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**Collection Enhancement Report No. 23 for the V&A, Theatre and Performance
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Knowledge Exchange: DMU and the V&A

As the Postdoctoral Research Associate on the Shakespearean London Theatres (ShaLT) project I have now completed two years of work in collaboration with the V&A Museum's Theatre and Performance Department, a unit headed of course by Geoffrey Marsh, with the project steered by Professor Gabriel Egan (ShaLT PI). The project and role have both proved to be invaluable and rewarding. Here I outline and review the overall progress of a key aspect of my AHRC role: the Knowledge Exchange element, a scenario that required me to be based at the V&A for three days a week, whilst being employed and line-managed by De Montfort University.

As the initial advertisement for the position put it, part of my PDRA job was 'to identify items in the Victoria & Albert Museum's 'National Collection for the Performing Arts' which are enhanceable by focused application of theatre- historical knowledge through ShaLT project work, and to write a monthly 'Collection Enhancement Report' for the V&A, and a project-end summary'. This aspect of the position was mostly completed by my continued access to the V&A's Dyce collection of early modern print in the National Art Library (housed at the Museum at South Kensington). The 24 completed reports are available, along with several responses from the V&A, at:

<http://www.shalt.org.uk/downloads>

These reports turned out to be primary examples of Knowledge Exchange, as I was able to write scholarly but accessible reports that suggested how the Theatre and Performance Department might showcase some of this often neglected material. Throughout the reports, I recommended that the Museum or Department should put together an exhibition on early

modern drama and print/titlepages, as various extremely rare and important materials are usually unavailable to the general public. Furthermore, discussions with various early modern drama specialists working in this field has revealed that the collection is rather neglected even by scholars, with a first point of call for such materials usually being the British Library. But the V&A/National Art Library has a number of particularly important items that are deserving of wider exposure. Luckily, however, because I was able to identify such items, many of these have been photographed and are freely available on the ShaLT website. Likewise, I conducted a tour of the entire Museum site in order to point out other items that the V&A might use to publicise early modern theatre (the subject of report number 3).

Also in terms of Knowledge Exchange, in the first year of the project I reported on the ShaLT project (along with Dr Maurice Hindle) at a seminar set-up by the Museum's Research Department. Likewise, in the second year of the project I reported on the progress of ShaLT to the Theatre and Performance Department at a staff meeting. In the next few months it is hoped that I will present my experiences of Knowledge Transfer, ShaLT, and working at the V&A at an event on large projects and Knowledge Exchange at De Montfort University (this depends on future funding, but Professor Egan is pursuing this at the moment).

Overall, the most enjoyable aspect of the Monthly Collection Enhancement Reports was the chance to have regular access to a fascinating archive. Likewise, it was very rewarding to have the opportunity to write reports that signalled how the material could be used for the enjoyment of the wider population, rather than a limited number of scholarly professionals. That said, it appears to be rather unlikely that such an exhibition might take place in the not-too-distant future, and it would be a shame for the printed materials to remain hidden away, particularly when the British Library's display of such objects appears to have been a welcome addition to their public profile. Likewise, the V&A and/or someone in the

scholarly community should give serious attention to the possibility of digitising the Dyce collection, thus making the materials fully available to all online. (Effectively, this would be a scaled-down and collection-specific, theatrical version of the *Early English Books Online* database).