

The Shakspere Society of Philadelphia

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Abstract

The Shakspere Society of Philadelphia was founded in 1851 by Philadelphia-area lawyers seeking a social and intellectual supplement to their professional duties. As a Shakespeare "club," members looked to the plays and poems as an opportunity for "regular social reunion . . . so arranged that improvement of the mind should result." This simple arrangement has shaped the way the Society and its chroniclers have understood the group ever since: a delicate balancing act in which dinner-club socializing and academic study function both as complements and competitors. The overview of the Society I offer here attempts to trace the two poles of "academic" and "social" through the group's own minutes and histories. I conclude by considering the usefulness of binary models in describing modes of practicing Shakespeare today.

Academics versus Socialites

The Shakspere Society of Philadelphia was founded in 1851, as the "Shakspere Apostles," and its first recorded meeting was held in October of 1852.¹ According to meeting minutes and various histories produced by the Society's members during the first 100 years of its existence, the original members were Philadelphia-area lawyers who sought in Shakespeare a refuge from the demands of studying and practicing law. The Society "evidently supplied a need," and its membership grew from four to twenty-six by 1860 (Savage 1952, 343). In 1861, the club incorporated and adopted its current name, together with a constitution and by-laws to supplement the "certain canons or unwritten rules" that had governed procedure in the early years (Ashhurst 1898, 4). Though not the earliest Shakespeare society to be founded, the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia is the oldest continuously meeting club, and it stands today as a rare instance of a nineteenth-century belletristic literary society that has survived largely unchanged from its origin in both form and practice. Membership, by invitation only, is still restricted to men,² and while new members are inducted without regard to "occupation or calling," some amount of academic or social affluence remains a functional prerequisite (Savage 1952, 350). Meetings, formal though certainly genial, combine social, gustatory, and literary refinement according to the model of an "old Philadelphia dining-

club" as described by member Henry Savage. Writing a centennial retrospective for *Shakespeare Quarterly* in 1952, Savage invites readers to imagine themselves at a meeting:

At 6:30 p.m. on a Wednesday evening in mid-October we enter the old Philadelphia Club at 13th and Walnut Streets. Ascending by the ancient elevator to the Library on the second floor, we find a group of some ten or twelve gentlemen of differing ages enjoying a pre-prandial cocktail. The group has split up into twos and threes, and conversation, whatever the subjects, is spontaneous and animated. Introductions over, and one notes that they are complete, each and every member of the group expressing his pleasure that a newcomer has honoured by his presence this little *familia* of Will Shakspeare, the late arrivals are given *quelque chose à boire*, for "here's yet some liquor left." Soon it is whispered about that "the Dean thinks it time for us to go in to dinner." (Savage 1952, 341)

Latin, French, and of course, Shakespeare, are the natural languages of the writer's affable narration. Everything else — from the pre-prandial cocktail to the "pleasure" expressed at the presence of guests, to the politely circulated call to "go in to dinner" — indicates the genteel flavor of the Society's proceedings in 1952. After dinner, and then cigars, the table is cleared and the Society "gets down to business." The Furness Variorum is brought out and "laid before the Dean," along with Kittredge and Dover Wilson, and members equip themselves with one or another edition of the evening's reading, according to their tastes. Reading and discussion, the centerpiece of the Society's meetings even today, occupy the remainder of the evening. Describing the conclusion of the discussion, Savage transforms the Dean into Touchstone, via Jacques:

Finally the Dean, with a glance at the timepiece on the mantel, "says very wisely, 'it is ten o'clock' ":

'Thus we may see,' quoth he, 'how the world wags.

'Tis but an hour ago since is was nine,

And after one hour more 'twill be eleven.' (*As You Like It*, Shakespeare 1997, 2.7.22-25)

There is a flourish of "decanal" gestures, and the Dean dismisses the session at the established hour of ten o'clock (342).

Writing for *Shakespeare Quarterly* in 1952, Savage had the difficult task of negotiating the right ethos for his audience. Obviously, he does not shy from embracing, even performing, the Society's heritage and legacy as a high-society, Oxbridge-style dinner club. But he is also

keenly aware that his account will invite dismissal: He anticipates that the early *Shakespeare Quarterly* readership will consider the club a "mere collection of gourmets or triflers," and he goes to great length, as the article continues, to demonstrate how seriously the Society regards its scholarly business. Taking up its academic pedigree and celebrating it alongside the social and fraternal pedigree, he offers a catalogue of former deans and a list of prestigious local campuses from which the Society draws its members and guests. Savage's concern is to present both society and scholarship as mutually informing and interdependent. What he sees in the Society is the harmonious complement of components in a formula the group has been perfecting since the first meeting of 1852.

Whether Savage was successful in persuading his 1952 audience is difficult to say. But *Shakespeare Quarterly* is an unlikely venue for another such retrospective, and *SQ* readers today are likely to dismiss the club based on its social format, regardless of whether they can be convinced of its scholarly seriousness. As I began researching this account for a meeting of a very different Shakespeare club — the Shakespeare Association of America (SAA) — my own inclination was to regard Savage's account with bemusement. As a mode of practicing Shakespeare, the Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia might well strike members of the SAA as outdated, preferring pleasure and veneration to critical inquiry and scholarship. Members of either group, in fact, are likely to see in the other group precisely what they themselves do *not* do when practicing Shakespeare: an opposition of polite, social, Shakespeare on the one hand, to serious, academic Shakespeare on the other. The two clubs slip into an easy polarity, particularly when placed in juxtaposition, where their differences crystallize, and where each acquires a homogeneity in negative definition against the other. Other Shakespeare clubs discussed in this cluster of essays do not invite so readily comparisons to academia. Because of its origins in "highbrow" Shakespeare, however, together with a history of academic membership and an interest in scholarship, accounts of the Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia tend to cast social activity and academic activity as competing practices. In the brief overview that follows here, I would like to trace this tendency through selected accounts and then consider its shortcomings as a model for describing the practice of Shakespeare today.

Early Years

Garrick Mallery, a founding member and the Society's first secretary, outlines the group's activities from 1851 to 1860. In the absence of earlier minutes or specific records, Mallery fixes the first "regular" meeting in October of 1852, "at the office of Mr. Fish, No. 6 Mercantile Library Building" (Mallery 1860, 4). The Society met weekly for readings, followed by "post-lecturean exercises . . . of the very slightest, consisting generally of a glass of ale at a hostel unknown to

fame . . . with the additional refection of the casual cracker and the exiguous cheese" (5). Each season, then as now, featured an annual dinner, originally held in December but eventually moved to April, to coincide with Shakespeare's birthday. Aiming at both a "regular social reunion to relieve severer duties" of the legal profession, and at something "so arranged that improvement of the mind should result," the Society has concerned itself since its inception with balancing refinements of the mind and refinements of the palate (4). If the plays were occasion for relief from the working week, the meetings were also a time for socializing, organized (more or less loosely) around eating and drinking.

How seriously the Society took its Shakespeare in the first six seasons is not entirely clear, but by 1856, the "post-lecturean exercises" had become "a regular institution," and the 1857-1858 season featured "an infinity of good eating and drinking, but an infinitesimal amount of Shakspeare, discussed" (Mallery 1860, 5, 8-9). Mallery laments the fact that Shakespeare was neglected, but he expresses no regret over the growth of the social component. Nonetheless, in the following season the Society made a concerted effort to attend to scholarly interests. Elections in 1858-1859 for Dean, Secretary, Treasurer, and a "Library Committee" suggest an emerging emphasis on seriousness and formality that registers even more clearly through 1859-1860: "during this year the regular and systematic study of the Poet was not only pursued without deviation, but also reduced to writing for future reference" (11). Before the conclusion of the spring of 1860, "it was also resolved, that the members should be expected to write papers on subjects connected with the purposes of the Society, and read them at the meetings; also that the papers so read should be printed for general use" (11).

This inclination toward formal study reached an early peak in 1864-1865, when the Society chronicled its reading of *The Tempest* with a line-by-line inventory, which it printed at regular intervals for the use of the members. Richard Ashhurst, whose history of the Society picks up where Mallery's leaves off, calls it "a brilliant year in the Society's annals in every respect" (Ashhurst 1898, 10). A "Prologue" to the year's printed minutes begins:

In the winter of 1864-65, we first had in our history as a Society, the material for a thorough study of Shakspeare. Booth's Reprint and Howard Staunton's Photolithograph, had placed in our hands to all intents and purposes the folio of 1623.

It then became apparent that to secure all the advantages of combined study, some means must be adopted of retaining in a permanent form the criticisms and suggestions called forth at each meeting. Accordingly, it was decided to print them, whereby not only whatever might be gained, whether much or little, would be rendered permanent; but incidentally

the benefit, not to be despised, accruing from the practice of accuracy of expression and clearness of thought, the prime necessity of which would thus make itself deeply felt. (Shakspere Society of Philadelphia 1898, vii)³

The scope and scholarly bent of the season's records are impressive. The minutes open with several pages of bibliographic entries, cataloguing printed versions of *The Tempest*, and related scholarship, from the First Folio all the way through to the minutes themselves. The final four entries suggest the tenor of the document:

1864.] H. C. Notes and Queries, vol. Vi, p. 202, 3d Ser. On the Origin of The Tempest; an article tracing The Tempest to the Oriental story of "Rama."

1865.] HUNTER. Shakespeare's Play of The Tempest, with Bibliographical Preface, Selected Criticisms, and Explanatory Notes. Adapted for use in schools and for private study, by the Rev. John Hunter, M.A. London, 12mo.

1865.] COHN, A. Shakespeare in Germany in the XVI. and XVII. Centuries. Lond. 4to. Part II. Contains the comedy of "The Beautiful Sidea," by Jacob Ayrrer, of Nuremberg, 1595 : "the only drama extant which points to the plot of The Tempest." See The Athenaeum for March 25, 1865, p. 417.

1866.] SHAKSPERE SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA. Notes of Studies on The Tempest. 60 copies, privately printed. Phila. Folio. (Shakspere Society of Philadelphia 1866, xi)

Important editions are assigned by the Dean to specific members, and the Society begins its study with a discussion of the date of the play. Several theories (including G. K. Hunter's and Edmond Malone's) are considered in detail, after which a reading of the play is "systematically entered upon" (4). The entries that chart this systematic reading have the air and flavor of variorum accounts. Of the opening word "Boafswain," the minutes note that "attention was called to the various modes of *spelling* this word in the First Folio, and its Etymology stated." The second line passes without remark, but the members consider the third — "Good; speak to the mariners — fall to't yarely" — carefully:

as to the word good, its ordinary interpretation of "good cheer" found advocates. Dyce's interpretation of "good sir, or good friend," was not received with favour. (a) Cf. Dyce's Sh., vol. iI, p. 237, 2 Ed.D ; Walker's Crit. Ex., vol ii, p. 18. (b) Add to Warton's note in Var. other examples of "yare" (Shakspere Society of Philadelphia 1866, 4)

Several Shakespearean instances of "yare" follow. The study is indeed "systematic," careful, thorough, and sometimes exhaustive, consisting primarily of glossing and annotation. Particularly in the context of the mid-nineteenth century, the Society's procedure is academic, in part because its membership, which now included Horace Howard Furness, was academic, and its business inevitably reflected that of its members. Of the 1866-1867 season, Ashhurst remarks, "perhaps we may flatter ourselves that this year's reading of *Romeo and Juliet* may have had a direct effect, perhaps been *causa efficiens*, in guiding the mind of Dr. Furness to select *Romeo and Juliet* as the first play to be discussed in the 'New Variorum'" (Ashhurst 1898, 12).

Despite the blossoming of serious study, there is no suggestion that the post-lecturean refreshments suffered. When the social component did wane, it was a reflection of politics and the national mood, rather than a struggle with scholarship for the Society's attention. The Civil War and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln had a particularly sobering effect, and the 1865 dinner was cancelled, the minutes noting that "we were Americans before we were Shakspeareans" (Ashhurst 1898, 10). For the remainder of the decade, "plain living and high thinking, frugality and sobriety, were the order of the night" (13). The group gave up its rented room and held meetings at a member's house; annual dinners were omitted, and even "the slight refection following our labors was first reduced to a meagre *régime* of tea and crackers, and then altogether discontinued" (13). Ashhurst is conscious of the contrast with the levity of the previous decade and notes that as the Society had then "barely escaped dying of a plurisy, in its Shakspearean sense, of a too much," it now faced the danger of the opposite extreme (13). The "work" of the members continued to be high quality, but "the spirit somehow was lacking":

And when we entered the old, dark corridors to go to the rather dimly-lighted lecture room, and after two or three hours' work went down the old, dark entry again to go out into the night, it seemed too much like going to school again to be genial or pleasant; and some of us, then younger members, feeling our virtue was not adequate for another such year, formed a conspiracy for the restoration of the old order of things, which proved successful, the Dean himself coming over to our views and deserting the part of the ascetics. (14)

The Society thus established scholarship and fellowship as complements, rather than competitors, and it maintained each, not at the expense, but for the benefit, of the other. This relationship is nicely inscribed on the bills of fare for the annual dinners, which take infinite delight in weaving quotations from the plays into the evening's scheduled proceedings. It is accordingly tempting to understand the Society's consumption of Shakespeare as the intellectual counterpart to its consumption of fine food and drink: terrapin for the palate, and *The Tempest* for the intellect. But the

Society, particularly in its early years, understood itself not merely as an attempt to nourish the mind while it fostered fraternity; it was also contributing to the academic understanding of Shakespeare. Recall that the last entry in the group's *Tempest* bibliography is for the minutes themselves. The Society's work, with an emphasis on glossing, collating, and annotating, was scholarship in and of itself, and while the careful study set down in those minutes was printed for the benefit of the Society's own members, that membership did work at the same table, and in the same terms, as the editor of the *New Variorum*. Indeed, as late as 1952, when member Henry Savage set about writing a centenary retrospective, he invited the readership of *Shakespeare Quarterly* to imagine itself at a Society meeting: "Let me describe for the reader a dinner of the Philadelphia Shakspeare Society. I should really prefer to have him beside me as my guest for eating, drinking, and talking by proxy is an unsatisfactory business" (Savage 1952, 341). Savage effectively opens up the Society's dining table, and its discussion of Shakespeare, to the Shakespeare scholarship industry.

Again, the polarities of Society and scholarship are not so much in balance as they are in tandem: both are necessary if either is to flourish. But they remain the organizing principle on which the account is structured, and a description of the Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia today shows the club still negotiating a balance of the two components, academic and social. Comprising thirty-five members from various backgrounds and professions, it is "a mix," in the words of a current member, "of serious academics, social bluebloods and amateur aficionados."⁴ It is lead by a Dean, "typically a society type," and a Vice Dean, "the more academic," the first presiding over the meetings generally and the second over the reading and discussion (Shakspeare Society, 2006b). Every other Wednesday evening, members gather at a small, historic Philadelphia literary club for evening cocktails, followed by dinner and reading. The Society covers between one and three plays a season, together with selected poetry, as determined at the close of the previous year. Parts are not allotted; speeches are read in order around the table, with discussion at the end of each scene or as occasion arises. An annual banquet, hosted on or near April 23, follows the format established in the Society's early years, with a formal menu annotated and adorned with quotations from the season's plays.

The Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia Today

I attended a meeting of the society, as a guest, in October of 2006. My host, a former county commissioner turned political activist, has been a member for thirty-two years, though he attended meetings as a guest even earlier. We arrive at the club just after 6:00, and he introduces me to the current Dean, Phillip H. Wagner, and to a good dozen or so of the twenty members present this evening. This is the second consecutive meeting with over twenty in attendance, including guests,

and the tables are cramped with place settings. The serving staff circulate from group to group, carrying appetizers on platters as a few late arrivals trickle in. A large table laden with cocktail makings stands near the entrance. Members pour their own drinks and record them on a clipboard.

Some forty-five minutes after the gathering begins, the Dean announces that it is time to take places at the table and start with the meal. Guests are introduced, and the Dean makes opening remarks. In two weeks' time, he notes, the Society will welcome an invited speaker, a local Shakespearean and established senior scholar who will talk with the Society about film versions of *Hamlet*. The Dean notes also that the Society will be featured, briefly, in an upcoming radio documentary special on Shakespeare.⁵

I am seated to the right of the Dean, and another guest sits to his left. I talk with the members at the end of our table, one of whom is a retired professor of History from Philadelphia's Main Line and friend of a colleague on my own campus. In many ways, the experience is indistinguishable from the account given by Henry Savage in his 1952 retrospective. There are no cigars this evening, and the Furness Variorum, if present, remains on the shelf. Any number of other inflections specific to 1952 have given way to newer practices. Still, the working model appears to have changed little since the days of Henry Savage, and indeed, little since the Society's founding in 1851.

Certainly, the Society's "business" is still reading Shakespeare, which this evening begins where the Society had left off two weeks before, after Hamlet's first soliloquy in act 1, scene 2. The Society's library contains several different editions of the play, but most members have brought their own copies. It is immediately apparent in the reading that the Society is accustomed to managing different texts and different lineations, and the minutes to the previous meeting note that the Vice Dean has offered an overview of the textual issues with the play. We pause at the end of the scene, and the Vice Dean observes that Horatio appears to take cues from Hamlet in referring to the ghost either as "it" or as "he." Introducing the next scene, act 1 scene 4, the Vice Dean refers to Aristotle's theory of tragedy as a context in which to understand Hamlet's comments on the "vicious mole of nature" that spoils virtues otherwise "as pure as grace" (Shakespeare 2006, 1.4.24, 33).⁶ The discussion is formal and generally serious, though not without stretches of humor; the register is not particularly academic, though the tone is scholarly. Anyone familiar with a literature classroom would recognize the conventions of close reading and careful explication. For glosses and annotations, the Society relies today on footnotes, and on its small cadre of academics, though it does not always defer to them. There is a regard for historically-informed commentary and for skill in literary parsing. Poetry is celebrated, but the appreciation stops short of outright

Bardolatry. Different members bring different backgrounds to the table, and the result is a lively, lettered discussion.

As we make our way through act 1 scene 5, a member several seats to my left reads the twenty-odd lines of "I am thy father's spirit" slowly and deliberately, relishing the poetry but also employing a hint of camp. "List, list, O list," he intones, dramatically, drawing out the final syllables of his speech: "If thou didst ever thy dear . . . father . . . love —" The next reader jumps on Hamlet's short interjection, "O God!," infusing it with appropriate sarcasm by way of response. The tables erupt in sustained laughter.

It is with this laughter in mind that the current Dean, in an unofficial profile, describes the club as meeting "to enjoy and celebrate the works of Shakespeare in truly informal fashion."⁷ On one level, the phrase "truly informal" works to separate the Society from a more academic Shakespeare, as practiced by the academy. Historically, the Society has been by no means short of professional academics. Its current Vice Dean, Professor Robert Fallon, is professor emeritus of English Literature at a local university who has published widely on Shakespeare and Milton. His predecessor was Professor Roland Mushat Frye, of the University of Pennsylvania, and the Vice Dean before Frye was Professor Matthias Shaaber, a former editor of the *Pelican Shakespeare*. The list of academic leadership stretches back through Horace Howard Furness, Sr. and Jr. As the Society considers the successor to its current Vice Dean, it will seek someone with the academic background necessary for the "formidable task of leading our discussions." It will be wary, however, of the "ideological hobby horses" that dominate the ranks of campus academics today.⁸ While the club continues to recognize a need for academic leadership (it still solicits active scholars as invited guests), it does not wish to complicate or disturb its established model by taking on the concerns that occupy its professional counterpart.

The phrase "truly informal" also distinguishes the Society from a procedural rigidity evident in the volumes of minutes from the club's past. "Of greatest significance," the Dean's profile notes, "we believe ourselves to be the oldest Shakespeare Society in continuous existence in the English-speaking world" (Shakespeare Society, 2006a). This claim could be advanced aggressively: it has been carefully documented and is historically sound. But instead, the Society offers the claim casually, even amicably, which, together with the phrase "truly informal," suggests something about the Society's regard for its own heritage. If it is unconcerned to present itself as an academic enterprise, and if the Society wants to avoid the extra-literary agendas that distract from the poetry of the plays, it does not regard itself merely as a present-day echo of its 150-year legacy. There is focused, genuine interest in reading and re-reading Shakespeare today, deriving from a

straightforward investment in literary merit: "One season we might read *Coriolanus*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Henry VIII*, for all their variety; the next, *Hamlet* alone, for all its intensity. An inscrutable sort of 'democratic' process determines this slate" (Shakspere Society, 2006a). The society lives very much in the present, employing the machinery of its heritage and remaining attentive to its academic history, but occupied ultimately with Shakespeare.

Conclusion

Henry Savage observed the dangers facing the Philadelphia Shakspere Society in 1952 — that it would "become a place where pedantic professors wrangle over textual minutiae" and bore the poetry lovers looking for "relief from the drabness of a financial or legal career," or that it would "become a pleasant dining-club" with high society types more interested in the dinner than Shakespeare (Savage 1952, 350). The growth of academic Shakespeare through the twentieth century has led to such specialization and sub-specialization that ordinary, close-reading interest in the plays as texts is confined to lower-division undergraduate classrooms. Scholarship is increasingly competitive and increasingly sophisticated, addressing minutiae and abstractions and contextual ephemera of little interest to the non-matriculating world. The Society welcomes academics, but it no longer presents papers as part of its seasons, and it has no interest in pursuing Savage's attempt to push serious scholarship in a model built on high society. Conversely, professors of Shakespeare, whether more or less pedantic than they were half a century ago, would probably see in the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia the "pleasant dining club" scenario that Savage saw as Scylla to the academic Charybdis.

The differences between the academy and the Society are not illusory, and it is not my object here to challenge the boundaries that separate them today. We could look closely at the social component of the annual Shakespeare Association of America meeting and make an argument about the degree to which "academic" Shakespeare also depends on social interaction and on gustatory pleasures to supplement scholarship. We could recognize the subtle hierarchies that permeate the structure and the activities of the SAA today, and we could certainly do more to acknowledge, explicitly, its complex network of "canons" and "unwritten rules," as Ashhurst might call them, for membership in any academic Shakespeare club is no less a matter of tradition, of formalities, and of socio-intellectual circumspections than is membership in the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia. But revealing the practices of one society in the workings of the other will do little more than reinscribe the polarities we have been using to talk about modes of practicing Shakespeare.

Polarities of one sort or another have dominated accounts of different Shakespeares through the twentieth century. Lawrence Levine outlined the most basic of these, "highbrow" and "lowbrow," in his 1986 study, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. According to Levine, the binary model is a product of the nineteenth century, when highbrow and lowbrow emerged as the principal modes of consuming not only Shakespeare, but also music and art generally. Museums, theaters, opera houses, music halls — all the spaces in which artistic instances of culture could be viewed, staged, performed, sung, or otherwise produced and consumed gradually separated into popular on the one hand, and elite on the other. The Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia is the perfect case study for "highbrow" Shakespeare: educated, typically affluent men consuming the plays and poetry either as a rich cultural supplement to their professional lives, or, increasingly, as an exercise of their profession itself. And the rise of the academy, of course, is an effect of the high/low division, which elevated literature to the status of high culture and which created the framework in which both were to be studied as academic disciplines. English departments still serve as arbiters of culture, even as they work to reconfigure the canon and the approaches we take to studying it.

Because of these common origins, the terms "highbrow" and "lowbrow" are inadequate for situating the Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia vis-à-vis professional scholarship. But the polarities that have taken their place — variations on "academic" versus "social" — are also inadequate because they are incomplete and, inevitably, reductive. We would need to supplement these basic distinctions with any number of additional distinctions, also rendered as polarities (professional versus amateur, serious versus casual, political versus aesthetic, blue-collar versus white-collar). Exhaustive as a cumulative list might be, though, it would never be complete, and it would always require ignoring the overlap, sometimes significant, which allows members of one group to share a given status with the other. Perhaps more to the point, such binaries are more likely to bring about the conceptual framework they attempt to describe than they are to reveal structures already at work.

If it still makes sense to recognize that the Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia is very different from the SAA, a model based on society versus scholarship is increasingly less useful. The range of "Shakespeares" being practiced today, in film, art, music, academia, popular culture, and high society, on listservs, in prisons, and by corporations — the list goes on — has exceeded the capacity of binary models.⁹ The preponderance of new terms to account for modes of practicing Shakespeare, from "Shakespop" to "Schlockspeare" to "shakespace," mark the academy's frustration with "highbrow" and "lowbrow" in particular.¹⁰ Richard Burt

and Douglas Lanier have argued that academics need take "schlock" or "kitsch" Shakespeare seriously.¹¹ Burt argues further that Shakespeare's "heterogeneous cultural presence" today is so complex, so fragmented and segmented, that maintaining the division between "dialogical" and "postdialogical," between "hermeneutic" and "posthermeneutic," is increasingly impossible (Burt 2002, 12).

Most of the calls to do away with "simply drawn binary oppositions" (Burt 2002, 5) that polarize different models of Shakespeare consumption and production are directed at high versus low. But as this distinction gives way to less totalizing schematics, the divisions within highbrow will also become outmoded. Consumers of Shakespeare today cannot comfortably be confined into any one group or another. They are multiply constituted, as diverse as the different Shakespeares they perform and consume. As Shakespeare proliferates into more and more Shakespeares, the people who practice them become less and less fixed and rooted, local not to one practice or another but dispersed among many.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia for their kindness and graciousness in entertaining me over the course of this research. I would also like to thank Kathy Rowe, Kristen Poole, Edmund Campos, Jamie Taylor, and Zachary Lesser for their timely and helpful feedback on drafts. Henry Savage suggests that the founders "must have known of the famous 'Cambridge Apostles' . . . and possibly borrowed their initial sobriquet from that more pretentious group" (1952, 343). Garrick Mallery, the Society's first historian, does not mention the Cambridge group, though he does link the word "apostles" to the group's attempts to "keep the sacred number [of twelve] at least in appearance full" at the annual dinner (Ashhurst 1898, 6). Surprisingly, neither account mentions the "Shakspeare" spelling, but the Society links itself to the "orthodox faith," accepting William Shakespeare of Stratford as the author of the plays and poetry (4-6).
2. The Society has recently reconsidered the policy, though it has not yet decided to admit female members.
3. Minutes to the 1864-1865 season are available in manuscript format (Shakspeare Society of Philadelphia 1863-1877, vol. 3) but were also printed privately for the society, in a revised and augmented format. I cite here the printed version of 1866.
4. I quote here from an email exchange from February of 2005. For simplicity's sake, I have elected to withhold the names of current members, with the exception of the Dean and Vice Dean.

5. The radio documentary, *Shakespeare in American Life*, will be broadcast by Public Radio International, beginning in April 2007. Produced by Richard Paul and narrated by Sam Waterston. For more information: <http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=2233>
6. Quotations from *Hamlet* follow the 2006 Arden edition.
7. I quote from "About Us: An Unofficial Profile of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia," provided by the the Society's Dean, Philip H. Wagner. See Shakspere Society of Philadelphia, 2006a.
8. Quoted with permission from the minutes of the meeting of the Shakspere Society of Philadelphia, October 11, 2006. See Shakspere Society, 2006b.
9. On Shakespeare and corporations, see Hedrick 2002 and Lanier 2002b. On Shakespeare and prisons, see *Shakespeare Behind Bars* (2005), and "Act V," *This American Life* episode 218 (2002). On Shakespeare and film, see *Shakespeare, the Movie* (1997); *Shakespeare, the Movie, II* (2003); and Burt 1998.
10. On "Shakespop," see Lanier 2002a (especially Chapter 1); on "Schlockspeare," see Burt 2002. On "Shakespace," see Hedrick and Reynolds 2000.
11. See Burt 2002 and Lanier 2002a.

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