

Dympna Callaghan
Address in Toronto, 29 March 2013

Welcome to you all. And there are an awful lot of you here.

It is my very pleasant duty is to welcome all of you and to extend a special welcome to those of you who have never before been to an SAA. If you don't know anyone, feel you don't belong etc., let me assure you of the fact that this won't last. When I first came here, not having done my Ph.D. in the US, I truly didn't know anyone, and yet no sooner had I spilt coffee on an unsuspecting colleague in the break between paper sessions in Austin, Texas than I had made my first friend at the SAA. (I must point out that this was an accident, and I don't suggest newcomers do this deliberately—well, not unless you are really pushed.)

One of the things I have been so grateful to SAA for is that you get to meet people in person that you've only known as texts. One memorable SAA in San Diego, I was introduced to Stephen Booth at a restaurant where he was having dinner with someone I knew. Then, like Bottom in the wake of that incident with the Queen of Fairies, I was so overcome by the idea that the great editor of the Sonnets was in the flesh before me, I said "Are you really Stephen Booth?" He said, "Yes, I really am," and I said something inane like, "I think you're amazing." It was probably just my imagination that he had that look of someone who is wondering if he can make a quick getaway out back via the restroom window. It was the sort of look that you might expect to see on the face of George Clooney or Jon Hamm when confronted by a crazed fan. But let's face it, who'd want to meet George Clooney or Jon Hamm when you could meet Stephen Booth. And no matter what kind of a fool I made of myself, I'm still really thrilled to have met him.

Then there was the time I ran into Stephen Orgel. When I say "ran into" what I mean is that I was late for an early SAA breakfast meeting; I'd jumped out of the shower, thrown my clothes on, daubed on a bit of lippy and raced out—but just as I bolted into the corridor, Stephen Orgel was walking past. Now, he must have been walking closer to the doors on my side of the corridor than in the middle (by which I don't mean to make him culpable, to apportion blame—I'm just telling you how it happened)—because I ran slap-dab into him and we both lost our balance. In a split second, the hideous consciousness dawned upon me that it was 6:55 in the morning, and I was on lying on top of Stephen Orgel whom I had felled in a hotel corridor. My career in ruins flashed before my eyes. Then another hotel guest, an SAA member who shall remain nameless, opened her door. She was clearly horror-stricken at seeing me trying to unravel myself from Stephen Orgel, who was struggling to get up, and she beat a hasty retreat into her room. Stephen, wherever you are, I want to say publicly what I have been too ashamed to say before, I so very sorry about what happened that morning, and I hope you sustained no long-term injuries.

But seriously my point is, if you are new, or indeed, more especially if you've been around a wee while, talk to strangers, bump into people. So with Touchstone I enjoin you to "Accost, accost." (You can even meet people with names other than "Stephen"). I'm happy to say that I have met new people here every single year—and some of them have suffered neither dry-cleaning bills nor physical injury as a consequence.

I think it is also important that I tell you that if you are new to the SAA—perhaps a graduate student, or if you are an academic from outside the US, or an independent scholar—I am so glad you are here because the SAA as an organization requires your presence for its success. In order to remain fresh, to keep up the flow of new ideas about scholarship, performance and teaching, we need people coming up from Ph.D. programs, scholars from elsewhere—elsewhere in the world and sometimes from outside the academy—who share the gifts of their learning and ingenuity at SAA.

I would also like to say how wonderful it is to be in Canada with its own distinctive and distinguished tradition of Shakespearean scholarship. For this is the Shakespeare Association of America, and not just of the United States, and so it is a particular privilege to be here in Toronto. (And I am not just saying that because SAA in Toronto makes where I live in Syracuse, New York seem like the tropics!) I'm saying it because this is yet another thing that is wonderful about the SAA: while being firmly—and quite rightly—institutionally based in and focused upon the North American academy, SAA has open borders, and the traditions of scholarship and pedagogy native to North America are only enhanced by that openness. We now have members from no fewer than thirty-six countries. So wherever you hail from or to wherever you have been transplanted, you belong here at the SAA, and this is something for which I personally, as a transplant myself, have always been very grateful.

That spirit of inclusiveness, one of the many things I so appreciate about the SAA, means that although we haven't yet got the complete head-count in for this conference, there are more of us in the organization than there have been at any previous time since its founding by the esteemed and wonderful J. Leeds Barroll over 40 years ago. The SAA has grown since then, having almost doubled in size between 2004 and 2012. The organization now stands at approximately 1,300 members. Of course, not all of these—mercifully—come to the conference at any one time, but the increased size incurs some inconvenience—for example, we do have to keep the conference in more or less two out of three years on an Easter/Passover weekend, just to keep hotel rates in check. Also, as you will have noticed the Board of Trustees has been tweaking the schedule. In order to allow a more equitable proportion of the membership the opportunity to deliver papers in the unique conditions of the SAA before such a sizeable audience of specialists from every level of the profession, there will be three (rather than the traditional two) concurrent panel sessions tomorrow. We hope that the new, fairly minor adjustments to the schedule (the Thursday morning seminar session and the extra panels on Saturday) will prove a step in the right direction and will do so without cluttering the schedule or infringing on those precious SAA moments when like-minded Shakespeareans can get down to brass tacks in conversations outside the public spaces of the seminar and the panel. This is an experiment and we won't really know if it has worked until the conference is over. Only then can we tell whether the fragile balance of the SAA conference ecosystem has been maintained. (Rest assured that the Board will re-evaluate and recalibrate wherever necessary, and over the coming years, the Board will continue to look into the matter of how to set the conference schedule with a view to fully and fairly representing the membership and the diversity of members' scholarly interests in both seminars and panel sessions.)

This is important because here we have a space where we are not teaching, but where we are sharing and exchanging. Here, especially in the format of the seminar pioneered by former executive director, Ann Jennalie Cook, we have permission *not* to assume the posture of *le sujet supposer savoir* (you see—I really do know we are in Canada—and yes, I know we are in Ontario and not Québec). Here at SAA, while still within the context of academic rigor, we are allowed to be uncertain, to have the tentative beginnings of an idea rather than a fully developed conclusion; we are allowed not to know the final destination of our arguments and even to “get them wrong” in a work in progress for a seminar in the process of exploring uncharted territory in order to be spurred on to new insights and to different directions than the ones we had hitherto imagined for our projects. At the SAA we find others who also appreciate the intellectual energy that needs to be spent on Shakespeare, on questions about language and history that do not admit easy answers, but that often, in fact, require dense and convoluted ones—responses, rather than answers, that stretch our thinking far beyond its comfort zone. And while popular interest in Shakespeare is certainly connected to our enterprise, it is especially important that the cutting-edge critical studies, textual work, theories of performance, historical and archival explorations—that is to say, work that is *not* primarily defined by accessibility—is nurtured here. (Accessibility certainly has its place, a very important one in which members also spend a great deal of time—namely, the classroom, the public lecture, the theater). But those places are not the SAA, even though what we do here fuels our capacity to speak to those other audiences in other venues.

I realize I'm preaching to the converted here—indeed, I want to celebrate the very fact that this is so, and I do so in response to the increasing institutional pressure (not all of it bad) to explain the significance of our contribution. Sadly, however, we are asked to explain ourselves not so often on intellectual grounds (a prospect which most of us would relish, I think) as on economic ones. The kind of work the SAA does that represents specifically scholarly endeavor and accomplishment and that benefits from our coming together annually, in the flesh rather than in cyber-space, to discuss matters that promise no immediate economic or social gain, flies in the face of recent developments in humanities education. Here, I want to return to some of the issues that I briefly touched upon in the newsletter. These matters have occupied me a great deal of late and I believe to be of the utmost urgency, and therefore to merit further iteration.

For what is so striking about the expansion of the SAA is that whatever is the case elsewhere, the much-vaunted imminent demise of the humanities is not evident in the SAA, and for that, I think all of us can be immensely grateful. This is not to say that many members' institutions and careers have not been touched by declining interest in and funding for humanities' research, but it is to say that SAA members remain, in spite of all obstacles, committed to teaching Shakespeare, to educating new generations of general readers, scholars, theater practitioners, film-makers, bloggers, poets and writers, and to discovering in their own research projects more about the historical and literary conditions that shaped Shakespeare's works. In this, Shakespeare Studies and the Shakespeareans who practice it represent a vital line of defense against the erosion of the humanities. What is at stake here is not only Shakespeare's canonical or intrinsic significance (though that should not be underestimated), but also the way in which Shakespeare serves as a portal to a vast range of issues—textual, digital, lyrical, emotional, aesthetic, social, stylistic, political, cultural, historical, philosophical, environmental (you name it)—that requires a mode of critical reflection, a form of imaginative and creative intellection, that is not bludgeoned by what I have been calling the tyranny of relevance, that is, the insistence that literary studies demonstrate its immediate usefulness as a tool for “innovation,” social progress, or economic gain. However, Shakespeare Studies is, of course, always well able to demonstrate its vital role in contemporary life even as it resists the narrow remit of “relevance,” the limited, overly instrumental understandings of what it means for Shakespeare to remain pertinent. SAA members show how the confluence of issues that characterized literary and non-literary textual output of the early modern era might help us think through our own philosophical conundrums, political problems, and aesthetic dilemmas, that is to those circumstances that are specific and even unique to our present historical moment. Our members every day make evident how Shakespeare can be used in the classroom to endow our students with skills of self-articulation and enhanced academic acumen, and how Shakespeare in the theater or on the web can become a refraction of issues of the most immediate, urgent importance to communities across the globe.

Finally, while I certainly want to celebrate what we do here, I regret it also behooves me to address a certain excoriating division within the SAA itself. I am aware that in this I violate the hallowed tradition of the SAA luncheon address by raising serious and disturbing matters so close to home, but it would be a dereliction of duty to remain silent on this matter. I refer of course to that sad undertow of the conference—to the fact that the membership is woefully and sharply divided between those who attend the Malone Society Dance and those who do not. Those of you who don't attend (you sad lot!) you have no idea what you're missing. For a very modest admission charge, you can see people you've known only as library books boogeying on down amidst the throng of Shakespeareans. You don't need a partner, you don't need to be a good dancer, lithe or limber, you just need to let go and catch the rhythm—iambic pentameter or trochaic trimeter can actually work out pretty well in terms of the footwork. It's funny too because when you go to the SAA dance early in your career, and you see the library books getting down, you think “These people don't get out much.” Then later, you think, “Gosh I haven't danced all year, I should get out more.”

But wherever you are in your career, tomorrow night is the Malone Society Dance. So go on, shake a leg for Shakespeare and the SAA.

Thanks and Awards

My first pleasant duty is to congratulate the newly elected officials: Rebecca Bushnell as Vice-President, Katherine Rowe and Ayanna Thompson as Trustees. Please stand when you hear your name so that everyone knows who you are.

I offer thanks to all the people who made this conference possible: retiring Trustees Jim Siemon and Doug Lanier and retiring President Suzanne Gossett for their wonderful work. I also want to extend a personal thank you to my predecessor, Suzanne Gossett, for her generous advice in showing me the ropes and, on behalf of all of us, I want to thank her for all her work as President of the organization last year.

This year's Program Committee was chaired by Valerie Traub. Thanks to her and Gina Bloom, Elizabeth Harvey, Ian Smith, and William B. Worthen.

The Nominating Committee was chaired by Laurie Shannon, with David Baker and Ellen MacKay.

The Travel Awards Committee was chaired by Douglas Lanier, with Sujata Iyengar.

The Local Arrangements Committee was chaired by Lynn Magnusson.

As you all know, there would be no conference without the SAA staff. Bailey Yeager is a wonder of organization and efficiency, and she was assisted by Donna Even-Kesef for part of the year. The SAA wouldn't function without Bailey. Heartfelt thanks to Michele Osherow who was Interim Executive Director while our Executive Director was on leave and who managed to work on innumerable SAA matters from accommodation to zip file issues despite the demands of teaching and dramaturging at the Folger Library. The greatest debt as ever remains with our Executive Director, the magnificent Lena Orlin. Lena is the most democratic person I have ever met, by which I mean that she is totally committed to the SAA operating in a way that fully and fairly represents its membership. Also, what's truly impressive is that even as a world-class scholar, she is completely committed to running this organization, to the nuts and bolts of it—she was at Kinko's at 2:00 in the morning last week with our financial report—like finding convenient conference locations, the hotel rates, and whether enough people have had a shot at giving a paper here, and trying to make sure that everyone feels included, valued, and welcomed. For this, and for the countless hours of her labor, for her painstaking email responses to questions on the nitty-gritty of SAA matters, she has my unstinting admiration and I know she has the heartfelt thanks of everyone in this room.

Now it is my pleasure to announce the winners of the various SAA awards. I begin with the dissertation prize. I invite the winner to please come up to the podium: Matthew J. Smith from the University of Southern California, whose dissertation "Stage, Cathedral, Wagon, Street: The Grounds of Belief in Shakespeare and Renaissance Performance," was supervised by Professor Bruce R. Smith. Congratulations Matthew!

We also recognize two Honorable Mentions this year: Eleanor Decamp, from the University of Oxford, and Scott Trudell, from Rutgers University.

The winner of the Bogliasco fellowship this year is William C. Carroll. Please stand Bill. Congratulations.

Finally, it is my very pleasant duty to hand you over our new President, Diana Henderson.