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New World Tempests: Dating Shakespeare's Late Play from the Eighteenth-Century Library to the Modern Special Collections Repository

This talk is devoted to the question of how institutional history and literary history are sometimes, surprisingly, interconnected, so that an institution may be shaped by a literary text as much as a literary text's survival and the form(s) by and in which we come to know it may be shaped by its institutional affiliations. To explore this idea, I focus on Shakespeare's *Tempest* as a material text whose survival in the eighteenth-century collections of the institution that would eventually become Yale University Library tells as much of a story about the foundation of that library and the form it eventually took, as Yale Library tells about Shakespeare's *Tempest* as we have come to interpret it in the twenty-first century. To do so, I focus on one of the earliest editions of Shakespeare to contain illustrations, Nicholas Rowe's 1714 *Works of Mr. William Shakespear* in 9 volumes, and show how this title made its way from eighteenth-century London to colonial New Haven, where it was shipped by what we might consider an early 'vendor' or 'supplier,' upon the request of Bishop George Berkeley, the Irish divine who from 1729 to 1731 lived in colonial Rhode Island at Newport, hoping to create a college and seminary in what Shakespeare, in the *Tempest*, called the "still vex'd Beremothes." Having read the same tracts as eighteenth-century editors of Shakespeare assumed Shakespeare had read, Berkeley came up with a 'tempest' of his own—an educational enterprise that involved educating Native Americans and indigenous populations from the island and the North American mainland in a seminary whose proposed form shares much with Shakespeare's take on Prospero's attempts to educate Caliban. I then show how when this project failed, Berkeley poured all his efforts into existing educational enterprises in the New World and how his copy of Shakespeare was the foundation of the vast collections of Shakespeariana that Yale Library holds today. I also go on to suggest that, in fact, it was this forgotten colonial project, whose inadvertent legacy it was, like the uneasy ending of the *Tempest*, to be the creation of the second largest research library in the United States, that shaped the modern special collections repositories which today allow for the reconstruction of this narrative and contribute to the many ways in which Shakespeare Studies continues to evolve.