6 May 2005

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Dear Dale and Committee,

I would like to apply for the summer research stipend, which would help fund a summer research trip for the month of July to the Folger Shakespeare Library and Library of Congress in Washington DC. Access to the libraries and the research time would enable me to continue working on a four-part project that I began last year on the contested reception of and mediated access to Shakespeare in modern Anglo-American culture. I will also be able to renew relationships with other scholars who I hope will be willing to write letters supporting of my research for future grant and fellowship applications.

I completed the first part of this research project at the Folger last summer. It focused on film and the changing access to Shakespeare’s cultural capital and resulted in the publication of an article, “Star Power: Al Pacino, *Looking for Richard* and the Cultural Capital of Shakespeare on Film” in the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*. In the article, I argue that in his documentary *Looking for Richard*, Pacino uses his status as a movie star to manipulate his audience into accepting his authority as an expert on Shakespeare, rather than the authority of academic professionals. The article traces some of the means by which academics and theater professionals mediate popular access to Shakespeare and how the medium of film complicates this access.

The second part of this project, an article in progress tentatively entitled “Porcupines and Hedgehogs: Two Species of Shakespeare and the Problems of Writing His Biography” investigates the publication and reception of Stephen Greenblatt’s new biography *Will in the World*. By surveying the contentious reception of Greenblatt’s book by popular and academic reviewers, I believe I will be able to extend my investigation of mediated access to Shakespeare to define more clearly how Shakespeare is valued in the academy and by the general public.
This essay came about fortuitously, inspired by a discussion with the graduate students in my Shakespeare seminar about the biography and our position as academic mediators of Shakespeare. I read an early version of it to the faculty during the 1 April faculty forum. Since then, I have not had time to shape its argument or complete the research necessary to submit it for publication. But because of its timeliness, I hope to finish it this summer, submit it to *College English* and organize a session around it for the *Shakespeare Association of America* conference in April of 2006.

The third part of this project, “Reputation by Association: Shakespeare’s Richard III, a Villain for All Time” extends my investigation back into the Renaissance to examine how the cultural capital associated with the character of Richard III was used by acting companies to comment on local political and social events. Scholars have suggested that in Shakespeare’s time, the character of Richard was used to slander Robert Cecil, one of the most powerful politicians in King James’ court, by characterizing him as visually similar, and thus morally similar, to Richard. I plan to extend this line of investigation to the present day, tracing how Richard has repeatedly been used to vilify public figures, typically politicians. One example of this is Richard Loncraine’s 1991 stage version and 1995 film version of the play wherein Richard is intended to be reminiscent of Adolph Hitler, though reviewers found comparisons between him and Richard Nixon. I contend that this use of Richard’s character by theater and film professionals constitutes another aspect of the mediation of Shakespeare for public consumption and for political ends. I plan to submit this article to the *Shakespeare Bulletin*, which has a specific emphasis on studies of Shakespeare performance and reception. A conference version of this paper would be ideal for the *Shakespeare Association of America* in 2007 or a conference directed at performance issues like the *Blackfriars Conference* sponsored by the Shenandoah Shakespeare theater and James Madison University.

The fourth part of the project is the least developed. The germ of it began when in the stacks at the Folger, I chanced on a small illustrated pamphlet from 1902 entitled *Christmas at the Mermaid*. The work is a fanciful narrative poem with engravings that depicts a gathering attended by Shakespeare at the Mermaid Tavern in London one Christmastime. The pamphlet perpetuates a myth that Shakespeare and other literary men of his day like Jonson and Marlowe (and even Milton) congregated at the Mermaid for bouts of drinking and literary fellowship. While the myth has been disproved, it endures in popular and academic culture, most recently
in the film Shakespeare in Love (1998) and Greenblatt’s biography. I am interested in the persistence of the myth. Why do biographers (popular and academic) embrace the idea of this gathering? What does it tell us about how Shakespeare is valued, consumed, and reproduced? What does it tell us about how genius is valued as a social (rather than private) phenomenon?

The time and particularly the resources in Washington DC would allow me to finish “Porcupines and Hedgehogs.” During the school year, I have been able to collect some material for this project and written a narrative that strings ideas together. But many sources are unavailable from the library or inter-library loan and the article lacks organization and a fully developed argument. The holdings of the Folger and the Library of Congress will enable me to complete the research. The unencumbered time will allow me to revise, focus, and polish the article and submit it. The situation is the same with “Reputation by Association.” I have begun some research, but the project requires access to a research library with broad holdings in Renaissance literature; and the archives at the Folger are the only place in the U.S. where I can trace the performance history of Richard III. These resources, the research time, and the momentum from parts one and two will enable me to finish and submit this article by the end of the summer.

Last summer’s research resulted in the acceptance of two of my articles, a review essay and the circulation of another. This has provided momentum that I am keen to continue. I think the progress on my project will make me a strong candidate for an outside fellowship, such as the Folger Short Term Fellowship, the Newberry Library Fellowship, or an NEH grant for 2006. One of these grants combined with my scheduled research leave in the Fall of 2006 will enable me to return to my secondary research stream in early modern travel writing to prepare a book manuscript or a series of articles based on my dissertation. Further, with two articles accepted for publication as a result of this summer’s work, I feel I will be in a good position for tenure.

Summer research time and funding is particularly valuable to me, not only because I am able to access libraries like the Folger. The potential demands of a PhD program, my continuing work on the Graduate Council and Graduate Committee, as well as a new class in the fall (English 271) mean I will be very busy at the summer’s end and during the semester. My research time will probably be limited to preparing conference papers (one planned for Group for Early Modern Cultural Studies in December, one planned for Shakespeare Association in
April, and once already accepted for MLA in December) and a book review. The energy provided by research and writing time at the Folger this summer will give my research momentum through the next school year and into the summer prior to my research leave.

Thank you for your initiative in locating the money for this stipend. I think it will be a boon to the department in terms of research productivity, university status, and student access to current research in our fields.

Sincerely,

Mark Aune
Assistant Professor
Department of English