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The new Millennium is here, and, as with many putative watersheds, nothing much seems to have changed on the day-to-day level where lives get lived. The calendar says 2000, but the student papers of the Millennium look pretty much like those of 1999. Is it foolish, then, to pause and think about what may be changing in regard to Shakespeare's role in the culture of 2000 and after? Maybe, but I have decided to do it anyway, less to predict an unknowable future than to assess a fissured present.

In New York where I live the complex of events, texts, and practices we call "Shakespeare" threads through the fabric of the city. The most frequent encounters with Shakespeare, here as elsewhere, probably takes place in classrooms. In colleges and universities, Shakespeare courses flourish whether or not they are required. These courses justify many of the professional activities in which Shakespeareans engage: teaching classes, editing texts, writing criticism, training the next generation of teachers who will succeed us in the classroom. Yet the continuing demand for classroom Shakespeare can deflect attention from the way new developments such as distance learning, the World Wide Web, or the corporatization of the academy are already affecting these customary academic activities. On many campuses the number of Renaissance faculty is shrinking as retirements outpace replacements. Even if Shakespeare courses remain popular, their meaning changes when, rather than being embedded in an array of early modern offerings, "Shakespeare" stands in solitary splendor in a curriculum that has no depth and texture until it reaches nineteenth-century America. Similarly, established modes of graduate training become increasingly insufficient as our Ph.D.s go into classrooms where students are more likely to do research on the World Wide Web than in the library and where traditional publication venues such as university presses and print journals are uncertainly positioned against on-line alternatives.

In this city Shakespeare can also be encountered, and no less problematically, at earlier rungs on the academic ladder. On the subway I see high school students reading their Folger copies of *Romeo and Juliet*, and, if they are lucky, these students go on field trips to productions like *R and J*, the all-male, small-cast version of *Romeo and Juliet* that had some of its greatest successes with student audiences. But not all high school students, in New York or elsewhere, get to go to live theater, and their encounters with classroom Shakespeare can be more intimidating than exciting. For several years the Brooklyn Academy of Music has run a program called Shakespeare Teaches Teachers which aims to develop successful ways to work with Shakespeare in a diverse array of secondary school settings. The program puts college teachers in dialogue with high school teachers, sends professional actors into schools for workshops, and sometimes enables high school classes to attend productions at the Brooklyn Academy. It's an excellent initiative, but it underscores how often a successful classroom encounter with Shakespeare depends on material resources many public schools can't command. Often underfunded, schools frequently serve students who do not come from economically or culturally privileged backgrounds. Shakespeare Teaches Teachers provides a handful of schools with crucial resources—everything from good editions of playtexts to highly trained actors who get kids on their feet and engaged in performance before they have time to think about how stupid they feel before the Bard. The forms of textual literacy that the study of Shakespeare demands do not come from nowhere. The birthright of some, for many they are produced only by good schools. The defunding of public education makes complex encounters with textual Shakespeare an increasingly circumscribed practice in many secondary schools, and inevitably that has ripple-up effects on the teaching of Shakespeare at post-secondary levels, as well.

In New York, as elsewhere, however, the textualized Shakespeare isn't the only game in town. Increasingly, there are film Shakespeares as well. Many teenagers saw Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet* as soon as it opened in theaters, not because it was based on Shakespeare but because it starred Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio. There is an opportunity here, but just what *sort* of opportunity remains a

matter of debate and uncertainty among professional Shakespeareans. Is the goal to capitalize on the popularity of film and students' more democratically distributed film literacy to get back to textual Shakespeares? Or is the challenge to accept the alterity of film as a medium and address it primarily on its own terms both as a formal artifact and as part of a global culture industry with few analogues to the early modern theater? Even as textual critics question the self-evidence of the Shakespearean corpus, the status of the words on the page, so the popularity of film Shakespeare problematizes the formal and historical status of our collective object of attention.

By contrast, Shakespeare on stage can seem less problematic whether his plays are encountered on Broadway, in regional repertory theaters, or in summer festivals. Professional Shakespeareans generally feel comfortable with the theatrical Shakespeare and know how to bring critical pressure to bear on production choices, cuts, and casting. But live theater can also test limits. On Manhattan's West Side, *The Donkey Show*, a disco version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, has been pulling big crowds for both its nightly shows. Inside the disco club, where patrons can dance and drink as they watch the one-hour performance, there is no sign of Theseus or Hippolyta; the rustics have become car-wash attendants; and, except for the fairies, all the men's parts are played by women. In this viscerally exciting event, the gross material body gets its due, in spades, and the disco music performs its powerful retro seductions. But what exactly is its status? Is it Shakespeare? Could we take our students? Should we? What words are adequate to *The Donkey Show*—Dionysian, trivializing, liberatory, populist, utopian, obscene, racist, revelatory, stupid? Is this were, at the Millennial turning, one finds Shakespeare, or where he is forever lost?

I conclude only one or two simple things from observing the many incarnations of Shakespeare at the Millennium. First, partly as a result of late capitalism's tendency to find advantage in any opportunity, Shakespeare is everywhere. Second, our ability to get critical purchase on these Shakespeares is actually newly difficult, despite the justified perception that we are in something of a Bard Boom. Established ways of dealing with Shakespeare within the academy are being pressured by everything from faltering national commitments to excellence in public education to shrinking Renaissance course offerings to new developments in "information delivery and retrieval." Meanwhile, many academics remain a bit uneasy about their relationship to the Shakespeares that find their incarnations in discos, on the wide screen, and in other popular culture venues. As a group we are not always familiar with the explanatory protocols that allow rigorous engagement with these phenomena on their own terms, not merely as transparent switches back to a putatively originary text. Third, things mutate or they die. There is tremendous cultural capital attached to the name of Shakespeare; it has been invested with the labor of generations of editors, commentators, teachers, film makers, and directors. To what ends this investment will be turned in the year 2000 is not entirely within the control of professional Shakespeareans. But we should use the limited agency we have to insure, partly by our own flexibility and rigorous engagement with the new, that the academic study of Shakespeare stays robustly alive in its many manifestations and that it forges a profitably critical traffic with the Shakespeares beyond the academy. The Millennium has not brought about anything like a revolution in Shakespeare studies, but the changing texture of our collective encounters with the Bard indicates that beneath our feet, the terrain is shifting. It's a good moment to think about what it means to be professing Shakespeare, both in the shapes in which we have known him and in those unimaginable shapes to come.