example, the History plays, <i>As You Like It</i>, <i>Julius Caesar</i>, <i>King Lear</i>, <i>Hamlet</i>, <i>Macbeth</i>, <i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>, <i>Cymbeline</i>, <i>Coriolanus</i>, and <i>The Tempest</i>. 2. The right to a fair trial. Through, for example, <i>Richard II</i>, <i>King John</i>, <i>The Merchant of Venice</i>, <i>Measure for Measure</i>, <i>The Winter's Tale</i>, and <i>All is True (Henry VIII)</i>. 3. The right to healthcare. Through, for example, <i>All's Well that Ends Well</i>, <i>King Lear</i>, <i>Macbeth</i>, <i>Pericles</i>, and <i>Henry IV Part II</i>. 4. Freedom of religion and belief. Through, for example, <i>Measure for Measure</i>, <i>The Merchant of Venice</i>, and <i>Othello</i>. 5. Freedom to choose personal relationships and identity. Shakespeare's 'gender-bending' comedies and multiple directions of desire in the Sonnets speak to this freedom. | | | | |

These rights, which are fundamental to humanist discourse but also underpin legal conceptualizations and priorities, can be explored through Shakespeare's works. The researcher will select a theme, identify it in the works of Shakespeare, and then consider how those ideas find their reflection in the institutions, values, and mission of the modern United Nations. This will involve textual and perhaps performance analyses.

Collaborative Context

The collaborative context will enable the researcher to undertake a truly cross-disciplinary study. Through BCU'S Centre for Human Rights, the researcher will have access to a range of human rights expertise, materials, legal research training, and network of stakeholders. The SBT offers special access to its international Shakespearian networks, the opportunity to make connections with the SBT's UNESCO-listed collections, and to network with its in-house and external expert network. The SBT's digital platforms for the dissemination of the research for a wider, general public, as well as specialist engagement will also be available. In addition to producing a thesis, the researcher will work with the SBT and CHR to design and deliver a conference on '*Human Rights and Shakespeare*', which will bring together local, national and international stakeholders from across various disciplines. The project will create an implicit "glocal" interaction, and foster an intellectual synergy for the UN to be brought into Stratford-upon-Avon and Shakespeare to the UN.

HOW TO FIND OUT MORE

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| Lead HEI Supervisor: | Professor Jon Yorke |
| Lead HEI Supervisor Email: | jon.yorke@bcu.ac.uk |