

Shakespeare Association of America 2021, Seminar 42  
Public Shakespeare(s) in the Market

Leader: Timothy Francisco, Youngstown State University  
Respondent: Geoffrey Way, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies

Abstracts

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### The Public Shakespeare Network

Imagine if, instead of national outlets going to the same “public intellectuals” for pseudo-informed commentary, public writing and programing were part of graduate training in the humanities, so scholars knew what to do when their expertise could inform our understandings of current events. Imagine if, instead of promising projects from upstart young crows lost in the slush piles of open submissions, the university wits among us were to use what little power we have to facilitate new work and distribute opportunities.

The Public Shakespeare Network is a decentralized, grassroots movement supporting communities and scholars looking to think about, with, through, and against Shakespeare and other early-modern literature beyond the confines of academia. Through the #PublicShax hashtag, it creates a space for people from all walks of life to connect with Shakespeare and Shakespeare scholars. For public venues, it offers a go-to resource for finding expertise and ideas, the Network counteracting structural biases in academia and journalism that create barriers on the basis of gender, race, religion, class, disability, and age. For scholars interested in public-facing writing and programing, but not quite sure how to do it, the Public Shakespeare Network offers three main resources:

1. *Guidance* for doing public-facing writing and programing: Free and openly accessible how-to tips and tricks from established practitioners walking you through the process of creating different forms of Public Shakespeare.
2. *Workshops* to help scholars develop and revise public-facing writing and programing: Small group conversations that help aspiring Public Shakespeareans think through ideas at different stages of development, from the concept to the execution.
3. *Connections* to people and resources that can help bring Public Shakespeare projects to light: the Network is committed to offering introductions and opening doors to help promising projects find the right home.

About the Author

[Jeffrey R. Wilson](#) is a faculty member in the Writing Program at Harvard University, where he teaches the “Why Shakespeare?” section of the university’s first-year writing course. He is the author of two books, *Shakespeare and Trump* (Temple University Press, 2020) and *Shakespeare and Game of Thrones* (Routledge, 2021). His work has appeared in journals such as *Modern Language Quarterly*, *Genre*, and *College Literature*, and been featured in public venues including *National Public Radio*, *Literary Hub*, *Zocalo Public Square*, and MLA’s *Profession*. On Twitter [@DrJeffreyWilson](#).

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A recent public-facing book on Shakespeare:

James Shapiro, *Shakespeare in a Divided America: What His Plays Tell Us About Our Past and Future* (NY: Penguin, 2020)

Seminar paper abstract:

#### Allegories of Climate Justice

In *Shakespeare and the 99%* Daniel Vitkus concludes that “today’s critical practice in reading and teaching Shakespeare...should focus on our linkage to Shakespeare’s time through the history of capitalism’s expansion, from the end of the feudal order to the triumph of global capital today” (202). Indeed, triumphant and still-expanding capitalist forces have helped mightily to foster a climate crisis that may actually destroy capitalism and a great deal else. In the U. S. and elsewhere, various green new deals aim to counter the rampages of that crisis through policies that would transform the dead-end, still-racist neoliberal order of deregulation, low taxes, and privatization of the public sphere. These initiatives pursue social justice as climate justice, and they respond in part to growing pressure from youth, who parse the increasing odds against their ever obtaining intergenerational climate justice.

For the classroom and for a book or article as public-facing as I can make them, this paper outlines a project concerning how conflicts in Shakespeare’s plays can effectively signify forces of climate breakdown and struggles for climate-change mitigation and climate justice. It builds on previous work, an article on intergenerational justice, regicide, and deceptive predictions in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (<https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/emc/vol13/iss1/15>), as well as a seminar paper on racial and religious discrimination in the world’s first global capitalist financial center, the Venice of *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. A successful marriage in *Othello* would figure a climate-redeeming alliance, and Iago’s motiveless malignancy a kind of denialism that, like climate-change denialism, can perhaps never be wholly understood.

Finally, intergenerational injustice also comes to the fore in *Romeo and Juliet*, in the Veronese milieu where elders’ neglect fails to quell the legacy of the feud. Allegorically that figures the staggering irresponsibility of today’s powers-that-be to address climate. There too the principals’ sublime but abortive marriage would relate to our climate hopes and fears.

**Dr. John Higgins**  
**Case Western Reserve University**  
**SAA 2021 Annual Meeting**  
**“Public Shakespeare(s) in the Market”**

Public and counter-public Shakespeare at the 2012 Globe to Globe Festival

My essay for the seminar will focus on how the 2012 Globe to Globe Festival and its connection, through the 2012 London Olympics and the accompanying Cultural Olympiad, to the logic of global capitalism. Specifically, I will argue that the cultural logic underlying the Globe to Globe Festival was contradictory, both recreating the logic of global capitalism and also providing the opportunity for resistance to this same system. The festival took place from April 21 – June 9 2012, and saw the performances of 37 different Shakespeare plays in 37 different languages, all staged at the Globe Theater in London. The festival brought theatrical companies from around the world to – in [the words of its organizers](#) – “Enjoy speaking these plays in their own language, in our Globe, within the architecture Shakespeare wrote for.”

Taken as a single festival entity, Globe to Globe in many respects recreated the multicultural, capitalist public of the Olympic movement to which it was attached. Much as the Olympics gather countries together, outwardly paying them respect while simultaneously promoting the commercial interests of Coca-Cola and Budweiser, so the Globe to Globe Festival brought together global theater companies in order to benefit Shakespeare and “our Globe” as international cultural icons. Individual performances, however, could work to counteract this logic by fostering what Nancy Fraser has described as “subaltern counterpublics,” or, “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”<sup>1</sup> A performance of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* in British Sign Language, for example, became a celebration of London’s deaf community, while a performance of *Richard II* by Ashtar Theater Palestine ended with the unfurling of the Palestinian flag by members of the audience and calls in support of a free Palestine.

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<sup>1</sup> Warner 118.