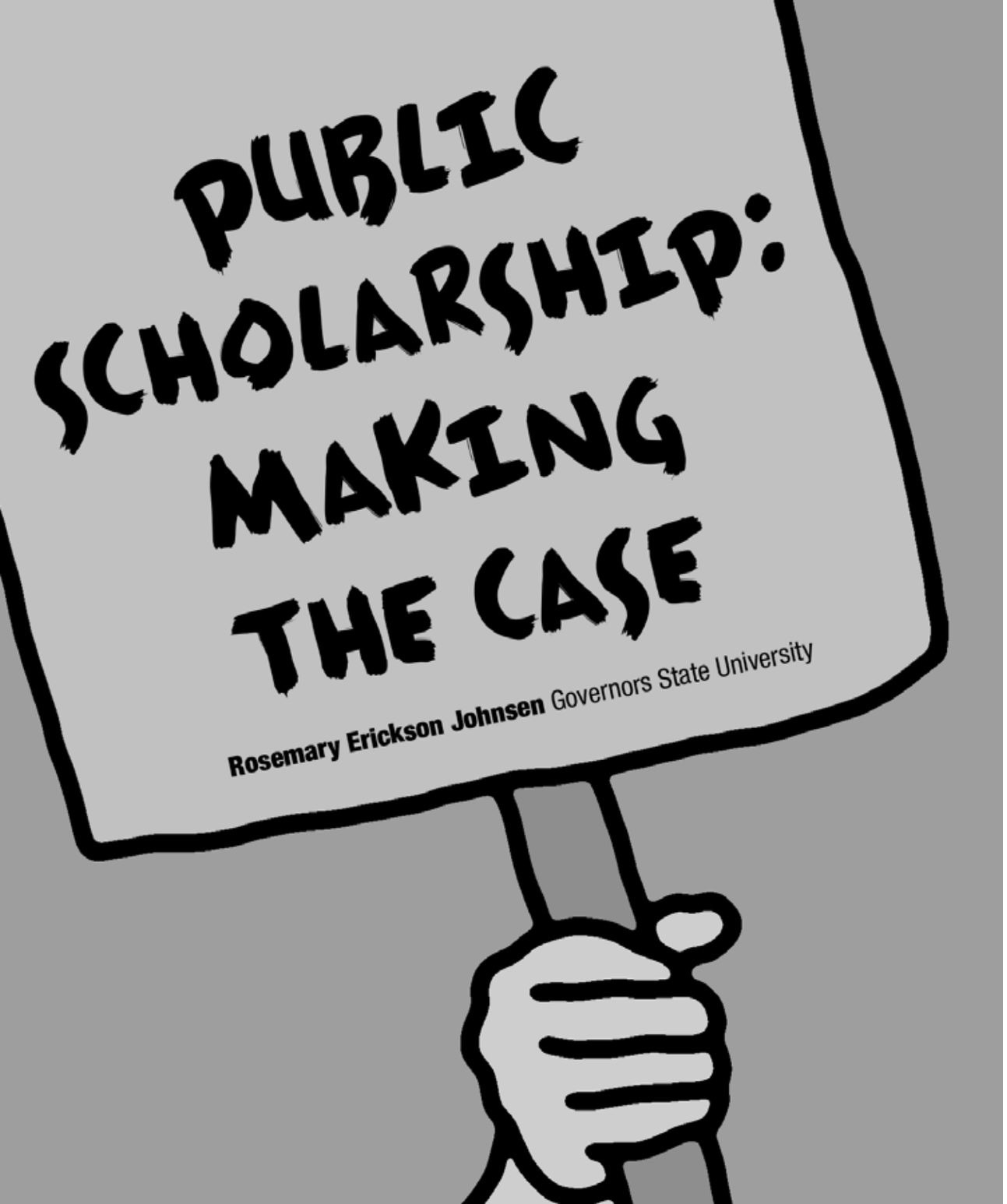

ON DECEMBER 1, 2014, the National Endowment for the Humanities announced the creation of its Public Scholar grant program as one component of a new NEH-wide initiative, "The Common Good: The Humanities in the Public Square." NEH Chairman William D. Adams says the new grant program aims "to challenge humanities scholars to think creatively about how specialized research can benefit a wider public" ("NEH creates"). This grant program is a sign of the times. It is also a welcome development in a context in which the role of the humanities in higher education has been under fire, and faculty members need to find ways to engage interested parties in the broader community. In undertaking public scholarship, we draw on our disciplinary expertise to connect with others beyond our campuses and disciplinary enclaves, and we engage in a multi-directional exchange of ideas. Never has it been more urgent for academics in language and literature fields to make the case for the value of what we do, and public scholarship should be central to these efforts.

One way to track growing awareness of these public challenges, and to consider our role as teachers and scholars in formulating possible solutions, is to note their presence in the MLA conventions since 2011, the first convention on the new January schedule (a change that itself reflects new realities for language and literature faculty). The 2011 convention kicked off with an opening day of panels and workshops dedicated to the theme "The Academy in Hard Times." Russell Berman's presidential address to the 2012 convention called for "robust advocacy by MLA members in the face of cultural and political resistance to the MLA's core mission" ("Session Details"). The MLA president's theme for the 2013 convention was "Avenues of Access," which included scholarly communications as a major subheading, while MLA 2014 had a presidential theme of "Vulnerable Times." The 2015 convention features a fee-paying registration workshop, "Talking with Our Publics: Engagement and Accountability," about "communicating our work with two kinds of publics—the

media and a general, nonspecialist audience" ("Convention"). The profession is under pressure, and workforce issues are becoming of necessity one of our subjects. In recent years, conferences and publications of the MLA and the regional MLAs have addressed not only the scholarly subjects of members, but, increasingly, the circumstances under which we pursue that scholarship. Public scholarship is one channel for academics in MLA fields to advocate for our disciplines, as well as for our work as scholars and teachers. A foundational working definition is provided by Imagining America: public scholarship is "scholarly or creative activity that encompasses different forms of making knowledge about, for, and with diverse publics and communities. Through a coherent, purposeful sequence of activities, public scholarship contributes to the public good and yields artifacts of public and intellectual value" (Ellison and Eatman). The nature of public scholarship —what it is, or could be—is a subject we should engage both intellectually and practically, and this case study joins other efforts to do just that.

Relying upon a case study, a description of my own experience serving as a scholar for a Chicago-area professional theatre, this essay looks in two directions, back to campus and out towards the community. In it, I present strategies for convincing on-campus reviewers of the proper credit due to public scholarship, and I argue that public scholarship is a vital component in our efforts to engage the support of those outside the universities. This case study contributes to the growing conversation on public scholarship in some ways characteristic to that relatively young field, by asking questions and relying upon an experiential knowledge base. The first section is a description of my recent engagement with public scholarship; in this section, I offer some suggestions for how to identify or create similar opportunities. Then I turn to the pragmatic challenge of receiving appropriate credit for this work by campus evaluators, framing my own experience in recent work on public scholarship. The concluding section examines some of the implications of the case study, ethical and practical, and advocates for faculty engagement in public scholarship.

Public Scholarship: One Case Study

I am an associate professor at a regional master's institution located just outside the Chicago metropolitan area. The university's primary focus is on teaching, although research expectations have been rising steadily for the past ten years. Pertinent to my efforts in public scholarship, the university's mission includes the principle that it is "is dedicated to creating an intellectually stimulating public square" for the region. This case study concerns work I did for Lookingglass Theatre in downtown Chicago. Lookingglass is an important Chicagoland theatre company with a national reputation, as evinced by its 2011 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, and it continues to build its national reputation for ensemble-based theatrical excellence. I have served as the designated scholar for four productions at Lookingglass Theatre: *Our Town* (1938) in the 2008 to 2009 season; two plays in the 2010 to 2011 season, Amanda Dehnert's new version of *Peter Pan* (2010) and Laura Eason's adaptation of *Ethan Frome* (2011); and, most recently, the final play in the 2012 to 2013 season, Keith Huff's *Big Lake Big City* (2013). I was selected for the first three based on my expertise in early twentieth-century English and American literature; *Big Lake Big City* connects with my scholarly credentials in crime fiction and coincides with my current research.

The program in which I participated is an ongoing collaboration between two Chicago-area nonprofits: the Raven Foundation (based in Glenview, Illinois) and Lookingglass Theatre Company. Raven provides the scholar, who is given advance access to the script and the dramaturgical materials used in rehearsal, and then contributes to framing the show in several ways. The scholar writes a 1,000- to 1,500-word essay for Lookingglass Theatre that forms part of the study guide; for *Big Lake Big City*, my essay was posted directly on the theatre's main webpage. The scholar also takes part in a post-performance discussion with cast members and others—for example, the *Ethan Frome* discussion included Laura Eason, the author of the adaptation—at a designated Saturday matinee performance. The final piece of the scholar's contribution is the preparation and delivery of a 60-minute pre-show lecture, which is followed by a Q&A session. Each lecture has a topical focus chosen by the scholar: it is not a review or a summary, but a critical engagement with some aspect of the play. Most recently, for example, I focused my lecture on crime fiction's historical interconnections among print and other media (radio, stage, television, film) and the development of the American hardboiled subgenre. Public engagement with all of these activities is promoted through the efforts of both the Raven Foundation and Lookingglass, using their websites, social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and a program insert at the designated performance. The study guide is disseminated through Raven and Lookingglass's websites, and an audio recording of the lecture is available through WBEZ, Chicago Amplified. This engagement in public scholarship thus produces artifacts that extend well beyond my performance on the day of the show.

My own outcomes thus include post-performance talking points, the hour-long lecture, and the study guide essay, each of which requires a different kind of preparation; likewise, each of these products is geared to a slightly different audience, and requires an appropriately adjusted presentation of scholarly knowledge. I use the essays to provide biographical and critical context for the play, suggest some interpretive possibilities, and offer a brief bibliography for those interested in learning more. The research that contributes directly to the lecture may inform the study guide essay, but with only selective inclusion in the text and "suggestions for further reading," while some of the sources I include in the essay are more introductory than would be suitable for the lecture. To compare these products to my work within the profession, the essay relies upon and represents the kind of broad-based scholarly preparation that contributes to curricular design and course planning, shaped by my individual understanding of a body of knowledge, while the pre-show lecture matches the critical impetus and focus of a conference presentation or article. All of these are shaped and delivered with an audience awareness developed through my experience in classroom teaching, community service, and scholarly dissemination.

Lookingglass Theatre values and promotes the work done by the scholar, according to its director of marketing, Erik Schroeder:

> The scholarly essay is a centerpiece for our study guide and is a resource for our audience, educators and our artistic staff. We share this essay with our subscribers before they see the show, and it enriches their experience at Lookingglass. The scholars function as "outside eyes" in this collaboration. They read the script and…share unique insights with our patrons. (Schroeder email)

The significance of this work is underscored by the multiple uses to which Lookingglass puts it: the study guide's scholarly essay informs not only educators, but also the theatre audience and, notably, the theatre's artistic staff. The scholar's work is disseminated to the public in a variety of ways, going beyond the promotional efforts of the partners, to include campus recognition and even news coverage. My university's public relations office has sent a representative to the theatre and featured photos in the campus newsletter, recognizing my efforts and promoting it beyond campus. In connection with

my work on *Our Town*, for example, the *Southtown Star* published a full-page profile, including information about the play and also my work as a faculty member and my experience leading study abroad programs for my alma mater. (The *Southtown Star* is the *Chicago Sun-Times*' news outlet for the Chicago Southland, with a circulation of over 57,000.) This broad dissemination of the scholar's work is important in making the case on campus and also in forging connections with the public, issues I take up in the following section.

For those who are not already engaged in public scholarship but would like to find opportunities in their own communities, here are some strategies for identifying existing opportunities or creating them if they do not already exist. These suggestions come from my engagement with public scholarship and/or reflect advice shared with me by those experienced in promoting the arts (Junius interview; Schroeder email).

- Welcome, rather than resist, popular currency for your scholarly subjects. As a recent review-essay notes, "too much is never enough" when it comes to Jane Austen, for example (Wyett 455). Scholars in previously ignored Scandinavian language and literature fields know what happens when popularity arrives—even if contemporary crime fiction has little to do with their academic specialties. Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003) offered opportunities for medievalists to turn their backs in disgust on his inaccuracies and melodrama, or to join the conversation. These crossover sites provide fertile ground for public scholarship.
- Connect your expertise with pre-existing observances, whether one-day events (such as Women's Equality Day) or more extended observances (such as Black History Month). These kinds of events, whether local or national, one-time or recurring, create a need on the part of community organizations and other non-profits for quality programming.
- Work in conjunction with local libraries. Many library presentations by faculty members are appropriately categorized as community service, but libraries are often seeking opportunities for more substantial, high-quality programming. Use the Cantor and Lavine criteria (discussed in the next section) to think through what you can offer, and think creatively about how the library might be a third partner with another local organization or your university.
- Think about how to use radio, particularly public radio, to add another dimension to your public scholarship. For example, when I did a small study with girls several years ago, "Hystory Girls: Today's Girls Reading Historical Fiction," I made an appearance on the local public radio affiliate morning show to speak about the project, the girls' reading, and the AAUW-sponsored public program we were presenting as part of Women's History Month celebrations. (The results of that project were published as part of my first scholarly monograph, offering more evidence that public scholarship is qualitatively different from community service.)
- Tweet! Use twitter to develop a presence for yourself as an interesting scholarly voice.
- Seek out local nonprofit organizations that rely on regional talent, for financial or other reasons. Some arts organizations have large budgets to bring in speakers—scholarly or not—but many do not. Within the latter group, identify those that are not overly conventional: who might be open to try something new? You can make a direct approach, indicating how you are prepared to adapt your scholar's knowledge to provide insight for their patrons.
- Look for intermediaries. The intermediary serves a valuable role in vouching for your scholarly expertise and suitability for the project. The best intermediaries are those with missions that align with the goals of public scholarship and have some connection to your disciplinary expertise; you will have come across them in your service, professional, and personal community activities, but may not have thought of them in this capacity. Who are you meeting at the gallery openings, theatre performances, or literary events? Which organizations are sponsoring events connected to your expertise? In my case, the Raven Foundation was a key intermediary.
- Don't overlook people and/or offices at your institution with off-campus missions, regardless of whether those missions are driven by educational, community relations, or money-raising functions: consider how public relations, advisory boards for the arts and other cultural entities, or alumni relations might be able to make useful connections for your scholarly expertise. While it is true they are "rarely affiliated with an academic department, which is the unit that holds the real power on campus" (Jay 58), these offices have a vested interest in getting their faculty engaged in the community, and you can shape the nature of your commitment to underscore its bona fides as public scholarship.

Making the Case on Campus

Public scholarship, unlike the dissemination of research through traditional publishing outlets, challenges scholars to make their own case for receiving appropriate credit for such work by on-campus evaluators. Growing awareness of the role of public scholarship and the deliberate development of best practices may change this fact; in the meantime, unfortunately, Kathleen Woodward's observation that public scholarship is "dismissed under the demoralizing rubric of service or the paternalistic rubric of outreach" is all too accurate (110). My experience persuading campus evaluators that public scholarship is not a self-aggrandizing descriptor for community service has been fairly successful. I was granted tenure and promotion on a portfolio that included the first instance of this public scholarship engagement, and I have found that my explanations have had a cumulative effect, necessitating less explanation—and justification—in subsequent annual activity reports.

From the outset, I have relied on three basic strategies. One that appeals directly to administrative priorities is showing connections between campus initiatives and my theatre-related public scholarship, demonstrating how what I do in my role as public scholar qualifies me for participation in planning outside my department. This strategy was shaped in keeping with the "public square" part of my university's mission and led to service and curricular planning; for faculty on other campuses seeking credit for public scholarship, connections to teaching may be the best route to take. In my case, the top-level administration was pleased when the university was awarded grants recently from the Chicago Community Trust for a series of "One More Night" performances on campus by Chicago theatre companies, and any visibility for the university's faculty in Chicago theatre is welcomed. When I first started including this work in my annual activity report, I showed the connections between my public scholarship and university service that the administration values. As a result of this increased visibility, I served on the search committee for a new director for the university's Center for Performing Arts, was asked to help in developing a new minor in Theatre and Performance Studies, and was appointed the first-ever faculty representative to the advisory board of the Center for Performing Arts. The addition of a faculty representative to the advisory board has outlasted my individual service in that role, and connections between academic programs and the Center continue to grow. On the one hand, what I

am describing represents more service work for me. Nonetheless, it is quality service related to my scholarship, and it reflects the mutually beneficial nature of public-scholarship engagements. Furthermore, it benefits the university to have someone invested and informed contributing to group efforts in these areas, and it also enhances faculty representation.

I have also tackled this challenge by making my own case for the value of public scholarship by incorporating into my annual review the material I produced for the project, as well as by drawing on the supporting comments of professionals at the Raven Foundation and Lookingglass Theatre. Most of these arguments are intended to draw a line between public scholarship and more service-oriented presentation and publication. My approach is in keeping with Gregory Jay's admonition: "Do not cede the ground of 'research' or 'scholarship' to others. Do not argue that engagement should be valued equally with research and scholarship: Show that engagement IS research and scholarship, though it is also so much more" (58). The materials I produce for this public scholarship engagement are not simply introductory or summary in nature, I argue, as demonstrated by the essay and lecture texts. The Raven Foundation's marketing director supports that claim, observing that "those who attend the pre-show lectures see a different play than everyone else" (Junius interview). The scholars who contribute to this project make an active contribution not just to the theatregoers, but also to Lookingglass Theatre itself by creating an additional level of discourse around its work, providing scholarly affirmation of the Theatre's mission and its core values of collaboration, transformation, and invention. Part of my task in the campus evaluation process has been to demonstrate the level of scholarly expertise needed to engage in these activities. Claims of public scholarship should be supported by evidence of an *original* contribution by the scholar, and Schroeder's statement that the scholars "share unique insights with our patrons," quoted earlier, provides an external validation of this claim. While the materials generated by this instance of public scholarship are used to promote participation, I have been able to demonstrate that my work has not been uncritical adulation. For each play, I have provided an independent, scholarly stance, which has been critical where appropriate. For example, my pre-show lecture included a feminist critique of the *Peter Pan* adaptation Lookingglass was staging, noting that while the racist treatment of the "redskins" in Barrie's original play was altered and the pirates received an update, the sexism remained and was even re-emphasized by certain choices of the adapter.

Finally, I have situated my work for the theatre in the larger context provided by the growing body of work on public scholarship, using that work to address potential concerns about "dumbing down" and the importance of peer review. To speak successfully to non-scholarly audiences, one need not diminish the complexity of the ideas or the significance of the information. As Katharyne Mitchell notes in her introduction to *Practising Public Scholarship*, "I have both spoken and written for audiences outside of a university setting. In just about every situation that I can recall, I have radically changed my language, including the vocabulary and even grammatical structure of my sentences. But I have retained most, if not all, of the content, and in a number of cases, I have felt that editorial suggestions made my writing crisper and stronger than the original draft" (2). I have found that reservations arising from traditional reliance on peer review are best addressed through citation of existing scholarship on public scholarship itself, which provides support for broadening the form of review we should recognize. Gregory Jay's question, "who are the peers in publicly engaged scholarship?" (62), does not yet have a clear answer although, as Cantor and Lavine note, "we are also looking for a broader definition of 'peer' in 'peer review,' to include recognized nonacademic leaders in public scholarship and public-art making. Capable reviewers may be found in museums, theaters, public education, nongovernmental organizations, and libraries" (B20). Because of the transitional state of recognition for public scholarship *as* scholarship, this broader form of peer review demands "a set of criteria, benchmarks, and methods of assessment not yet in place" (Jay 62). Given this context, I have argued that public dissemination—like the web-based Lookingglass distribution of essays on the plays—ensures strict review by the sponsoring entity. It is different from scholarly peer review, but it is rigorous. This is certainly true of an ensemble-based theatre company such as Lookingglass, where some ensemble members serve as directors, several are playwrights and adapters, and all take on cast and/or crew roles in various productions. The ensemble's long-term commitment to Lookingglass means that any scholar who provides material for them should expect to have that work scrutinized.

How can faculty members engaging in public scholarship define it with sufficient clarity to persuade on-campus evaluators that it is an endeavor requiring their scholarly expertise? The Ellison and Eatman definition quoted in my introduction is valuable in part because it presents key components and attributes of public scholarship in ways that have implications for assessment. Criteria listed in Cantor and Lavine's *Chronicle of Higher Education* article are useful for establishing the connection between specific projects and the concept of public scholarship. Slightly edited, these criteria are:

- Connects directly to the work of specific public groups in specific contexts
- Arises from a faculty member's field of knowledge
- Involves a cohesive series of activities…resulting in "public good" products
- Is jointly planned and carried out by coequal partners
- Integrates discovery, learning, and public engagement. (B20)

These criteria help answer some common objections before they can be made, as they characterize the relations among the scholar's expertise, the nature of the project, and the collaborative nature of public scholarship. Those seeking additional resources to help think through public scholarship, and to make the case for public scholarship on their campuses, will find invaluable the foundational work of the national organization Imagining America: Artists and Scholars in Public Life.

Making the Case to Ourselves: Why Do It?

Why should faculty in MLA fields engage in public scholarship, given these challenges and ambiguities? I would ask, can we afford not to? The implications of this case study suggest at least three compelling reasons to consider public scholarship. First, in the most idealistic view, it can be seen as an ethical imperative. As Kathleen Woodward reminds us, "there is a long historical tradition of the democratic impulse in higher education in the United States, and we need to reinvigorate that founding vision—it is both noble and pragmatic—of service to the public and work with the public" (123). In a similar vein, David Domke argues that "we have a duty, a social responsibility, to offer these perspectives in lay terms for those who are interested.… It is not acceptable for me to write for and teach only the few who attend my university or read the academic journals I publish in. I owe the public more" (45). Public scholarship arises in part, then, from an ethical call to engage with the public intellectually, to be citizen-scholars.

Second, I recommend public scholarship for its rewards to us as individual scholars. The exchange of ideas with people who are neither our colleagues

nor our students is invigorating. In the humanities our approach is often isolated, beginning with our graduate training. As Todd Presner describes it, we work on "ever smaller, ever more specialized problems, addressed by single individuals almost always working in isolation" (154). Presner's vision of the humanities—which also took root in one of Russell Berman's MLA presidential stances, one on graduate education—calls for what he characterizes as "twenty-year projects" that mimic some of the valuable elements of research in non-humanities fields. One of the many advantages of this approach chimes with the call for public scholarship, as Presner's research model embodies "the 'translational' public potential of the humanities, the applications of humanities knowledge far beyond the tiny group of specialists who typically encounter and care about our research" (156). Engagement beyond our traditional specialist audiences is growing, and signs of it are increasingly evident. For example, the five Austen studies reviewed by Jodi L. Wyett in *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* collectively document the kind of two-way traffic that buttresses public scholarship. Wyett applauds Claudia Johnson's impeccable scholarship in *Jane Austen's Cults and Cultures* (Chicago, 2012) but notes that she risks "the incredulity of her fellow academics" (455) by telling a personal ghost story in a scholarly work. Wyett makes sense of these apparent contradictions by arguing that they represent "a timely intervention in a long-held if rapidly dissolving divide" between fans and scholars, and notes Johnson's idea that "academics have much to learn from other readers" (456). Such mingling at the divide can be very fruitful. People ask unexpected questions, and provide new perspectives, and this sharpens our thinking and may redefine our commitments in subtle ways. Through my role as scholar for the theatre, I have met many people I would not otherwise know, and these encounters have expanded my knowledge base—enthusiasts are specialists, too, just as academics are—and deepened my appreciation for literature's ability to engage people. I have become aware of how much I truly believe in the value of literary study when called upon to advocate for it, and to share some of the basic tools of my profession with a wider audience. My participation has, indeed, led to what Woodward describes as a "larger sense of meaning where before there had been only a profession, not a calling" (122).

Finally, to return to the warnings and admonitions cited in my introduction, *now* is the time to bring together the public and our scholarship. It is no coincidence that the MLA added a section on advocacy to its main webpage in the spring of 2014, with links to a dedicated page ("Advocacy"). As MLA Executive Director Rosemary Feal argues in the *Newsletter*, "how we present our work to the public is critical to our ability to effectively advance the study of languages, literatures, and cultures. Only if people understand—and are compelled by—what we have to say can we act as strong advocates for the humanities" (5). The pressures on our profession also include curricular shifts that demand the attention of faculty in MLA fields. The work of the American Association of Colleges and Universities, particularly the LEAP initiative and the Degree Qualifications Profile, shows clearly how emphasis on civic engagement, readiness for lifelong learning, and community-based learning are transforming the general education programs of higher education in the United States ("Liberal Education and America's Promise"). Greater demands for faculty to demonstrate their preparation for, and experience in, such areas are likely to follow these shifts, so we should be prepared to help define the terms of that engagement. Rather than being called upon to do more undervalued service work, in other words, faculty can take the initiative and insist on a proper valuation of public scholarship as a research activity, to be rewarded as such by campus evaluation processes. We also must be ready to insist on the value of our fields in the face of standardizing curricular mandates. Scholars in MLA fields need to do more than present the value of language and literary study to the pre-service teachers in our classrooms and to our colleagues; we must be connecting with the larger community. There are unexpected allies and opportunities if we are prepared, if we have been actively practicing engagement. *Time*'s Joel Stein, for example, reached an enormous audience with his response to the Common Core Standards, arguing that "school isn't merely training for work; it's training to communicate throughout our lives…. Teaching language through nonfiction is like teaching history by playing Billy Joel's 'We Didn't Start the Fire'" (67). Humorously presented, Stein's argument is a compelling one. Would the public connect Stein's column with the activities of language and literature faculty?

Commitment to our profession in these times may require us to go beyond our campus and professional comfort zones. Jay claims that "many scholars come to their careers with solitary temperaments and a tendency to see the attachment of scholarship to public purposes as either crudely instrumental or simply a 'service' dimension of their labor that cannot be counted like a publication" (57). I believe that such attitudes may be changing, and I welcome the increasing number of voices calling for a more nuanced approach to discussions of the value of the humanities. Rita Felski, for example, argues that "the uses of studying literature or art, and the functions of the humanities more broadly, can be meaningfully debated without falling back into a thin-lipped language of efficiency and economic calculation" (Felski xii), and one of the potential achievements of Presner's "bigger and bolder" humanities is to "be a model for engaged, broad-based, public humanities scholarship (with appropriate rigour and scholarly oversight)" (159). These broad ideas about public scholarship, debate, and advocacy must be rooted in the conscious engagement of individual scholars, adding example to example until we have a more visible, positive presence in the public domain.

I hope that this case study has demonstrated not only the challenges of engaging in public scholarship, but also some of its many rewards. We are not encouraged to talk about *fun* in our professional voices, but I have enjoyed the experience of being the scholar for these theatrical productions. While the intellectual and social energy is significant, there are minor material delights, too, accompanying the presentation of one's work in a new context. Part of the fun has been seeing my essays transformed by professional graphic design (so rarely the lot of low-budget humanities faculty), with the epigraph brought to life, the title given shadow effects, and the text graced by full color illustrations. Engaging interested people beyond our campuses and our scholarly communities within the fields of our disciplinary expertise benefits all parties to the exchange of ideas. Lookingglass Theatre Company's Erik Schroeder told me that they "offer the pre- and post-show conversation as a value-added program for our patrons. Many Chicago theatregoers consider the arts to be 'continued education,' so these discussions are ways for us to engage those members of our audience" (Schroeder email). In other words, this is a tailor-made opportunity to bring scholarly expertise to enrich the experiences of theatre patrons—and then, when they see in the media that humanities professors are parasitic, narcissistic sloths, obfuscating the literature they claim to specialize in, perhaps those community members will remember the humanities professor who contributed to their "continued education" in a spirit of democratic engagement.

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