

Michael Warren

Address in Vancouver, 22 March 1991

My first task at this lunch is to thank all those who have made our gathering in Vancouver possible, and who organized last night's splendid reception at UBC. I would ask the members of the local arrangements committee to stand as I read their names [from the program]. And finally—and especially—the chair and chief organizer, Anthony Dawson from UBC—please join me in thanking them.

Secondly, I would like to introduce to you the program committee that laid the foundation for this conference by proposing and planning its events—and I would ask them please to stand—Albert Braunmuller, David Kastan, Maureen Quilligan, and their gallant chair Meredith Skura.

In his absence I would like also to thank Tom Berger for continuing the Malone Society Dance; even while he is resident in London he has a sense of priorities, and I am asked to advise you that during the interval of the dance a special Surprise Message will be played.

Nothing can happen without the Executive Director and her staff, but as some of you may have noticed, Nancy Hodge is unable to be with us at this meeting; however, we are/I am very grateful that Ann Cook has agreed to take time off from her humble role as Chair of the ISA to resume for this meeting the august tasks that she has some slight acquaintance with—and she is being ably assisted by Elizabeth Oakes (making a return engagement from Western Kentucky University) and Jill Bagwell and Leigh Anne Duck from Southern Methodist University, who are aided by an excellent group of student assistants from campuses in the Vancouver area. Thank you all very much.

At the annual luncheon we formally note the retirement of those trustees whose terms are complete—I would ask them to stand so that we may thank them for their service—Anne Lancashire and Carol Neely, both former presidents, and Scott McMillin.

It is my pleasure to announce the results of the recent elections: your two new trustees are Leah Marcus and Joel Altman; and your new Vice President is Linda Woodbridge. Lastly we should thank the Nominating Committee—Michael Bristol, William Carroll, Phyllis Gorfain, and their chair was Carol Neely—we are grateful to them for their efforts.

I would like to exercise the privilege of my position to draw attention to two aspects of this conference. This evening in this room from 7:00 till 8:00 we are honored to have the opportunity of seeing two of England's most important Shakespearean actresses, Juliet Stevenson and Fiona Shaw, known to most of you from their contributions to *Clamorous Voices*. They will be performing scenes and discussing their work, and *Clamorous Voices*. For this visit we are deeply indebted to Murph Swander's ACTER organization out of University of California, Santa Barbara—as some of you know, I hope one day to say of University of California, Santa Cruz.

Secondly, I would ask you all to take a look at Ken Steele's SHAKSPER project, and to consider associating yourselves with the International Electronic Conference. It already has about 140 members with correspondents in France, Britain, Japan, Korea, and Brazil; and it promises to be an excellent tool for shared research and rapid scholarly communication—and it costs nothing so long as you have access to your campus mainframe.

I have been asked by the sales representative of OUP to announce the winner of their drawing. Gretchen Quiring of Vancouver has won a copy of *The Textual Companion to the Oxford Shakespeare*, which she can collect this afternoon or tomorrow.

“Soft you, a word or two before I go.” As I said already, Nancy Hodge is not with us at this meeting; I am consequently able to say now what might embarrass her were she present. I believe that I speak for all current and recent trustees when I say how fortunate we are to have Nancy as Executive Director. Anybody who works with her knows of her quiet subtlety and steady persistence in all she does; of her ability to take home from a conference a set of brilliant, inchoate, and often idiosyncratically formulated ideas and then diligently and expertly fashion them into a program, for which other people then take most of the credit. Moreover, she has the capacity to schedule sessions so that only 20% of the attendees wish to be in both rooms at once—no mean feat. It has been my pleasure to work with her, to learn to appreciate her droll humor, her measured silences in the face of impractical suggestions, and her fine judgment, her simple efficiency. We are very lucky indeed that she is so ready to perform a task with a multitude of responsibilities for which thanks are few.

One of her greatest skills is diplomacy; I have learned always to take her cautiously phrased advice. In this year’s preliminary agenda for the trustees there appears a notation regarding the luncheon—“president’s brief remarks”—and I intend to take her advice. Carol Neely and I shared one special response to being elected—the resistance to what one of my colleagues called my “Presidential Address,” which, he said—a diplomat too—he regretted missing. In fact, it is at moments like this that legionnaire’s disease appears a rather attractive option, but, alas, that happens only in fictions which compare conferences to pilgrimages, and this is March, not April. Indeed, I had hoped to find a suitable quotation from Morris Zapp, but I failed. However, that infallible organ of wisdom, the *Sunday San Francisco Chronicle*, provided me with a columnist who quoted Voltaire on three things which, in concert, are guaranteed to make *even a great man* ridiculous: “The necessity of saying something, the embarrassment produced by the consciousness of having nothing to say, and the desire [I would say obligation] to exhibit ability.” You know, a conference with such a concentration on seminars ought perhaps to have instead an open mike.

Moreover, a presidential address is something that we to the south avoid at present; it suggests something said on TV by a talking head with a smug grin that no amount of “prudence” can overcome—“this is no time for gloating.” Since the presidential title is itself becoming contaminated, I wonder whether we might consider—in honor also of our next two presidents—a Canadian amendment, and change the title to Governor General? [For the last year my children have called me chief Shakespeare nerd.]

Is it a peculiar feature of democratic organizations and societies that where monarchs had fools for their entertainment, democracies assume presidents can and will display the qualities of Touchstone or Feste? Personally I feel more like that clapped out Clown in *Othello*, the one who sounds as if he knows he will be cut at the second performance and that there is no such thing as memorial reconstruction; or perhaps like Coriolanus, asked to show his scars *after* being elected. Anyway, I do take pleasure in presiding in Vancouver, a town to which I am very attached sentimentally, as I realized on Tuesday night; a wonderful summer spent teaching at UBC in 1960 was what provoked me to emigrate to Victoria the year after, thus initiating that sequence of events that brought me to California, and later the SAA.

It was a fellow Californian who suggested that my topic should be the new direction of Shakespeare studies in the coming decade, but nobody I believe should risk such an enterprise,

given our diversity. But in that diversity I do notice one singular failure—the absence of recognition of the potential contribution of Californian culture for the study of Shakespeare. I hope you will forgive my rashness in advising you in this area.

It is not just my fellow trustees' regrettable reluctance to conduct all business in the hot tub, but specifically their blindness to the powerful illuminations afforded by our distinctive consciousness. I look in vain in the program, in the journals, for ecological responsibility as a category in our criticism. What do we make of Orlando's abuse of trees in the service of poetry? Should we not be aware of the environmental criminality of Hotspur's desire to divert the River Trent? More might be made of the Gravedigger's profound understanding of the Danish recycling effort? Further, the plight of Egeon may well be rendered deeper if one conceives of it as a consequence of his inadequate technique as a surfer; by the same token, Sebastian is clearly a cool dude.

And here I come to the meat of my argument. Again I see no signs of encouragement of a responsible Vegetarian School of Criticism. Consider the implications for *Henry V* of a new reading of that French observation that the English are "shrewdly out of beef"; to what else can the French defeat be attributed but their high-cholesterol diet? Why else is the line there? And as for Caliban; he showed Prospero "the fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile"; may we not believe that it is Prospero who has—along with offering him "water with berries in it"—corrupted him not just with language but with *red meat* also, teaching him how "to snare the nimble marmoset"? It is notable that with crabapples and pignuts to eat he sees that in freedom he'll make no more dams for *fish*, either. Dietary Criticism, I know, is as yet in its infancy, but it leads one to ask what was in the banquet that Ariel removed; and if burnt meat produces cholera, perhaps questions might be asked about the gastric ecology of the Minola household, where such rivalry and squabbling succeed a dinner. *Man ist was man isst*, I remind you. My students have also set the pace for me in Opiate Criticism, showing remarkable curiosity about the experiences of Juliet and Imogen, and asking probing questions about those forces whose pastime is to make "midnight mushrooms," a piece of Jacobean verbal encoding badly in need of decoding. In this context—and the failure of interest in Zen and Shakespeare, or Shakespeare and Self-Esteem—I cannot but be dismayed to learn that there is no truth to the rumor that next year's textual seminar will be devoted to "compositors who cross-dressed." I have hope that one day the larger hegemonic forces at work within this multinational association will be attentive to the potential contribution of vigorous regionalisms.

If these proposals seem foolish, it is because none of them seems worthy of adoption at this time, although Shakespeare and Diet has a quirky appeal for me—perhaps I'll propose a seminar in a couple of years' time—just allow the idea to sink in. Frankly, none of us knows what will seem a worthy approach in future years. In the context of my ludicrous proposals I want merely to urge the maintenance of this association's commitment to the exploration and the examination of new as well as old ideas; there is always a danger of one year's radicalism becoming the next year's hardened orthodoxy. We must keep our doors open to all. Fifteen years ago next month I attended my first SAA conference—it was the Washington Congress of 1976—and my paper was accepted through open submissions, a term which for me gained new meaning among the titles of the papers before lunch. At the time I had not read a paper at a conference for seven years; I had no taste for the MLA's annual midwinter lemming run. On the day of its acceptance I had three hours before receiving a rejection slip for the same paper from *PMLA*, with a reader's report that said "this paper ought not to be published anywhere." (Do you think we might have a seminar on the art of the rejection slip? I have others to share.) Anyway, I have always been grateful to the SAA and the persons who accepted that paper. They took a risk and I benefitted from their readiness to entertain something different. Those fifteen years have seen

radical changes in how we talk about Shakespeare—to compare the seminar listings of 1976 with those for our conference here is a testimony to the catholicity of approaches that the Association has encouraged over the years. I suspect that in 2006 this year's program will look very dull and stodgy. Many of us will look pretty dull and stodgy. I do not pretend to know what single direction Shakespeare studies ought to go in; all I do know is that the numerous approaches that currently make our field so perplexingly various and stimulating need still to be encouraged; that no one group has a monopoly on the truth, or the center—that we should be tender to each other's well-being, since these days we are all on the margin. And before I ask Jill Levenson, your new Governor-General, to take the podium and make some announcements, I'd like to express two hopes: first, that if we are not yet a significantly multicultural group (we welcome this year, however, two scholars from Brazil), we can strive to bring into our profession and our association those who may diversify us further; and second, I hope, in my Californian way, to see many of you all in the pool at 6:00 a.m. tomorrow.