

WHITHER GOEST THOU, PUBLIC SHAKESPEARIAN?

SHARON O'DAIR AND TIMOTHY FRANCISCO¹

'You never want a serious crisis to go to waste.' So said Rahm Emanuel, the Chief of Staff for President-elect Obama, in November 2008. But, he continued, 'what I mean . . . is that it's an opportunity to do things that you think you could not do before'. Emanuel was hoping to persuade his listeners at the *Wall Street Journal's* CEO Council that the financial crisis in 2008 presented the country with opportunities to address its serious problems – problems ignored for too long, problems so large solutions might come from either party. That, he said, is 'the silver lining'.² Twelve years later, in 2020, the country – and the world, too, as was also true in 2008 – faces another economic crisis, this time instigated by a novel coronavirus, itself a crisis, a pandemic with, as of this writing, no endgame. The long-term problems Emanuel spoke of were not addressed in the wake of the 2008 crisis, which presents us now with greater challenges but perhaps greater political will to address systemic problems – to do . . . *something*. Emanuel's words hint at the difficulty, however. If solutions might come from either the Left or the Right, then each knows that you never want a serious crisis to go to waste. Both the Left and the Right can, shall we say, weaponize a serious crisis for their own interests.³

Long-term problems have plagued academia, too, including deteriorating economic conditions, the brutal job market for Ph.D.s, deep inequities among the professoriate, and widespread awareness that higher education no longer drives social mobility but, instead, cements social class hierarchies. One

response by academia to these material and social problems is the promotion of community engagement, public engagement and renewed attention to pedagogy.⁴ In our field, this volume of *Shakespeare Survey* is an important example, as is the prominence recently given to teaching, pedagogy and public engagement by the Shakespeare Association of America, which this year established a Shakespeare Publics Award to be given annually. Such work, in all

¹ The authors thank Jeffrey R. Wilson, who interviewed us for an oral history of Public Shakespeare. Without his interest, we would not have been able to write this article. 'Whither goest thou?' is from 2.4.16 of *The Merchant of Venice*.

² Transcription by the authors. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=_mzcbXirTkk.

³ Emanuel reprised the phrase in March of 2020. In an interview on ABC's *This Week*, he said, 'Never allow a crisis to go to waste. Start planning for the future . . . We're going to have more pandemics, but this has to be the last economic depression.' The quote was quickly seized by Republicans, who lambasted Emanuel as well as Democrats' attempts to include worker and environmental protections in the stimulus package designed to offset economic losses during the pandemic. Mark Lotter, Director of Strategic Communications for President Trump's re-election campaign, tweeted, 'Democrats are using Rahm Emanuel's playbook of never letting a crisis go to waste. Their demands have NOTHING TO DO with helping the American people combat the China virus.' See Andrew O'Reilly, 'Rahm Emanuel on coronavirus response: "Never allow a crisis to go to waste"', *Fox News*, 23 March 2020: www.foxnews.com/politics/rahm-emanuel-on-coronavirus-response-never-allow-a-crisis-to-go-to-waste.

⁴ As will become clear in the course of this article, institutions, organizations and faculty may hold different motivations in promoting such work.

SHARON O'DAIR AND TIMOTHY FRANCISCO

its variety, has coalesced of late as Public Shakespeare, but that coalescence remains undefined, subject to debate. Provisionally, and for our purposes in this article, we define Public Shakespeare as non-peer-reviewed writing on multiple platforms; as pedagogies of social justice; or as local, community work legitimated, inspired or enabled by one's place in the academy. That is, Public Shakespeare consists of expanding audiences for and opportunities to engage in theatrical performance; expanding audiences for our criticism by writing outside scholarly norms; assisting colleagues in the classroom via peer- or non-peer-reviewed work; or promoting and engaging in activism outside the institution. We think all of this work, however, is a form of pedagogy, of teaching, rather than research.

And yet Public Shakespeare is not popular culture; its practitioners hold some form of professional expertise, rooted in the academy. As such, Public Shakespeare offers potential to rethink the prestige economy of Shakespeare studies, in which status and remuneration, at least in the US, are based upon one's distance from the labour of teaching. For, indeed, the relative merits of teaching and research have not always been as they are today: the research culture in literary and cultural study emerged slowly and, shall we say, organically, as John Guillory implies, noting that, in the US, a 'negotiation about what constitutes knowledge in the humanities . . . never took place'. Such a negotiation 'of the nature of research, and of the system of rewards in the profession, may have the benefit of applying a braking action on the inflation of research and on the ill effects entailed by that tendency'.⁵ Ten years later, in 2010, Tony Judt supported this idea, as he remembered matriculating at King's College in 1966, a time when 'Most of my supervisors . . . were obscure, published little, and known only to generations of Kingsmen. Thanks to them I acquired not just a patina of intellectual self-confidence, but abiding respect for teachers who are indifferent to fame (and fortune) and to any consideration outside the supervision armchair'.⁶ Even one of us remembers such professors, and if it is true that you never want a serious crisis to go to waste, perhaps now is

a time to renegotiate the meaning of knowledge and the system of rewards within our field.⁷

But will Public Shakespeare do this? Can Public Shakespeare do this? We ask this question of our colleagues: whither goest thou, Public Shakespearean? Again, if it is true that you never want a serious crisis to go to waste, and if it is also true that a serious crisis can be leveraged by the Left and the Right, then in this article we lay out a number of questions for Public Shakespeareans and, in doing so, we historicize Public Shakespeare; we do not offer a survey of today's Public Shakespeare. What Gary Taylor suggested in 1989 remains true today: Shakespeare is almost entirely academic. Any account of contemporary work in Shakespeare must consider 'the economics, politics, and social rituals of academic life'.⁸ We think placing Public Shakespeare within these rituals remains essential, even though the pandemic of 2020 has – at least temporarily – unhinged academic life from its past. How many colleges and universities – or theatres – will close permanently this year, or next, or in five years? How many tenure-track jobs will be advertised this year, or next, or in five years? Will institutions deliver money for research, whether in the archive or at

⁵ John Guillory, 'The system of graduate education', *PMLA* 115 (2000), 1154–63, pp. 1162, 1162–3. One such ill effect is the off-loading of teaching to a lesser category of professor, the contingent; another is less prestigious institutions' aping of their betters, demanding substantial records of publication from their faculty and new faculty. Today, in order to obtain a position at even a 'teaching institution', a candidate may well need to offer a published book.

⁶ Tony Judt, 'Meritocrats', *New York Review of Books* 57 (2010): www.nybooks.com/articles/2010/08/19/meritocrats.

⁷ Jeffrey R. Wilson thinks such a renegotiation is going on within a Public Shakespeare he defines narrowly as 'public writing': 'Once a gated community of tenured white males, Public Shakespeare is undergoing a revolution that prioritizes perspectives from often precarious junior scholars leaning into insights availed by gender, race, class, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, intersectionalities, and other identities.' See Jeffrey R. Wilson, 'Public Shakespeare': <https://wilson.fas.harvard.edu/public-shakespeare>.

⁸ Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History, From the Restoration to the Present* (Oxford, 1989), p. 326.

WHITHER GOEST THOU, PUBLIC SHAKESPEARIAN?

conferences? How many academic presses will fold? Will professional organizations, and their conferences and journals, survive? We ask colleagues to think about the meanings and development of Public Shakespeare in this moment of extravagant uncertainty about the future of our enterprise. We attempt here to refrain from answering our own questions, although our positionings probably are, or will become, clear. We would rather ask, ‘What do you think?’ And, more importantly, we would rather ask, ‘What are you prepared to do?’

Our questions are these. Will Public Shakespeare reconfigure the status hierarchy of the profession by reinvigorating a teaching culture; or will Public Shakespeare be seen as a top-down effort by the research culture to be relevant and preserve itself in a time of social unrest not seen since the 1960s – social unrest that is significantly anti-elitist? Alternatively, will the elite appropriate Public Shakespeare – that is, the local, community work pioneered by non-elite professors – now that economic conditions for elite institutions have changed; or will Public Shakespeare be a way for elites to acknowledge and recognize the important work non-elites are and have been doing? Does Public Shakespeare resist attempts by institutions to further practices of neoliberal management; or is Public Shakespeare one of those practices? Is it coincidence that Public Shakespeare has blossomed alongside institutions’ promotion and marketing of alternative careers for Shakespearians?

If, as we have suggested, the way to consider these questions is to situate Public Shakespeare within the academy, then we offer three placements of Public Shakespeare, moving from the easiest to the most difficult, with the caveat that each crosscuts the others. First is this: a fifty-year effort by literary critics to politicize their work and to democratize it. This effort derives from literary critics’ desire for political and ethical meaning in their professional and personal lives, an admirable desire awakened in the late 1960s. Much good has resulted from these efforts to see, or move, outside the ivory tower, and the profession is more diverse and more interesting than it was fifty years ago.

Such gains cannot be gainsaid, although more diversity – in thought and among faculty and students – is necessary and to be welcomed. Nor can one gainsay the sincerity of colleagues’ desire for political or ethical meaning in their lives.

This politicization of our work in these ways has been critiqued from the Right and the Left. From the Right, the critique is familiar – the undermining of Western culture will lead to cultural fragmentation, if not decay – and remains with us today, although, as Taylor insisted in 1989, the ‘revolution [that critical contras like (Allan) Bloom] deplore[d had already] occurred’.⁹ Bloom doubtless was motivated to write *The Closing of the American Mind*, his surprising best-seller, published in 1987, because he knew which way the wind was blowing: that many of his colleagues, and even more students, were questioning the relevance to contemporary society of Shakespeare or Milton or Aristotle or Plato. Of Shakespeare, Bloom observes, the students could see plainly that the plays are ‘repositories of the elitist, sexist, nationalist prejudice we are trying to overcome’.¹⁰ Twenty years after Bloom, the aesthete Ron Rosenbaum, who is no friend to theory, pointed out the peculiarity – and, for him, the misguidedness – of critical and theatrical attempts to soften, if not eliminate, the antisemitism of *The Merchant of Venice*.¹¹ Of *Merchant*, Rosenbaum concludes, ‘I don’t believe that *Merchant* should be banned or never shown. I’m just not sure of the rationale for showing it rather than reading it. One could study it as a historical artifact. One could study its language and patterns of imagery in relation to their use in other plays. But one cannot airbrush it.’¹² It is a good question: why do we continue to perform and write about *Merchant*, *Othello* or *The Taming of the Shrew* if the plays are racist or sexist? In 2020,

⁹ Taylor, *Reinventing*, p. 322.

¹⁰ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* [1987] (New York, 2012), p. 353.

¹¹ Ron Rosenbaum, *The Shakespeare Wars: Clashing Scholars, Public Fiascoes, Palace Coups* (New York, 2006), pp. 288ff.

¹² Rosenbaum, *Wars*, p. 315.

SHARON O'DAIR AND TIMOTHY FRANCISCO

more than thirty years after Bloom, still more and more of the young, whether students or faculty, see Shakespeare as 'repositories of elitist, sexist, nationalist prejudice'. In a reversal that might amuse the deceased Bloom, one might frame Public Shakespeare as attempting – desperately? heroically? – to answer that question without turning to aesthetics, as Rosenbaum does.¹³

From the Left, our politicization has been critiqued as merely liberal, our moves to democratize and diversify failing to affect patterns of inequality not only in society but also within the profession. Certainly, economic inequality in Western societies has become much, much greater in the fifty years we have pursued political criticism. In the United States, a 'winner take all society' has emerged, with elites taking larger shares of wealth than at any time since the late 1920s.¹⁴ In Europe, more robust redistribution has so far prevented this situation from arising, but, as Thomas Piketty observes, this is less than reassuring, given the fragility of the European social state.¹⁵ Workers have seen their wages stagnate; any gains for the majority of people have come from the creation of a two-income family. Similarly, in higher education, tenured professors are remunerated appropriately for members of the upper middle-class, while many, if not most, of their colleagues not on the tenure-track are remunerated like the working poor. Overall, the profession is being deprofessionalized, with, as of this writing, less than 30 per cent of faculty tenured or on the tenure ladder. Regarding higher education, this is not unfamiliar territory for those who have read John Guillory, Walter Benn Michaels or, more recently, Joseph North.¹⁶

We will not, therefore, rehearse the argument here, save to note two trenchant comments by John Guillory – one from his magisterial *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, and the other from 'The system of graduate education'. In the former, Guillory observes that the economics, politics and social rituals of academic life are not 'organized to express the consensus of a community; these social and institutional sites are

complex hierarchies in which the position and privilege of judgment are objects of competitive struggles'. These struggles, like the institutions in which they occur, are not democratic; these

¹³ High school English teachers in the United States have begun to question the value of teaching Shakespeare to students of colour. See, for example, Christina Torres, 'Why I'm rethinking teaching Shakespeare in my English classroom', *Education Week*, 1 October 2019: www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2019/10/01/why-im-rethinking-teaching-shakespeare-in-my.html. See also Valerie Strauss, 'Teacher: why I don't want to assign Shakespeare anymore (even though he's in the Common Core)', *The Washington Post*, 13 June 2015: www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2015/06/13/teacher-why-i-dont-want-to-assign-shakespeare-anymore-even-though-hes-in-the-common-core. Ayanna Thompson is a key example here of Shakespearians who address such concerns. Torres cites Thompson's interview on National Public Radio, 'All that glisters is not gold', *Code Switch*, 21 August 2019: www.npr.org/transcripts/752850055. See also Thompson's interview with Robin Tricoles, 'The Othello whisperer: an interview with Ayanna Thompson', Arizona State University Knowledge Enterprise, 9 July 2019: <https://research.asu.edu/othello-whisperer-qa-ayanna-thompson>. See also Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose: A Student-Centred Approach* (London, 2016). Turchi is a specialist in curriculum development. In the US, eliminating Shakespeare from the secondary school curriculum is arguably serious business for university English departments, since most – if not all – Schools of Education still require prospective teachers to take a course in Shakespeare.

¹⁴ See, for example, Robert Frank and Philip J. Cook, *The Winner-Take-All-Society: Why the Few at the Top Get So Much More than the Rest of Us* (New York, 1996). For academic work on this, see, for example, the work of Thomas Piketty, especially *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, 2014). See also the work of his frequent collaborator, Emmanuel Saez – for example, 'Striking it richer: the evolution of top incomes in the United States (updated with 2018 estimates)', Department of Economics, University of California, Berkeley (February 2020): <https://eml.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2018.pdf>.

¹⁵ See Piketty, *Capital*, pp. 493ff.

¹⁶ John Guillory, *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago, 1993); Walter Benn Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* (New York, 2006); and Joseph North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Cambridge, 2017).

WHITHER GOEST THOU, PUBLIC SHAKESPEARIAN?

institutions are not ‘representative’ places.¹⁷ In ‘The system of graduate education’, Guillory amplifies this position. Following French sociologist Alain Touraine, Guillory details ‘the relation between democratization and competition for status’. That relation is not intuitive, nor is it progressive, because

democratization does not institute equality in any simple sense. The progress of democratization is accompanied by intensified effects of competition and stratification. As university degrees become more desirable among the populace, the system responds not only by providing an array of bureaucratic economies – ways of delivering degrees for less money – but also by intensifying competition for resources and prestige, the result of which is the highly stratified system we have today.¹⁸

The competition to secure a place at a prestigious institution, already intensifying in 2000, may have found its apotheosis in 2019, when many wealthy parents were indicted for and convicted of buying admission to elite institutions for their academically mediocre offspring. According to the *New York Times*, the judge who sentenced one of the parents, actor Lori Loughlin, ‘expressed astonishment that someone who had what he called “a fairy-tale life” would corrupt the college admissions system out of a desire for even more status and prestige’.¹⁹

A second placement for Public Shakespeare is within debate about methodology, about what counts as intellectual work. This debate is nuanced but can be described as being between those who favour scholarship and archival research and those who favour criticism, including theoretical or political writing, and even non-peer-reviewed writing such as literary journalism or essays written for literary magazines.²⁰ One recent example of the latter kind of writing, from the 1990s, was an explosion of academic memoir and personal criticism by the first wave of professors from groups new to the academy – women, working-class people, and people of colour – such as Alice Kaplan’s *French Lessons: A Memoir*; Jane Tompkins’s *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned*; Deborah E. McDowell’s *Leaving*

Pipe Shop: Memories of Kin; Frank Lentricchia’s *The Edge of Night: A Confession*; Henry Louis Gates, Jr’s *Colored People: A Memoir*, and Jane Gallop’s *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*.²¹ Shakespearians, in contrast, were focused on political criticism – the new historicism, cultural materialism and feminist criticism of the 1980s and early 1990s – which was followed by what Hugh Grady called a ‘deepening apoliticism’ that developed when the ‘new’ was dropped from historicism and attached to something else – ‘the New Boredom’, as David Scott Kastan famously put it in 1999.²² Writing a ‘situated overview’ of Shakespeare studies in 2005 for the journal *Shakespeare*, Grady concludes that this deepening apoliticism ‘has taken the form of a revival of

¹⁷ Guillory, *Cultural*, pp. 27, 37.

¹⁸ Guillory, ‘System’, p. 1155.

¹⁹ Kate Taylor, ‘Lori Loughlin and Massimo Giannulli get prison in college admissions case’, *The New York Times*, 21 August 2020: www.nytimes.com/2020/08/21/us/lori-loughlin-mossimo-giannulli-sentencing.html. At the sentencing, Loughlin acknowledged that she had contributed to economic and social inequities in society. She added, ‘That realization weighs heavily on me, ... and while I wish I could go back and do things differently, I can only take responsibility and move forward.’

²⁰ North’s *History* (2017) documents the long history of this debate in literary study. The tension is clear in Stefan Collini’s perhaps biased assessment of the early years of Frank Kermode’s career. Collini asks, ‘Was he already that “Frank Kermode”, that effortlessly elegant, perceptive, slyly amusing, wide-ranging critic?’ His answer, ‘Not really, not to judge by this piece of scholarly flotsam’, referring to a bit by Kermode in ‘the back pages of the impeccably learned (read: dry as dust) *Review of English Studies* for July 1949’: Stefan Collini, ‘Early Kermode’, *London Review of Books*, 13 August 2020: www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v42/n16/stefan-collini/early-kermode.

²¹ Alice Kaplan, *French Lessons: A Memoir* (Chicago, 1993); Jane Tompkins, *A Life in School: What the Teacher Learned* (New York, 1997); Deborah E. McDowell, *Leaving Pipe Shop: Memories of Kin* (New York, 1996); Frank Lentricchia, *The Edge of Night: A Confession* (New York, 1994); Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Colored People: A Memoir* (New York, 1994); and Jane Gallop, *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment* (Durham, NC, 1997). These are a sample, only, and do not include essays and articles of this sort published in the same era.

²² David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare after Theory* (New York, 1999), p. 18.

SHARON O'DAIR AND TIMOTHY FRANCISCO

positivism (and secondarily, of an apolitical formalism), with a reversion to the older historicist idea that an “objective” factual reproduction of the past is possible’. Worse for Grady than the belief that Shakespeare’s work can be known within the conditions of its original production is the thought that ‘Kastan’s Shakespeare . . . is a Shakespeare who has moved from cultural insurgency to cultural conformity, from an understanding of literary studies as politically engaged to one that attempts to normalize and academicize its practices’.²³

A couple of years before Grady’s overview of the field, Douglas Bruster published *Shakespeare and the Question of Culture*, reinforcing Kastan’s position. Bruster mentions a colleague who once told him, privately, that Stephen Greenblatt is ‘an extraordinarily talented creative writer’. Although Bruster doesn’t say this, one can read envy in the colleague’s judgement, but Bruster’s point is that Greenblatt’s writing – and, we assume, that of his followers – is ‘more entertaining’ than traditional scholarly writing, which ‘begins with a statement of the topic, reviews the critical bibliography on that topic . . . and makes apparent one’s differences from existing conclusions about the topic at hand’. Traditional scholarly writing is ‘mechanical’ and, further, Bruster insists, ‘The routine of conventional citation . . . quite literally gets in the way of a good story’.²⁴ The implication is that the routine *should* get in the way, that creating stories is not what we do. One crucial subtext of this argument, however, is the fate of scholars or critics who are not ‘elegant and playful’ writers, which well may be most scholars or critics.²⁵ Indeed, a number of colleagues have pointed out that historicism as a method is exclusionary to those without access to archives or Early English Books Online.²⁶ And surely this is true, but, in addition, the New Boredom and EEBO enabled the careers of colleagues whose prose plods, allowing the focus to be the ‘mechanical’ work of digging around in archives, with a ‘mechanical’ presentation of the results.

What we have, then, is not only a struggle between positivist historicism and engaged political criticism, but also a struggle between mechanical prose and elegant and playful prose.²⁷ This

struggle too has a long history, which continues. In 2013, Michael McKeon responded to Melissa E. Sanchez’s “‘Use me but as your spaniel’”: feminism, queer theory, and early modern sexualities’, published in 2012 in *PMLA*, in precisely the terms of the former, although the latter emerges, too, in Sanchez’s writing, which is a fun read. McKeon is disappointed in ‘Use me’ because he thought he would read and learn about early modern women’s sexualities. Instead, he found ‘an account of what we know – and don’t know – about early modern women’s sexualities as a function of conflicts between feminism and queer theory’. Methodologically, he complains, Sanchez’s ‘project is dictated by the political encounters in which she frames it, and her implied readership is principally interested in the sex wars of the 1980s and their aftermath’.²⁸ In words that echo Grady’s, Sanchez playfully retorts that ‘In contrasting the insubstantial amuse-bouche of theory and politics with the more nourishing fare of true scholarship, McKeon invokes the fantasy of a scholar who is outside politics, an ideological construct frequently used to elevate “real” intellectual work above crude “identity politics”’. But, as we all know – or should, by now – ‘*all* historical and literary studies do political work, whether these studies conserve or contest dominant values – and whether they own up to their politics or not’.²⁹

²³ Hugh Grady, ‘Shakespeare studies, 2005: a situated overview’, *Shakespeare* 1 (2005), 102–20; p. 113.

²⁴ Douglas Bruster, *Shakespeare and the Question of Culture* (New York, 2003), p. 51.

²⁵ Bruster, *Culture*, p. 52.

²⁶ See, for example, Marisa R. Cull, ‘Place and privilege in Shakespeare scholarship and pedagogy’, in *Shakespeare and the 99%: Literary Studies, the Profession, and the Production of Inequity*, ed. Sharon O’Dair and Timothy Francisco (New York, 2019), pp. 207–24.

²⁷ The two pairs do not overlap completely. For example, we judge Bruster’s writing to be more engaging than Grady’s.

²⁸ Michael McKeon, ‘Early modern women’s sexuality: two views’, *PMLA* 128 (2013), 474–5; p. 474.

²⁹ Melissa E. Sanchez, ‘Early modern women’s sexuality: two views’, *PMLA* 128 (2013), 476–7; pp. 476, 477.

WHITHER GOEST THOU, PUBLIC SHAKESPEARIAN?

We would add that valuing traditional scholarship over other sorts of intellectual work and other kinds of writing – including theory, but also *belles lettres* or the essay – results from not only a fantasy of objectivity but also institutional pressures, such as prestige hierarchies within the field and the desire of literary critics to gain the superior status and better remuneration of colleagues in the sciences, including the social sciences. Indeed, looking from below, we might be so bold as to cast differently the debates above – between Kastan and Grady, between Bruster and Greenblatt, between McKeon and Sanchez. What counts as intellectual work is determined by who does it and where they do it. Recall Guillory, cited above: in our profession, ‘the position and privilege of judgment are objects of competitive struggles’. Or, as Taylor playfully contended in 1989, ‘not every Shakespeare critic on the planet can be fitted onto the program of a four-day conference ... Even among the elect, speech is rationed, hierarchically.’³⁰ Guillory and Taylor imply that in academia one needs visibility, which is difficult to obtain. Visibility is power, and ‘invisibility’, Taylor pronounces, ‘is impotence’.³¹ In this light, the most telling bit of McKeon’s complaint about ‘Use me’ is that he promotes his own work to *PMLA*’s readership – a book published in 2005, some seven years prior – as an antidote to Sanchez’s essay, which suggests to us that the senior scholar is nervous about visibility, about continuing visibility. McKeon knows that what counts, what gives visibility, is published in *PMLA*, *Shakespeare*, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, *Renaissance Quarterly* or *Shakespeare Survey*.

In thinking about the future for Public Shakespeare within this placement, the trajectory of another critical practice, that of ecocriticism, may be useful. Pioneered by faculty of lesser status – by teachers – ecocriticism became the province of elites, and now counts as serious intellectual work. Ecocritical essays and scholarship are now published in leading journals, such as *PMLA* or *New Literary History*, and by the leading publishers in academia. This was not always the case. In 2005, Lawrence Buell worried about the effects of elite academics like him entering the field, wondering whether ecocriticism would thereby forfeit its original mission –

its local, activist focus and its ‘disaffection with business-as-usual literary studies’ – to become ‘just another niche within the culture of academic professionalism’. Buell thought the additional resources, prestige and critical sophistication brought to ecocriticism by elites – after all, ecocriticism was born ‘as an offshoot of an association of second-level prestige whose principal support base lay mostly outside the most prominent American university literature departments’ – was worth the risk to ecocriticism’s original mission.³² Fifteen years later, the environmental humanities are another professional niche, and ‘business-as-usual literary studies’ continues.³³ But also useful in thinking about the future of Public Shakespeare is this: fifteen years has also brought a challenge to Buell’s thinking, thinking that assumes resources should be the exclusive province of elites and that elites know best how to use resources. In our field, Kimberly Anne Coles, Kim F. Hall and Ayanna Thompson recently issued a call to action on the problem of race in the profession, and in it the authors offer this rejoinder to thinking like Buell’s: ‘The twentieth-century model of hoarding expertise at an elite institution or two will not suffice in the twenty-first century when our fields are under attack and vulnerable to collapse.’³⁴ Outside our field, but almost simultaneously, Matt Brim published *Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University*, in which he too decries such hoarding of resources, whether of expertise or financial, advocating instead a ‘queer ferrying’ between rich and poor institutions.³⁵

³⁰ Taylor, *Reinventing*, p. 338. ³¹ Taylor, *Reinventing*, p. 371.

³² Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* (Malden, 2005), pp. 28, 27, 7.

³³ Nor has the environment improved from those additional resources, prestige and critical sophistication.

³⁴ Kimberly Anne Coles, Kim F. Hall and Ayanna Thompson, ‘BlackKKKShakespearean: a call to action for medieval and early modern studies’, *Profession 2020*: <https://profession.mla.org/blackkkkshakespearean-a-call-to-action-for-medieval-and-early-modern-studies>.

³⁵ Matt Brim, *Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University* (Durham, NC, 2020), pp. 194–202. Disruption to academic practice during the global pandemic has spurred

SHARON O'DAIR AND TIMOTHY FRANCISCO

Such calls lead to our third placement for Public Shakespeare: within deteriorating economic conditions for higher education, including – and especially for our purposes here – the job market for Ph.D.s. This placement complicates the possibility that Public Shakespeare might join theory, *belles lettres*, or the essay in challenging the elite status of archival scholarship in our field. Of course, the deteriorating economic conditions for higher education are likewise familiar territory, and mountains of studies and opinion pieces and data analyses have been produced since 1990 – or 1980 or 1975 – to assess the situation and to apportion blame, appearing in *PMLA*, *Profession*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed* or in sundry magazines or books. And yet, despite the data, the analyses and the opinions, neither the prospects for Ph.D.s nor the working conditions for faculty have improved, whether in the United States or the United Kingdom. These conditions now are leading even professors – not just the contingent – to quit academia, such as early modern historian Malcolm Gaskill, who did so in 2020 at, significantly, the age of 53:

I had dreaded telling colleagues in my field that I was quitting, imagining incredulity and a hushed inference that I was terminally ill or at least having a breakdown. Academia is vocational: people don't usually pack it in or switch careers – although that may become more common. When I finally broke the news, most of the people I told said they would retire early if they could afford it – a few had made calculations about payouts and pensions and most had at least contemplated it in glummer moments. It's just no fun any more, they said. One or two admitted that their self-identity was so bound up with academic life they could never give it up, but even this wasn't a judgment on my decision: they were entirely sympathetic and acknowledged that a wonderful career had lost a lot of its glamour.³⁶

For Bill Readings, the situation just described is structural and historical: the university as we knew it – the consolidator of culture – was linked to the nation-state, and the eclipse of the nation-state in a globalized and transnational world reforms the university, enshrining it as a corporation, bureaucratic in nature, focused on matters economic, and obsessed with the notion of excellence.³⁷ For Guillory, too,

the situation is structural and historical, having to do with the decline of the bourgeoisie as an elite – a group for whom 'literature' was a significant part of cultural capital – and the emergence of a new elite in a technocratic society, the professional-managerial class, an elite that is not 'exclusively white or male' and for whom 'literature' is not a significant part of cultural capital. For the bourgeoisie and its literature, it is 'unquestionably the case that the several recent crises of the literary canon – its "opening" to philosophical works, to works by minorities, and now to popular and mass culture – amounts to a terminal crisis'.³⁸ Readings and Guillory wrote in the 1990s, but Christopher Newfield, writing in the first decade of this century, looks at this history and sees a concerted attack by nefarious actors – presumably Republicans, capitalists and conservative cultural warriors – to undermine the middle class in the US by undermining the public university. This 'assault', he claims, 'began in earnest just as the American middle class was starting to become multiracial, and as public universities were moving with increasing speed toward meaningful racial integration'.³⁹ Newfield's implied causality arguably reduces the complexity of higher education's problems, but his assessment exemplifies many such analyses that blame broader forces – 'some other "not us"' – for our plight, such as elitism, capitalism, imperialism, neo-liberalism or, shall we say, continuing disaster.⁴⁰

such moves, as many conferences, performances, lecture series and pedagogical resources from around the world have moved online, allowing greater access than can be afforded through place-based events.

³⁶ Malcolm Gaskill, 'Diary: on quitting academia', *London Review of Books*, 24 September 2020, 40–1, p. 41.

³⁷ See Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, 1997).

³⁸ Guillory, *Cultural*, pp. 38, 265.

³⁹ Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Donna J. Haraway uses the term 'some other "not us"', to describe the way progressive feminists assess the problem of overpopulation. The culprits responsible for overpopulation and its deleterious effects on the planet are familiar – 'Capitalism, Imperialism, Neoliberalism, Modernization' – but they are always 'not us'. This, Haraway insists, must stop.

WHITHER GOEST THOU, PUBLIC SHAKESPEARIAN?

Arguably, from the perspectives of Readings or Guillory, the blame game misrecognizes, and can only fail to respond appropriately to, the historical processes that have upended the university and literary study. Needed is a sharp slap in the face, such as that provided by Jeffrey R. Di Leo, a professor of English and Philosophy and Executive Director of the Society for Critical Exchange: ‘there must be a point where we stop complaining about the conditions of higher ed, and bemoaning a past that is no longer recuperable, and begin to live in the present’. Neoliberalism, student debt and the job crisis are not crises but ‘the continuing condition of higher education in America’, which is to say: ‘the continuing condition of higher education in America is the neoliberal condition’.⁴¹ Until we accept the ‘present’, accept reality and our own complicity with it, Di Leo urges, we will make little or even no progress in transforming the neoliberal condition of our institutions and our professional lives.

In January 2020, *Inside Higher Ed*'s Colleen Flaherty reported that ‘the Modern Language Association is listening’ to professors’ concerns over the ethics of graduate education. On a panel about admissions, Guillory pushed against the grain to propose, according to Flaherty, ‘a thought experiment’ that ‘the MLA might also help oversee a staggered moratorium on admissions to humanities programs, in which one-third to one-fourth of departments don’t admit graduate students every year’. Smaller fixes were also suggested, such as departments’ publicizing their Ph.D. placements more transparently, or offering supplementary programmes to their students so that they may find an alternative career to a professorship, whether in or out of academia.⁴² Again, this is familiar territory at the MLA and other professional organizations, as well as in journals and books. Yet, as the MLA convention closed and its presenters and attendees made their ways home, whether locally or across the globe, a novel coronavirus, virulent and deadly, was already doing the same, traversing the globe. Within two months, colleges and universities worldwide were closed, and classroom instruction moved online. Conferences, too, were cancelled or moved online, including the Shakespeare Association of America, the International Shakespeare Conference

in Stratford-upon-Avon, and the January 2021 MLA convention. As we write, a tiny strand of RNA has begun to accomplish what Guillory suggested in January and what he and many other colleagues have argued for decades. As of early October 2020, eight highly-ranked Ph.D. programmes in English or Comparative Literature have suspended admissions for 2021–2, and twenty-four universities have suspended over 100 Ph.D. programs in other disciplines.⁴³ At the other end of the graduate student life-cycle, as of early October, the MLA lists three tenure-track positions in Early Modern / Renaissance Literature. But graduate students in early modern studies will have to compete with peers in other fields for these positions. The advertised positions, a cluster hire by the University of British Columbia, require expertise in Critical Race Studies, Studies of Empire and Colonialism, Global English Literatures or Indigenous English Literatures, from 1550 to 1900.

See Donna J. Haraway, ‘Making kin in the Chthulucene: reproducing multispecies justice’, in *Making Kin Not Population*, ed. Adele E. Clarke and Donna J. Haraway (Chicago, 2018), p. 88. With respect to the economic conditions of higher education, we too would like colleagues to stop blaming some ‘not us’. Jeffrey R. Di Leo agrees: ‘My own belief is that higher education deteriorated beneath the feet of many of us – and for one reason or another we were powerless to stop it. Using the rhetoric of crisis allows us to assume a level of plausible deniability for the deterioration . . . it is always everyone else’s fault that the humanities are failing, never our own’: Jeffrey R. Di Leo, *Higher Education under Late Capitalism: Identity, Conduct, and the Neoliberal Condition* (Cham, 2017), pp. xiii, xiv.

⁴¹ Di Leo, *Higher*, pp. xv, xiii.

⁴² Colleen Flaherty, ‘Seeking a culture shift in graduate education’, *Inside Higher Ed*, 13 January 2020: www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/01/13/mla-discusses-professors-ethical-responsibilities-training-graduate-students.

⁴³ Meghan Zahneis, ‘More doctoral programs suspend admissions. That could have lasting effects on graduate education’, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 September 2020, updated 2 October 2020: www-chronicle-com.libdata.lib.ua.edu/article/more-doctoral-programs-suspend-admissions-that-could-have-lasting-effects-on-graduate-education. Of the eight universities in our field, six are private and two public research institutions. This suggests that, in the US, Ph.D. education is expensive for private institutions and much less expensive for public institutions, who must staff many thousands of composition courses.

SHARON O'DAIR AND TIMOTHY FRANCISCO

Early modernists may also compete for a position at Brigham Young University, which advertises four tenure-track positions in American Literature, Folklore or British Literature.

In 2020, almost twenty-five years have passed since Guillory published 'Pre-professionalism: what graduate students want', in which he decried graduate education as 'a kind of pyramid scheme'. What Guillory meant is that graduate students and assistant professors desire to be, or mirror, their mentors – doing research, travelling to conferences worldwide, publishing articles and books, and – especially – teaching graduate students. But 'the number of graduate students would have to increase geometrically for this desire to be gratified for all of us' – hence the pyramid scheme. Because such geometric increase is 'phantasmic', the competition for such jobs intensifies and the result is 'the penetration of graduate education by professional practices formerly confined to later phases of the career, the obvious examples being publication and the delivery of conference papers'.⁴⁴ A few years later, Marc Bousquet radicalized Guillory's insight that graduate students 'do everything that their teachers do – teach, deliver conference papers, publish – without the assurance that any of these activities will secure them a job'.⁴⁵ Not only are graduate students professionalized too early, as Guillory observed, but, Bousquet insists, 'degree holding increasingly represents a disqualification from practice . . . For most graduate employees, the receipt of the Ph.D. signifies the end – and not the beginning – of a long teaching career.'⁴⁶ Bousquet does not provide data, and we think he overstates, but data about the careers of Ph.D.s or ABDs ('All But Dissertation's) in English are difficult to come by and difficult for colleagues to trust.⁴⁷ Still, whether one agrees with Guillory that we have over-produced Ph.D.s, or with Bousquet that we have under-produced jobs, or with the more recent arguments of Paul Yachnin that none of it matters because the Ph.D., properly reformed, is a degree for multiple careers, one must admit that it is possible – and even likely – for graduate students and early career colleagues to publish and perish.

For young scholars in 1989, like one of us, reading Taylor's 'Present tense' in *Reinventing Shakespeare* was alluring, inspiring and disturbing: alluring and inspiring because of the witty, conversational tone, but mainly for the thrill of imagining how it would be to be someone like Gary Taylor, 'play[ing] the international conference circuit' in 1986 – an average year for him, 'not especially important', but one in which he rolls from London to Berlin to Washington, DC, to Stratford-upon-Avon to Williamstown, landing, finally, in Silver Spring. And it was disturbing because the chapter is, at its core, a bad-boy take-down of exactly the culture Taylor revels in and plays so well – he treats 'academic life as the stuff of satirical fiction' – which even then suggested something like braggadocio or disingenuousness.⁴⁸ For us, in 2020, reading 'Present tense' feels like culpable excess – for the planet, for the profession. For young scholars, it must feel like a daydream. The proof is in the pudding and, in this

⁴⁴ John Guillory, 'Pre-professionalism: what graduate students want', *Profession 1996* (1996), 91–9, pp. 97, 98, 98, 92. In 1999, Maresi Nerad and Joseph Cerny published a study of those who obtained a Ph.D. in English between 1982 and 1985, and noted the following: ten years later, only 2.8 per cent of them were tenured professors at Carnegie Research I institutions. Only 16 per cent of all tenured faculty work at such institutions: Maresi Nerad and Joseph Cerny, 'From rumors to facts: career outcomes of English PhDs', *The Communicator* 32 (1999), 1–12, p. 11.

⁴⁵ Guillory, 'Pre-professionalism', p. 92.

⁴⁶ Marc Bousquet, 'The waste product of graduate education: toward a dictatorship of the flexible', *Social Text* 70 (2002), 81–104, p. 87.

⁴⁷ The Modern Language Association of America frequently analyses data on the status of the profession, much of which arguably obscures rather than clarifies the problem. One sometimes feels pity for David Laurence, MLA's Director of Research, who finds himself reading comments like this by William Pringle: 'It's astonishing that you've seen fit to draw conclusions from these numbers, considering the quality of the data and its statistical non-significance. Borderline dishonest, really – but typical of the MLA. More interested in protecting your reputation than you are in actually serving young scholars': <https://mlaresearch.mla.hcommons.org/2015/02/17/where-are-they-now-occupations-of-1996-2011-phd-recipients-in-2013-2/#comments>.

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Reinventing*, pp. 304, 372.