

Jill L. Levenson
Address in Kansas City, 17 April 1992

In the first place, on behalf of the Trustees and members of the Shakespeare Association of America, I want to thank the people who have made our stay in Kansas City such a pleasure—the Local Arrangements Committee. (I'll ask each of you to stand as I read your name.) The leaders of that committee are Robert and Barbara Wilson (University of Missouri, Kansas City). Other members are: Ralph Berets (University of Missouri, Kansas City), David Bergeron (University of Kansas), Father Robert Burke (Rockhurst College), Joseph Candido (University of Arkansas), Joan Dean (University of Missouri, Kansas City), Richard Harriman (William Jewell College), Donald Hedrick (Kansas State University), W. Nicholas Knight (University of Missouri, Rolla), Michael Mullin (University of Illinois, Urbana), Max Skidmore, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences (University of Missouri, Kansas City), and Jane Williamson (University of Missouri, St. Louis).

While we're on the subject of hospitality, I'm very pleased to extend our thanks to Norman and Libby Gordon for their generous contributions to the proceedings. It's been delightful for us to have you participate in our meeting.

For organizing the scholarly exchange that's under way, we're especially grateful to the Program Committee, who are responsible for arranging sessions, seminars, and workshops. (Again, I'll ask you to stand.) The chair is Mary Beth Rose (The Newberry Library), and the members are Anthony Dawson (University of British Columbia), Jean Howard (Columbia University), and Phyllis Rackin (University of Pennsylvania).

Of course, the coordinator of all these plans—from local arrangements to the program—is the Executive Director of the Shakespeare Association of America, Nancy Hodge. I should add here that Nancy coordinated our contributions to the International Shakespeare Congress in Tokyo last summer with the same intelligence and grace that she brings to the management of all SAA affairs. Her assistants in Kansas City, coming from Southern Methodist University, are: Jill Bagwell, administrative assistant, and graduate assistants Tom Brandt, Mary Courtney, and Leigh Ann Duck. (We can applaud, but they're not here—they're at a Thai restaurant!) We've had wonderful student assistants as well from the University of Missouri, Kansas City and the University of Kansas.

In the second place, it's time to thank the retiring Trustees and President, and to announce the results of this year's election. I know that I express the gratitude of the Association to three members of the Executive who have worked hard during their entire tenures. (Please stand.) Ed Berry (University of Victoria): Ed is the program chair for 1993; he's negotiating papers and seminars right through this meeting. Meredith Skura (Rice University): Meredith oversaw last year's program and this year's nominations. Michael Warren (University of California, Santa Cruz): my predecessor, Michael has been an active, helpful, and kind administrator.

I'm happy to announce that our new Trustees are Anthony Dawson (University of British Columbia) and Gail Kern Paster (George Washington University), and our new Vice President is Phyllis Rackin (University of Pennsylvania). Thanks again to Meredith Skura, for leading the nominating committee, and to its members for producing an excellent slate: Coppélia Kahn (Brown University), Russ McDonald (University of Rochester), James Siemon (Boston University).

Now that we've completed the most agreeable formalities, we've reached the point where I'm supposed to make a little speech. From what I've observed, at least a few of my predecessors—other people honored by this elected office—have had to search for an appropriate subject: what meaningful

things can one say to several hundred lunch-filled colleagues who would rather be planning their afternoons?

I considered two recent models of presidential address. One was last year's speaker at this luncheon, Michael Warren, who did something along the lines of Leeds Barroll's talk in 1986. I may seem funny to people, sometimes, but I couldn't begin to match that routine—which Michael must have tested at The Comedy Store before he brought it to Vancouver. Then I read Houston Baker's column in the spring 1992 *MLA Newsletter*. Here the slant was political and finally poignant. Baker asked, "What's Left of Anxieties in the Humanities?" He used about 80% of his space to position himself as the member of a minority, and from that position he challenged the views of the *New Criterion*, "the last breath of white, male, Western anxiety." When I saw this column, I thought, "I can do that. I belong to a couple of minorities."

But then I was struck by the difference of my context, and that made me realize a distinctive feature not only of this Shakespeare association, but also of Shakespeare studies internationally. As a group we seem to enjoy unusual freedom, variety, tolerance. I'm speaking from my experience of this organization as well as the International Shakespeare Association and the World Shakespeare Congresses which take place every five years. These operations represent hundreds of Shakespeareans who regularly set up large forums where sparks may fly openly, safely, over a great range. I'm referring also to publications in our field which offer a spectrum of critical theory and scholarship without subversive editorializing.

The program for this meeting illustrates the general point in more than one way. For 1991/92, the Board of Trustees included six women and three men; for 1992/93, it counts seven women and two men. Clearly there's no marginalizing of women here. (If anything, there's marginalizing of men!) The Program Committee has organized workshops, seminars, and sessions to run the gamut of critical and scholarly interests: from text and performance to genre and historicisms to feminist and postmodern theory. (By the way, among the speakers and session leaders there are thirty-three men and twenty-five women, a healthy balance.)

Academic variety also distinguished the Tokyo Shakespeare Congress, a feature noted in the two overviews published by *TLS* and *The Times*, and even in the preview given by the Spring/Summer *Shakespeare Newsletter*. Writing for the weekly, James Melville—who calls himself a "non-specialist observer"—described "a comprehensively varied programme of activities." In the daily, Joanna Pitman cheerfully reviewed "a week-long jamboree combining learned lectures and seminars with Japanese adaptations of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *King Lear*, a lute recital, a clowning workshop and a jig." Both reporters noticed the wide range of academic fare, exposing their own biases: "For the connoisseur of lit-crit gobbledy-gook," wrote Melville, "there was an embarrassment of riches."

No matter. There *was* "an embarrassment of riches" which I could only hint at in my *Bulletin* account: four dozen papers, twenty-two seminars, a forum, the workshop Pitman cited, various receptions, performances, and exhibits. I'll briefly illustrate this diversity from the seminars, our contribution. On the first afternoon, eight took place: three covered Shakespearean production during the English Renaissance, on the modern Western stage, and in the Eastern theater; the rest discussed Shakespeare and ideology, Shakespeare and theory, Shakespeare and current pedagogy. Others would explore issues from Elizabethan history and traditions to twentieth-century media and discourse on gender; from "The Culture of the Royal Court" and "Shakespeare and the New World" to "The Body as Site of Class and Gender Differentiation" and "The Idea of Female Impersonation in Shakespeare and Oriental Theater." Important scholarship of different kinds from this Congress has already begun to appear in print: Frank Hildy's essay on "The Reconstructing of Shakespeare's Theatre" in *Shakespeare Bulletin* (Fall 1991), and Ernst

Honigmann's article on Shakespeare's will in the *New York Review of Books* (November 7, 1991). Proceedings, with twenty to twenty-four papers, are forthcoming.

A glance at the Congress program—or the streets around the Congress site—indicated not only the range and variety of the academic event, but also the widely assorted backgrounds of the participants. As Melville said, rightly this time, “Professionally, ethnically, and sartorially, it was a richly diverse assembly.” The final registration list totalled 695 delegates from thirty-five countries.

Of those registered, 381 were Japanese. Attendance by the Japanese provided only one sign of their commitment to the conference. In addition they put tremendous energy into organizing and hosting the occasion; they delivered a number of excellent papers; and they offered splendid Shakespearean productions. In these ways they made the rest of us aware of the degree to which Shakespeare has influenced their art and education. Gary Taylor, commenting on this phenomenon in *The Sunday Times*, quotes the director of the Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum: “Shakespeare, in various shapes and guises, has become part of our modern culture.” According to Professor Yasunari Takahashi, President of the Shakespeare Society of Japan, “What we have been seeking to do is to demonstrate and rise to the challenge of Shakespeare.” Among other enlightenments, many of us learned to appreciate from this exchange in Tokyo how much the Japanese can contribute to *our* understanding of Shakespeare.

Of course this Congress was an international project in which many Shakespeareans cooperated, the SAA itself setting up the conference seminars, working from the ideas of Leeds Barroll, who was chair of our Tokyo Congress Committee. As you may know, we plan to host the next meeting in 1996, a wonderful opportunity to reciprocate to our European and Asian hosts, and to entertain fellow Shakespeareans from other continents as well. We have proposed Los Angeles as the Congress site.

Very sadly, one of our most genial members will be missing. George Hibbard died last month in England, where he had retired. The study of Shakespeare and Elizabethan theater owes George Hibbard many things, among them his scholarship and the biennial conference that he ran between the early 1970s and 1981 at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. Many people in this room are familiar with George's conference strategies: almost a year in advance he set a topic and asked each member of the varied group he'd invited—ten or so speakers—to find an approach; then he allowed each to make his or her individual way. Since he was a great editor and critic of English Renaissance drama, anyone invited to give a paper at the Waterloo Conference felt that George's editorial projects and criticism furnished the criteria of excellence: each contributor worked to these high standards—George didn't have to say a word about his expectations.

Inevitably the International Conference on Elizabethan Theatre generated a week of fruitful discussion, a volume of worthwhile essays, and a sense of fellowship among participants—all of these influenced by the presence and example of George himself. The Conference still does, part of his legacy, under the able leadership of Lynne Magnusson and Ted McGee. On the publication of his *Festschrift*, I said in *Shakespeare Quarterly* that that volume, *Mirror Up to Shakespeare*, celebrated a scholar notable for his broad spectrum of interests, high standards, open-mindedness, and vigorous sense of collegiality. His daughter has just written to me that he'd had “a wonderful time teaching and writing in Canada,” and that his family was delighted to hear that he would be commemorated at this meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America. As a member and Trustee of this organization, George Hibbard embodied our best qualities. I'd like to end these remarks on that positive note.