

William C. Carroll
Address in Philadelphia, 14 April 2006

Let me begin with my deepest thanks to our local hosts for the splendid reception and other local arrangements they have provided; their energy and good will have made all of us feel genuinely welcome, especially at last night's reception. The Local Arrangements Committee consisted of two extraordinary colleagues: Rebecca Bushnell and Margreta de Grazia. Contributions of support by the local colleges and universities are listed in our conference programs, and we are grateful to all. As you know, no conference could take place without an enormous amount of thoughtful work by a number of brilliant, dedicated people, but it is hard to believe the level of detail that must be dealt with, and the tact and imagination required. These same people, moreover, keep the Association functioning on the highest levels of efficiency and professionalism throughout the year; until you've seen it first-hand, as I had the privilege to do in the last year, it's difficult to comprehend. But trust me: these colleagues are the very, very best. I want to recognize three of them in particular, and ask each to stand: first, Lee Tydings, the Program Director of the SAA; Michele Osherow, the Assistant Director; and our incomparable Executive Director, Lena Cowen Orlin. Would you all please stand? Certainly, when I taught my first Shakespeare course at Oberlin College, I little suspected that a brilliant student in my class named Lena Cowen would someday be giving me all my cues and instructions at the SAA; we have known each other a long time, and I want to express my deepest gratitude to Lena for her guidance and friendship. I was happy to be your student this year.

It is a pleasure also to take note of the outstanding committees that have been working all year: I will call their names, and ask that each of them also stand. The Program Committee, which last year produced the program for this year's conference, was chaired by Paul Yachnin, and included Natasha Korda, Jeremy Lopez, and Valerie Wayne. Next, this year's Nominating Committee, chaired by Paul Yachnin (he did both jobs in different years), with Laurie Shannon and William B. Worthen. Finally, a special note of thanks to the members of a new committee established to review the applications for the Graduate Student Travel Fund that we established for this year: they are Roslyn L. Knutson (chair), and Anne Lancashire. I would also like to acknowledge this year's outgoing Trustees: Fran Dolan, Kim Hall, and Roslyn Knutson. My profound thanks to you all for helping make the Association the collegial and productive institution that it is. Incidentally, the Trustees have voted to renew the Graduate Student Travel support fund for next year. Finally, I would also like to recognize the winners of this year's Open Submissions competition, who will be giving their papers tomorrow morning. They are Patricia Cahill and Valerie Forman.

Finally, on a less happy note, the President's luncheon speech does not normally address losses in our family, but this past year has been an extraordinarily difficult one. In addition to the losses suffered by our colleagues in the South from hurricanes Katrina and Rita, you will know from the January Bulletin that our newly-elected Trustee colleague, Cynthia Marshall, passed away in the last year; a memorial notice is in that Bulletin. The Trustees appointed Mary Ellen Lamb to replace Cynthia, and we are delighted that Mary Ellen is now a trustee; would you please stand? There was another memorial in the January Bulletin for one of the true giants in our field, G. Blakemore Evans. And just before our last conference, Janet Field-Pickering, who many of us knew from her wonderful work at the Folger, passed away. More recently, two major figures of theater history, Herb Berry and Scott McMillin, have passed away. They will all be greatly missed.

When I started thinking about this year's conference, one of the first things to strike me was the location itself. I had only been to Philadelphia once before at a previous SAA meeting, and, quite unfairly, some of my impressions of the city had been formed by an early infatuation with W.C. Fields, who once proposed that his own epitaph should read, "On the whole, I'd rather be in Philadelphia." He also once said "Last week, I went to Philadelphia, but it was closed," but I was happy to find it open. Still,

as a fairly hardcore sports fan, I had a strong image of the city, and frankly, it was a bit scary: the City of Brotherly Love was well known as a tough city, infamous for Eagles' fans booing opposition quarterbacks as their shattered bodies were carted off the field, and fans so rabid that on-site criminal courts were set up at every home game; it has been reported that Santa Claus was once booed in a Christmas parade at a half-time show here, pelted by snowballs, and so shamed by the experience that he went home early. With this history in mind, I of course asked that all your tickets be carefully checked at the door. But there were more positive associations as well: Rocky, the heroic boxer, had taken many a beating but had risen to triumph in Philadelphia; I knew I could no longer run up the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, as Rocky had done in triumph – the conference only lasts three days – but I did take heart at the recent news account of the proposed film, *Rocky 6*. The new movie will show Rocky as an ageing, lonely has-been in Philadelphia who is reluctant to come out of retirement. It stars the now-59 year old Sylvester Stallone. Now there's a whole package I can identify with, I thought. I also found reassuring the profound comment by Danny Ozark, a former manager of the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team: "Half this game is ninety percent mental." A motto for us all.

But the site of this year's conference in Philadelphia is actually of course completely appropriate – it's a city with an enormously rich cultural, historical, and political history, and one with a particularly distinguished Shakespearean heritage. As you know, Philadelphia was the home of the great Variorum scholar, Horace Howard Furness, whose library now forms an essential core of the rare books repository at the University of Pennsylvania. This connection is all the more appropriate because, as soon as I stop talking, your new president for the year will come up here and speak, and she is Georgianna Ziegler, who for several years was the distinguished Curator of the Furness library before she moved to the Folger. Furness had begun the Variorum project as a consequence of discussions among the members of the Shakespeare Society of Philadelphia, the earliest formally established organization devoted to the study of Shakespeare's plays in America, "older even than the Deutsche Shakespeare Gesellschaft," as Michael Bristol has noted. The members of the Society realized that the 1821 Variorum needed updating, and so, in 1866, the Society began its study of *Romeo and Juliet*. Eventually, with an inheritance from his wife's father, Furness's library was established. Helen Kate Furness herself played an important scholarly role in the project, publishing in 1874 *A Concordance to Shakespeare's Poems*. Among the earliest acquisitions of the collection were the supposed Shakespeare gloves, which had been associated with a number of prominent actors and could be traced back to William Shakespeare Hart in 1746, who claimed they were "the only property that remains to our famous relation." Like any skeptical editor, Furness wrote carefully, "That they are veritably Shakespeare's Gloves, I hope: that they belonged to Garrick, Mrs. Siddons & Mrs. Kemble, I know, and with that I am satisfied." Certainly the history of modern scholarship would be very different, and a lesser thing, had Furness not begun the Variorum in Philadelphia.

Another thing that struck me as unique about this year's conference was the unusual roundtable that had been proposed on "Drafting Shakespeare: The Military Theater," which met yesterday afternoon. The idea of a session on Shakespeare in a period of war was striking and provocative, but in our planning meetings last year the Trustees worried about its timeliness: what if the U.S. was no longer at war by the time of the conference, we wondered? Nah. We came to our senses and proceeded with the unhappily still relevant session.

The combination of Philadelphia and the topic of Shakespeare in a time of war, however, also provoked in me a curiosity about Shakespeare in Philadelphia in the century before Furness and the Variorum project – during the Revolutionary War, and before that. I confess that I was totally ignorant of the subject, with a few minor exceptions. For those of you who do know this material, please forgive the amateur observations that now follow.

As it turns out, Philadelphia played an absolutely crucial role in the formation of the early American theater. The colonial and Revolutionary periods saw the same uneasy tension between the energies of theater and the forces of government that we know in Elizabethan England. Early American critics of the theater sound just like our old friend Philip Stubbes, denouncing the theater as the “Chapel of Satan” and the pit of damnation. One citizen of Philadelphia rejoiced in 1729 that there were “no Masquerading Plays, Balls, Midnight Revelling or Assemblies to debauch the Mind or promote Intrigue” (Rankin 23). And the Common Council of the City, pressured by the influence of Quakers, Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Baptists – an all-star chorus of godly opposition – condemned the performances and threatened the actors of the English touring company of Walter Murray and Thomas Kean in 1749, who promptly left town for the more hospitable New York.

The first Continental Congress, which met in Philadelphia in 1774, passed a resolution committing its members to discourage “every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting, exhibition of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments.” More than that, the Congress resolved that “any person holding office under the United States who shall act, promote, encourage, or attend such play shall be deemed unworthy to hold office and shall be accordingly dismissed” (Bigsby and Wilmeth 5). The Congress also passed an anti-importation act to discourage the use and dissemination of British culture, including theater. In 1778, the French minister, visiting Philadelphia, wrote to his Minister of Foreign Affairs about the difficulty of sponsoring entertainments in Philadelphia. “They allege a law of Congress which forbids public entertainments. This law originated with the northern Presbyterians, at the time when Congress fervently besought the aid of Heaven. Things have taken another turn, and quite a number of senators dance every week. Northern rigidity has become mollified in contact with Southern sensuousness; but there is still hesitation in repealing the law” (Brown 61). It seems strange today to think of Philadelphia as a “southern” city. In any event, despite the law, American officers performed in the Southwark Theater in September 1778. Congress was not amused: on October 12, 1778, it “earnestly recommended to the several states to take the most effectual measures for the . . . suppressing [of] theatrical entertainments . . . and other such diversions as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general depravity of principles and manners” (Brown 62). In other words, everything we like about the theater. To show that they meant business this time, Congress reiterated its position just four days later with an almost identical proclamation. And not to be outdone, on March 30, 1779, the Pennsylvania state legislature prohibited, with a Polonius-like flourish, the building of “any play house, theatre, stage or scaffold for acting, showing or exhibiting any tragedy, comedy, or tragi-comedy, farce, interlude or other play or any part of a play whatsoever,” and the act or being “in any way concerned” in them (Brown, 65). As we might expect, these prohibitions were not successful, failures even as they were enunciated, and were eventually withdrawn.

Philadelphia in the 1700s was one of the very few places on the vast, nearly empty American continent where a culture of theater could be established in the first place. It’s not enough to have playwrights and actors, though both of those were also in short supply, but a living theater needs a dependable audience, which in turn means an adequate density of citizens who to a greater or lesser extent share enough values to be able to join together occasionally in the communal ritual of going to the theater. This meant, in practice, that only Boston, New York, and Philadelphia could have been expected to sustain such an enterprise at this time; Boston, however, was too constrained by its dominant Puritan ethos and was consistently hostile. At the time I am discussing, moreover, Philadelphia was the largest American city, and was in fact the capitol of the United States between 1790 and 1800.

As a consequence of its status and its population, Philadelphia witnessed a number of important theatrical milestones. The first acting company in Philadelphia was recorded in 1724, and in 1749, the company of Walter Murray and Thomas Kean, the first recorded professional company in America with any history, presented Addison’s *Cato* in Plumstead’s Warehouse in Philadelphia. In 1754, Lewis Hallam

and his London Company of Comedians appeared in Philadelphia in *The Merchant of Venice*, at Plumstead's Warehouse. In 1759, the first recorded American professional productions of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* were presented in Philadelphia by the touring company of David Douglass (Shattuck 15). In 1766, the Southwark Theater on Cedar Street, America's first substantial playhouse, opened on November 12, and on 24 April 1767, Thomas Godfrey's *Prince of Parthia* was performed at the Southwark Theater, the first American play professionally performed. In 1770, *Julius Caesar* and *The Tempest* were presented by Douglass's company, to a mixed chorus of audience acclaim and condemnation by Quakers and Methodists. *Julius Caesar* was a particularly apt choice, as 1770 was also the year of the Boston Massacre, and liberty, republicanism, and revolt were much on their minds. In 1777, the British established a military theater in Philadelphia, about which more in a moment.¹

In 1794, the important Chestnut Street Theater opened in Philadelphia; it was the largest theater in the country, with a capacity of nearly 2,000. It had a large stage, a capacious orchestra pit that could hold 30 musicians, and up to date lighting (oil lamps that could be dimmed). In 1816, the Chestnut Street Theater became the first theater in America to be lit by gaslight; perhaps as a consequence, it burned down four years later, and was then rebuilt (Henderson 392-3).² In 1798, the first US theatrical periodical, *The Thespian Oracle*, was published in Philadelphia. In 1812, the Walnut Street Theater opened. Finally, Edwin Forrest, the first native-born white American to star on the stage in the U.S. (he had been preceded by Ira Aldridge), was born in Philadelphia, and made his unofficial debut in 1817 at the South Street Theatre (Roach 353). Let me admit, by the way, that this list of Philadelphia "firsts" is entirely anglophonic; the first documented play written and performed in the New World was – no, not *The Tempest* – but an unnamed comedy performed by the Spanish soldiers engaged in the conquest of New Mexico in 1598 (Davis 217).

But how much of this theatrical activity related to Shakespeare? As scholars such as Charles Shattuck, Hugh Rankin, Peter Davis, and Jared Brown have shown, one strand of resistance to theater in America derived from the fact that Shakespeare was an *English* author, and nationalistic feelings were often antipathetic to any English cultural import (Davis 221). But Shakespeare could still sneak into home-grown texts. The first play written and published in English in America was *Androboros*, by Robert Hunter, the governor of New York (Davis 226). The play is a political satire about early American politics, yet it contains a central character named Poor Tom; there is not a single other link to *King Lear* or to Shakespeare in this character, but there are several explicit quotations from *Hamlet* scattered through the text. In his book, *The Theater in Colonial America*, Hugh Rankin notes that in "the twenty-four years before the Revolution, fourteen of [Shakespeare's] plays were performed at least 180 times," and he suggests the total might be close to 500 (Rankin 191). Many of those performances were in Philadelphia. The most popular plays, he reports, were *Richard III* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

But back to the Philadelphia story. War and theater merged in Philadelphia in 1777 as the Southwark Theater was used as a hospital for the wounded. General Howe had captured and occupied Philadelphia in September 1777; while General Washington and his troops were suffering enormously through the terrible winter at Valley Forge, Howe and his troops enjoyed "dancing assemblies, cock-fighting bouts, races, and theatrical entertainments" (Brown 45). Captain Johann Heinrichs, a Hessian mercenary serving with the British army, wrote in his letter-book of this languid decadence, "Assemblies, Concerts, Comedies, Clubs and the like make us forget that there is any war, save that it is a capital joke" (Brown 46). Benjamin Franklin – whose 300th birthday, by the way, Philadelphia is now celebrating – also commented on Howe's inability to resist the city's social lures. When he was told that Howe had taken Philadelphia, Franklin responded, "I beg your pardon, Sir, Philadelphia has taken Howe" (Van Doren 585). Although most Philadelphians "looked with disdain upon the British army's pursuit of luxury," Brown notes, yet "a sizeable group threw itself into the festive atmosphere with fervor. Indeed, according to one history of Philadelphia, "the winter of 1777-78 was a season of gayety unprecedented, probably, in the annals of the city" (Brown 46). The 1778 season began at the Southwark Theater on

January 19 and lasted 4 months; 14 performances were given by General Howe's officers.³ Howe's indulgences in the pleasures of Philadelphia allowed the Continental army to survive and regroup. British military inaction during this period enabled Washington's army, having survived the winter, to recapture Philadelphia in the summer of 1778. As one British writer would criticize General Howe, the winter had wasted "away in lust and lechery" (Brown 56). So we might all yet be British citizens had it not been for the diversions of the British military theater.

Astonishingly, in spite of the hardships he and his troops suffered that winter, General Washington approved the opening of a theatre at Valley Forge and a play was given there on April 15, 1778—the title, alas, not recorded (Brown 57-8). To celebrate the French alliance with America, and the survival over the winter, another theatrical entertainment was ordered: Addison's *Cato*; it was Washington's favorite play, "perhaps because he identified with Cato as an opponent of Caesarism," Brown speculates, "and according to Garry Wills, [it was] the most popular play in eighteenth-century America (Brown 58). Among the plays the *British* troops performed at the same time was, somewhat surprisingly, Shakespeare's *King Henry IV*, on March 25, 1778, and again on March 30 (Brown 174). Could they really have staged the scenes of Falstaff's cynical manipulation of the King's press, the slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth? What might they have thought when they heard "food for powder, food for powder," or Falstaff's critique of honor as a "mere scutcheon"? Or was the production cut so as to bring the play closer to the "famous victories" of its source, and look forward to another British triumph? We don't know. Some of Washington's troops in Valley Forge, as it turns out, were also thinking of this play. On Dec. 30, 1777, General Anthony Wayne wrote from the despair and suffering of the Valley Forge encampment, "My people will be covered in a few days, I mean as to huts, but naked as to clothing – they are in that respect in a worse condition than Falstaff's recruits for they have not one whole shirt to a Brigade" (Freeman 571). George Washington himself, defying the odds against his army, wrote in that winter of 1778 that "They [the enemy] will know, that it is our Arms, not defenceless Towns, they have to Subdue, before they can arrive at the haven of their Wishes, and that, till this end is accomplished, the Superstructure they have been endeavouring to raise, 'like the baseless fabric of a vision', falls to nothing" (Washington 15).⁴ Washington here links himself with that European Renaissance prince, Prospero, also temporarily exiled to a natural place of danger that serves as a launching pad from which to reclaim political power. Certainly Washington associates Caliban's rebellion, temporarily shattering his dream of return, with Howe's temporary capture of Philadelphia. I should add that a very careful collation of Washington's quotation reveals that he had copies of the Arden, New Cambridge, and the Oxford editions of *The Tempest* before him as he wrote.

Of the records that I have been able to find of theatrical performances at this time, primarily in New York and Philadelphia, the same Shakespearean titles seemed to be played repeatedly. Between 1778 and 1783, the British military theater performed, at various venues, *King Henry IV*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Richard III*, among others – a fascinating list of plays; on the other hand, it's pretty clear that they had not yet read Franco Moretti's essay on "the deconsecration of sovereignty," as this dramatic procession of illegitimate, weak, destructive, and tyrannical monarchs might indicate.

Regular theaters not under British control in Annapolis, New York, and Philadelphia were at the same time staging some of the very same plays – *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Henry IV*, and *Richard III* – but also *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice* and, more unexpectedly, *King John*. There also seems to have been a tradition, on both the British and the American sides, of pairing a Shakespeare play with an afterpiece, a farce or entertainment. Some of the pairings seem, well, a little odd: thus *King Henry IV* and *The Upholsterer*; *Othello* and *The Harlequin Landlord*; *Hamlet* and *The Devil Upon Two Sticks*. *Richard III* seems to have been particularly popular, so we find *Richard III* and *Polly Honeycombe*, *Richard III* and *Miss in Her Teens*, *Richard III* and *The Irish Widow*, *Richard III* and *The Romance of an Hour*. Other pairings seem more pointed: *King Lear* and *Cross Purposes*; *Macbeth* and *The Mock Doctor*; *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Wrangling Lovers*; but then there was also *Tamerlane the Great* and *High Life Below*

*Stairs*⁵, a clever double billing in which the scourge of God finds himself in a hilarious bedroom romp about servants and masters in Georgian London.

The choice of most of these plays seems logical enough, as many deal with the imposition of tyranny and the resistance struggle for liberty. There is certainly little sign of the moral ambiguities of *Troilus and Cressida*, a corrosive play about war that does *not* appear during the Revolutionary War – nor, according to yesterday’s roundtable, is it taught at the Army War College. The Shakespearean titles in a time of war were primarily histories and tragedies. *The Tempest*, for us the quintessential play of the New World, rarely appears on these lists of performances, though Washington had obviously read the play.

We will never know exactly what the British and American soldiers took away from the theatrical performances they saw in the dark winter of 1777-78 in Philadelphia and at Valley Forge. Perhaps it was nothing more than pure escapism from the monotony and terror of surviving and waiting. Perhaps the plays were meant to inspire their causes, like Essex’s men commissioning a performance of *Richard II* before their rebellion. Did the British soldiers, when they saw *Henry IV*, see the Americans in Hotspur, and draw strength from his defeat? Did the American soldiers, if they saw the play, see the British in a weak King Henry, or a crazed Glendower? That both armies were thinking about this same play still puzzles me. In any event, in the next decade after its liberation, 1790-1800, Philadelphia became, as Joseph Roach has observed, “the dominant anglophone theatre center” (Roach 340) in America. The Philadelphia Story tells us, in a way no other city can, how Shakespeare came to America, and so it is especially appropriate that the Shakespeare Association has now returned to Philadelphia.

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¹ Dates and events in this and the following paragraph are taken, unless otherwise noted, from the very useful compilation by Wilmeth and Curley.

² Henderson gives the capacity, quoting a contemporary report, as 2,000 (392); Shattuck says 1,200 (25-9).

³ Brown (47) says 13 performances; Bigsby and Wilmeth say 14 (6).

⁴ In his essay on the cultural construction of "Shakespeare" in the New World, Michael Dobson says that Washington "alludes to Shakespeare only once in his entire written *oeuvre*," i.e., in this quotation (Dobson 196).

⁵ The list of titles in this and the preceding paragraph derive from Brown's helpful Appendix, "A List of the Known Theatrical Productions Given in America during the Revolution" (173-87)