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RICHARD KUHTA

THE Folger Shakespeare Library is a small universe, but it is inhabited by the best in the business of teaching and humanities scholarship in the early modern period. It's a subset of the academic world, a microcosm of research activity that occurs globally, and functions as a deceptively simple organism whose primary ingredients are readers and collections. But the emphasis on community and human exchange is what sets the institution apart from many of its peers. Scholars are attracted to the Folger because of its remarkable collections, but come back to participate in its programs, and look forward to returning in order to resume conversations and renew friendships.

The degree to which libraries are successful in creating a supportive environment has a good deal to do with the way people are treated. That, in turn, influences such things as whether readers return, how long they stay, and whether they choose to participate in academic programs and the cultural life of the institution. The stimulation and energy created by innovative programs draws scholars from around the world. But why are scholars so eager to return, why do readers come forward so readily to lead seminars, encourage their students to work at the Folger, become involved in exhibitions, assist with conference preparations, or devote time to mentoring junior faculty? Library staff does much to set the tone of the environment, but the Folger wouldn't be the place it is without the extraordinary goodwill of readers. The difference I see between the Folger and many other institutions is the extent to which readers are involved in shaping and influencing the life of the Library, and few have done more in recent decades than Leeds Barroll to make the Folger a vibrant and welcoming place.

Leeds became a Folger reader in June 1956, the year he earned his Ph.D. from Princeton. Since that time his sphere of activity at the Folger has touched many lives and his accomplishments have earned him respect and recognition. But it is the range of his activity that is so impressive. Leeds has lead NEH summer institutes, directed Folger Institute seminars, twice given the annual Shakespeare Birthday Lecture, been involved with the Center for Shakespeare Studies from the beginning, and lectured in programs for the Center of the History of British Political Thought. He has also participated in programs for secondary school teachers, and worked five years in the Fol-

ger's High School Fellowship Program. Over the course of his distinguished career Leeds has touched all the bases at the Folger, and is currently one of the institution's Scholar-in-Residence.

Scholarship is a lonely business. It leads people into remote corners of collections around the world to work with difficult, and often obscure, material for extended periods of time. It can force people into themselves. To make it otherwise, to remove some of that isolation, has been one of the great achievements of Leeds's career. One student in Leeds's Folger Institute seminar, "Researching the Renaissance," observed,

By having us articulate our research interests in a range of ways throughout the term . . . different forms of scholarly communication encouraged us to formulate ways of thinking about our own concerns that would interest and benefit others. I'm grateful for having had to do this because humanities research is often solitary, lonely work, and one can become ensconced in one's own limited world too easily. The précis critiques forced me to learn how to speak to others about their work in thoughtful ways. (1998)

Leeds's seminar was much more than an exercise in research methods, teaching others how to use the tools of the trade; it was an experience that brought participants out of themselves and humanized scholarship. "Researching the Renaissance" was about community, and in my view it was one of the Folger's most valuable seminars, superbly directed by Leeds throughout the 1990s. During this time, Leeds mentored dozens of students through the most difficult and lonely passages of their professional development. As he organized it, the seminar had at least three recurring components, each crucial for its success. First, he provided an expert introduction to the resources of the Folger, both standard and esoteric, tailored to individual needs and crafted in a way that allowed students to develop their own strategies for effective use. Secondly, Leeds counseled students individually and personally introduced them to distinguished scholars at the Library, helping young scholars build bridges to professional and personal relationships. Finally, Leeds turned dissertation students into their own support group, free of envy or competition, able to listen to and encourage each other. Leeds's work in this seminar was masterful.

Leeds has been instrumental in shaping the Folger Institute for nearly a quarter of a century. He joined the faculty at the University of Maryland Baltimore Campus in 1979, and a year later UMBC became a member of the Institute and named Leeds their faculty representative to its central executive committee. In Leeds's world, when you join you participate, and in fall of 1980 he set the example by directing his first seminar for the Folger Institute on "The Structure of Shakespearean Tragedy." In 1981, he followed with "Shakespeare's Milieu," and directed "Shakespeare and the Social Pressures

of his Time” in 1985, all the while urging his best students to follow him to Washington. In 1989, Leeds directed an NEH summer humanities institute on “The Problem of an Intellectual History for Shakespeare’s Age,” a topic of enormous scope that signaled the agenda of the burgeoning Center of Shakespeare Studies. Typically, Leeds was pushing against the borders, and asked others to join him in exploring new territory. That experience set the model for inviting visiting faculty that distinguishes Institute programs to this day.

Leeds’s ability to survey the profession and identify innovative topics for Institute programs was evident most recently in a conference he organized in 2002, “The Impact of the Ottoman Empire on Early Modern Europe.” Typically, it broke new ground, initiated conversations across disciplines, and helped people and ideas connect. The Ottoman conference pushed the Folger into new, and to some, surprising, areas. It only worked because someone of Leeds’s stature endorsed it and was able to assemble the right voices.

Leeds was one of the first people who held out his hand when I began my tenure as Librarian at the Folger in February 1994. He and Susan invited Candace and me to dinner that first Independence Day, when a group of us watched fireworks on the mall from their balcony and talked through the evening about life in Washington. It was a warm and generous welcome, and it made me feel the Folger Shakespeare Library was the place I wanted to be, and work, in order to be around such people. I still feel that way. I’ve never been in a place where there are so many talented, smart, unselfish people. Where people work together for the common good, where conversations aren’t interrupted, where rank is immaterial in the Tea Room, where intellectual exchange isn’t a battleground of egos, and where newcomers are so welcomed. In the face of what we know to be the norm in human life, those are the ingredients of a truly remarkable environment. But the unusual chemistry that brings people together at the Folger does not happen by accident. It is because of people like Leeds Barroll, who have spent a lifetime inviting others into the conversation, then listened to them.

Leeds is now a Scholar-in-Residence at the Folger; a distinction utterly fitting for someone who has been so devoted to making the Folger Shakespeare Library a center for advanced research and environment of goodwill. The values that Leeds embodies—intellectual integrity, service to community, academic rigor, and kindness—are essential to institutions devoted to supporting humanities scholarship. Leeds’s career has taught us that.

These are observations gathered over the last ten years. Others have expressed similar views far longer. I quote from the opening paragraph of a two-page expression of gratitude from participants in the Folger Institute seminar, “The Structure of Shakespeare Tragedy” (1981):

we shared a remarkable educational experience. In his lectures, Dr. Leeds Barroll offered us the rare combination of both sound scholarship and stimulating interpre-

tation. His critical standards were rigorous, yet he treated each of us with a generosity and respect that made the intellectual challenges enjoyable. We were a group with widely divergent backgrounds and interests who became friends and collaborators under his tutelage. He served as a model of what each of us should demand of ourselves as thinkers, scholars, and teachers.

Thank you, Leeds, for lifting us all a bit higher.