

Diana Henderson
Address in St. Louis, 11 April 2014

*April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.*

So wrote a son of St Louis, who sojourned in Boston before becoming more British than the British. Never did those opening lines of *The Waste Land* ring as true to me as this almost-spring, when the elements and the prospect of giving this speech conspired to squelch my usual irrational exuberance as the days grow longer.

Last year in Toronto, when I asked you to “Meet Me In St Louis,” I didn’t imagine it to be such a challenging invitation. That’s what I get for quoting Judy Garland. Coming from Boston, I suppose I should have anticipated hotel problems in an economically challenged baseball town so soon after Opening Day—the town of Dizzy Dean, Stan Musial, Bob Gibson—and, most ominously of all, the Red Sox nemesis from Game 7 of the 1946 World Series, Enos Slaughter. Memory indeed.

But still, I could not have imagined the particular resonance of TS Eliot’s words this year for my adopted home.

*Unreal City,
[...]
...so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
[...]
Falling towers*

London Beirut New York Baghdad Madrid Mumbai Kabul Boston

Add it to the list, the sadly familiar litany. On a gloriously sunny afternoon 17 days after our Toronto luncheon, I was walking along the Boston Esplanade, when MIT’s overactive emergency alert system text-messed an explanation for the many ambulance sirens beginning to interfere with my audiobook enjoyment: I had been listening to Alan Bennett’s felicitous recital of *The Wind in the Willows*, the adventures of Water Rat and Mole along a different riverbank, pastoral within urban pastoral, soon shattered by bomb explosions blocks away.

*The river’s tent is broken:
[...]
...The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song,*

Sweet Charles, run softly, for I speak nor loud or long.

At the violet hour that Thursday, Marina Leslie, co-chair of Harvard [Humanities Center]’s seminar on Women and Culture in the Early Modern World, offered to drive me home after our speaker’s dinner, going well out of her way. Her kindness serendipitously saved me from boarding the subway line being halted at that hour by SWAT teams searching for the young killers of another young man, Sean Collier—the MIT first-year campus policeman who had been shot to death just yards from my office.

*yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
'Jug jug' to dirty ears.*

The next day the city would be in massive lockdown, with social media playing a crucial role in sustaining both our community and our sanity.

*He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience*

Of course it's not the first time I or many of you have been uncomfortably close to or part of a city's trauma; I was stuck in Paddington after the London bombings and have been locked in or out of the British Library by bomb scares more times than I can recall. On this occasion the ironies were manifest—no “Riding in triumph through Persepolis” for this Tamerlan. So too were the unexpected forms of expressive, patient solidarity—among Bostonians, of all people. “Boston Strong” soon became a media cliché, as always happens, and it's too bad that the People's Republic of Cambridge lost a measure of its leftie coziness; much more disturbing are the damaged and the dead, and the prospect of a 19-year-old's death penalty trial still to come.

*Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus*

Collier Strong
MIT Strong
Boston Strong

Up the ladders of association, like a young Stephen Daedalus redefining my address.

The “Strong” in all of this which I want to emphasize today, even amidst a landscape of waste and violence, is community, *and* how our digital resources can reinforce it, or not, again in complex and serendipitous ways. For those of us in Boston trying to figure out what was going on, getting the word out to friends in the uncertain days between bombings and shootouts, and afterwards finding consolation amidst loss, all involved mass and social media, texting, phoning, posting and tweeting—which, as a footnote, leads me back to this community, and the fortuitous role it played for me. It was my somewhat scandalous announcement of “shakeass13” from the Toronto podium—albeit ineptly, avoiding the word “hashtag” (which I still find as ugly a compound sound as “Jug jug”)—that's what got me onto Twitter just in time. Twitter is often also a *waste* of time, and yet it and other digital tools not only helped during one city's crisis, but are now creating new Shakespearean communities, new early modern conversations, and new opportunities for us to stay linked in beyond our three days of conferencing. We play Shakespeare question games on Facebook—thank you, Linda Charnes—we tweet from the Folger and the RSA about what we are learning—thank you, Sarah Warner and (in absentia) Emily Sherwood—and we even post nice things about mentors on blogs about gratitude—bravo to Curtis Perry!

The SAA has deep roots in a different form of community, what some now call “IRL” and others call “live”: the reason we're all here, and value the many forms of exchange, work and play of the annual conference. As we try to balance these different forms of association, we have been challenged by the growing complexity of our organization in size, interests, and modes of communication; we are also challenged by limited resources and staffing, incomparably dedicated and resourceful as our staff is. We are invested in maintaining—and improving—the forms of inclusive interaction and intimacy that have led former SAA Presidents in their speeches to wax lyrical about conferences of yesteryear and to deliver

“billets-doux” to a professional organization.

But you can now peruse those Presidential reflections, which contain a wealth of information about SAA’s earlier days, at your leisure, by going to our newly created archive space on the SAA Website. If for no other reason, you must explore the site to hear the 1991 Malone Society Dance mix that Michael Dobson created, featuring John Gielgud, Kate Belsey, Tom Berger, Marge Garber, and many more.

*O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—
It's so elegant
So intelligent*

We miss you, Terry Hawkes.

I have trolled through the 19 earlier Presidential Addresses posted, and learned to recognize some of the characteristic tropes and obligatory gestures of this genre. I do not intend to try to rise to the level of Bill Carroll’s deeply learned 2006 address, which comes complete with scholarly footnotes, but I will add my own first SAA story—not as comical as Dymna Callaghan’s close encounters with men named Stephen that had many of you in stitches last year, but I will add it to the Presidential archive as a testimony to what this community has done, and perhaps needs to do now in new ways.

In 1994 in New Mexico, I was at that reception at the governor’s hacienda which Tony Dawson recalled so fondly in his 2002 speech. I had been startled out of my small college cocoon by an unexpected presidential action—the denial of my promotion to become a member of the tenured faculty. Unlike current young scholars, I had previously not been encouraged to attend conferences (though I had nevertheless gone to several, including a crucial one on Women and Sovereignty in St Andrews), but, as now, the job market was not promising. That Albuquerque conference was my introduction to SAA: through the encouragement of mentors such as Lynda Boose and David Kastan, I met new allies including Lena Orlin, Bill Carroll and Jim Siemon, all of whom subsequently played important roles in my life. Actually I don’t remember if all of those individuals were there at the governor’s reception—I *do* know I met Susan Frye, Clark Hulse and Lowell Gallagher at the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association because that coincided with student protests about my firing being broadcast on the local news—but most of the year was a bit of a blur and an emotional rollercoaster. Somehow, I found myself adopted by a scholarly world that understood the intersections of Shakespeare and gender studies in ways that had not yet permeated my campus’s hierarchy. The local and national AAUP offices understood, and so did the students and their parents, one of whom made hundreds of these campaign buttons saying “Diana for President 1994.” They became a fashion accessory at commencement. Pete Donaldson, who took the risk of hiring me at MIT for which I am forever grateful, tells me he still has one of these buttons, and the Women’s Center I co-founded the year before and found thriving at its 20th anniversary this past year has a whole bunch of buttons in *its* version of a material archive. So I’m wearing one myself today for the the first and last time, and I can’t say how fortunate I feel that, after a score of years, I’m President of a much, much healthier organization than the one I left in 1994—and that *that* one too is much healthier, for men *and* women.

Being a cause, even a very small one, makes you particularly aware of the systems that trump individuals, while paradoxically it is the caring individuals who help you get through. The reason I am sharing this story is not only as a thank you to SAA for helping me at a tough time, but also out of some sense of responsibility to those now facing comparable difficulties, in a very grueling job market. For the past two years at the very least, hiring in early modern fields has not been good, and at this year’s MLA, the more general difficulties of adjuncts and entry-level candidates became a dominant fracture within the conference. What feminists were going through in 1994, the contingent faculty are feeling now.

They are asking those of us who can to stand with them. As one blogger wrote, “Maybe you got your job because of an institutional connection. Maybe you really were better qualified than other candidates. Maybe you just got lucky. Simply put, *it does not matter now*. Speaking up in solidarity with the growing number of qualified, talented, passionate people who are being flushed out as a waste product of the academic labor system is what is important.” UVA graduate student and MLA subconvention organizer Laura Goldblatt adds, “I decline to accept the end of literary studies...I think the key to strengthening them, though, is by building solidarity within the academy and outside.” I agree, and think an organization such as the SAA, the figure of Shakespeare, and the methods of the Digital Humanities encouraged alongside work in theater, film, video and text, provide some of the best opportunities to build those alliances. That, and standing as a community to resist the reduction of tenure-track and tenured teaching lines in the arts and humanities, as happened at the University of Southern Maine last month in a particularly egregious way: last hired, first fired. When such things are happening, the time is indeed out of joint. We need to support *Ac and Alt-Ac* careers, theater *and* new media, and one another.

So I also tell my 1994 story, for what it is worth, because I hope somebody attending their first SAA today, or uncertain whether they will be able to afford to return for another one, may take a bit of heart knowing that the current SAA President was once precariously on the boundary of the academy, and through some extraordinary luck as well the community of scholars and friends embodied here, hung on to come out somewhere unexpectedly better. And there are many others here who have comparable stories to tell of precarious journeys, whose resilience has been nurtured by the SAA. It helped me to hear those stories in 1994. So please also accept this invitation to share your struggles and questions with us, and to let us learn and work from *your* experiences too.

And while you're at it, all of you, veterans of the days of smaller conferences and new attendees alike, please tell the Trustees how you do or don't use our publications, our website, and more: only by hearing from you can we figure out whether you are ready now for us to expand our digital tools and CFPs, to make other “next gen” changes, and whether you can find the resources you need on our website. This call for wider and online communication is a familiar refrain in Presidential addresses: In 2008 Peter Holland noted that “Your trustees need to continue to find ways to make SAA of year-round benefit to our members, not just an organization that holds a superb annual conference” and in 2011 Russ McDonald suggested “a database of published work by SAA members, and particularly of work that began life in SAA seminars or on SAA panels.” He also hoped that we could gain recognition through the ACLS, and we are now working to make that happen. Similarly, back in 2007 Georgianna Ziegler was already asking “Can we write about political and social issues through Shakespeare, using web-casts, blogs, or other online discussion venues?” We have made major strides just this year, but there is more to be done, such as updating our Constitution. There is also perhaps more than we *can* do, at least at present, while we honor the democratic spirit of an organization that tries its best to remain affordable.

The retrospective view can serve us as a guide to spur future action. Because of the redesign of our website, I could study the genre in which I am now participating. This use of the online archive echoes our increasing scholarly use of digital tools for historical and textual analysis, as our newly piloted Digital Room yesterday made so clear. We are at a moment of growth and complexity in our forms of community that spurs me to quote another son of Saint Louis, Yogi Berra, who sagely advised: “When you come to a fork in the road, take it.”

There are also tales from the past either cautionary or prescient, and memorably ironic witticisms: in 1991, Michael Warren, like others in this Presidential genre notable for his self-deprecating humor, remarked upon “the absence of ...the potential contribution of Californian culture” to the study of Shakespeare, and as part of this extended joke noted, “I look in vain in the program, in the

journals, for ecological responsibility as a category in our criticism”—I remind you again, he said this as part of a *joke* about “ludicrous proposals”—before he sagely conceded, “Frankly, none of us knows what will seem a worthy approach in future years,” and, he added, “we must keep our doors open to all.” *There’s* the true SAA spirit!

And in that spirit: while Russ MacDonald said he could not recount the history of the Malone Society Dance—a major lacuna in our oral history which Dobson and Callaghan have begun to address—Russ nevertheless read these lines from the mysterious “Lyrick Ode about our founding”:

Suppress, O Muse, details of trivial nature,
Such as the struggle over nomenclature:
Most favoured SAA, but nonetheless,
One faction tried to call it ASS.

The Past is Prologue, and here we are at SAA, aka, SHAKEASS14, and, as ever, ready to dance! In honor of both Judy Garland and our host city (vanquished twice in this millennium’s autumn classic by a certain Boston sports team but nevertheless celebrating its 250th birthday), I hope there will be much dancing of the Hoochie Koochie this year.

Oh, and about that birthday boy: He Who Must Be Obeyed says he’s glad we are here to celebrate his 450th, in a new age, a new time, a new way.

So I put on my Birthday Tiara now for him, *and* for Kit Marlowe too—who, by the way, adds, “You say it’s your birthday? It’s my birthday too, yeah!” For today, at this luncheon, we honor something like what King Henry V deemed “ceremony,” and Tradition trumps the Individual Talent. Not this One, or that One, but the Many. And in that spirit of collaboration, my mash-up Renaissance-Modernist Billy “the Kyd” Eliot obliges with a few more phrases to mark the celebration:

Why then Ile fit you.

*The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne
Glowed on the marble...*

Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!

Hieronymo's mad againe.

These fragments I have shored against my ruins.

But at my back in a cold blast I hear

HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME

Goonight Bill. ...

Ta ta Goonight...

Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

Shantih shantih shantih

Across times, places, and media, in the communal voice, the strength—SAA Strong—abides.

Happy Birthday, Shakespeare *and* Company.

