

**Anthony B. Dawson**  
**Address in Minneapolis, 22 March 2002**

I begin with thanks to outgoing trustees (Meredith Skura, Stephen Orgel, and Lois Potter), to members of this year's program committee (chaired by Jeff Masten, with Doug Lanier, Lynne Magnusson, and Susanne Wofford), to the Local Arrangements committee chaired by John Watkins, and to members of the SAA staff.

Those of you who have been around the SAA for a few years will have noticed two small innovations this year: a glass of wine with lunch (not to be regarded as the beginning of a tradition by the way!), and menu cards with a list on the back of all those who have served the SAA as president since its founding in 1972. These small changes mark an occasion, indeed a time for a small celebration—it is the 30th anniversary of the founding of the SAA and our 30th annual meeting (and it's also 20 years since we last met in Minneapolis). The organization was established in 1972 and the first conference was held in 1973—so we are celebrating two thirtieth birthdays in one year, even though the events being commemorated took place in different years. For some time I found this a puzzling and, as Gilbert and Sullivan might put it, a most ingenious paradox, but after some serious thought, I realized that it's rather like the new millennium actually beginning not on January 1, 2000 but a year later: the SAA was founded in 1972 and reaches 30 this year, while the inaugural conference was held the next year, in 1973, 29 years ago, which of course means that this year we are enjoying the 30th annual conference. I hope that's clear!

Anyway, I wanted to mark the occasion by reflecting briefly on the past of the organization. I'd like to begin by honoring those who have served as president of the SAA over this period. Many of these people of course, are not here, some sadly no longer with us in the flesh but here in spirit, as we remember them and their work; others were unable to make the journey for one reason or another; but a goodly number are here. What I propose to do is simply read their names and, once I've done so, could I ask all those who are here to stand up and be acknowledged? Starting in '73: G.E. Bentley; Madeleine Doran; Maynard Mack; David Bevington; Robert Ornstein; C. L. Barber; Charles Shattuck; Sam Schoenbaum; Bernard Beckerman; Norman Rabkin; O. B. Hardison; Jonas Barish; Leeds Barroll; Jeanne Roberts; Maurice Charney; Anne Lancashire; Carol Neely; Michael Warren; Jill Levenson; Linda Woodbridge; Phyllis Rackin; Bruce Smith; David Bevington; Barbara Mowat; Mary Beth Rose; Jim Bulman; Jean Howard; and Meredith Skura.

While we're commemorating and thanking, I don't want to forget all those other people, too numerous to mention by name, who have acted as trustees, and I especially want to acknowledge the crucial help of the four Executive Secretaries / Executive Directors who have served the organization over the years—Leeds Barroll, Ann Jennalie Cook, Nancy Hodge, and our current ED, the indispensable Lena Orlin, all of whom have done more than could be recounted in a much longer address than I am allowed, to bring the SAA to its current state of well-being.

Commemoration is an act of memory, and memory is a major cultural preoccupation at present. We think of occasions in round numbers, 30 being rounder and more resonant than 29, suitable for a ritual of remembrance that binds us all together in some way. I was in New York on March 11th, six months exactly after September 11th, and there was a solemn gathering where a battered sculpture was rededicated, radio broadcasts were replayed, and two tall beams of light were cast into the night air, ghostly reminiscences of the towers they replaced—all efforts not to forget, and tied to a specific measured time span. The links that such moments provide are suggested by a key word in the name of our organization—not "Shakespeare," not (clearly-speaking as a Canadian) "America"—but "Association," with its root in Latin *socius*, meaning "sharing" or "allied" in its adjectival form, "partner" in its nominal; hence the suggestion of links, filaments of relationship. Shakespeare never uses the word, but it was around in his time, disapproved of by Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, in 1535 ("Methinks the

word association soundeth not well”), no doubt because of the suspect relationships it might cover. While not conspiratorial, our Association embraces all kinds of relationships, even including (perhaps) suspect ones . . . but let’s leave that avenue unexplored.

Thinking about the SAA and its history, I found myself thinking of my own association with it—acts of commemoration, while they are ritual occasions, are also personal, ways of tying us as separate persons to the larger whole. My first SAA was in 1978 in Toronto (I’ll leave you to figure out whether that was the 5th, 6th or 7th conference). The focus throughout was on teaching, a vital aspect of our work that has been prominent quite frequently over the years since. But for me the big occasion was having a long chat with C. L. Barber, whom I regarded as a kind of demi-god but who in keeping with the spirit of our association turned out to be simply a very kind and winning colleague, as well as someone who both wrote about and embodied the kind of continuity we’re celebrating today. In the next year, both I and the SAA were caught up directly in the winds of change. It was San Francisco; what better place, even in the late ’70s, for a mini-revolution? I went to a session called “Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare.” It was the second session of the morning and therefore preceded by the requisite coffee break, in which I’m ashamed to say I over-indulged. With my usual difficulty locating the right salon, I arrived in the crowded room just as things were getting under way, and found a seat, one of the few left, in the front row. All went fine during the first paper but by the time the second speaker was into her theme I began to feel the stirrings of discomfort. This had nothing to do with the subject matter, which I was absorbing more successfully than I was the coffee—which wanted out. By the end of the session I was visibly squirming, no doubt to the consternation of the speakers who probably took my physical discomfort for intellectual disdain or defensive masculine hubris. Here was a case of “the body embarrassed” *avant la lettre!* Little did they know that my rushing out of the session the minute the last speaker finished, far from being a mark of dismay or disagreement, could actually be construed as a gesture of solidarity—if one could use such a term for an association based on the flow of the liquid.

The next event on the schedule was the luncheon and the post-prandial speech. You should know that in those days the SAA president was not inevitably saddled with the near impossible task of instructing and/or delighting his or her fellow members as an accompaniment to chocolate “bombe” and coffee. Rather, an eminent Shakespearean, almost always male (the only exception being Madeleine Doran in 1982), was invited to give what was known as the Annual Lecture. This practice began in 1973—the first conference though the second year as you’ll recall—with Harry Levin, and ended in 1984 (was that the 12th or the 13th?) with Joseph Summers. This particular year, the lecture, far from being the bland sort of thing you might expect, was mischievously controversial. A very fine scholar/critic told us, among other things, that there really wasn’t much left to say about Shakespeare, virtually everything of value having been exhaustively set down by our predecessors. He therefore proposed that we drop the rush to write and publish anew and spend more time absorbing the accomplishments of those in the generations that preceded us. Needless to say this did not go down well with the large number of younger scholars present. Many of us had just been at the SAA’s first session on feminist approaches (though most had not had to make an ignominious exit). Who could not perceive the irony, and, given the imminence of feminism, new historicism, cultural materialism, etc., in the ‘80s, who cannot now see, with hindsight, the danger of making such a pronouncement?

Of course, while I, with many, was dismayed and skeptical then, from my current vantage point, I have to confess that the idea that there may not be much left worth saying begins to have a certain attraction! Older and wiser you might say, or simply older. It’s an idea that arises partly as a result of having grown with the organization and wanting to keep it a certain way. I suppose it might also be seen as a preliminary to Alzheimer’s, something that happens just before the mind goes completely! But what if we look at all this a bit differently, as a sign of what makes us an Association? What if we were to reinterpret the lecturer’s fighting words—as an appeal not to forget the past, but rather to re-visit earlier work and hence avoid the tendency to reinvent the wheel? Still, of course, he left out something equally

imperative—the corollary need to welcome the renewal that comes with change. Both are involved in being an association—entailing a fruitful tension between continuity and discontinuity; in 1986, Leeds Barroll wrote in his presidential letter about finding unity in our diversity (embattled as unity was then and still is). He adopted a long-range perspective, looking back to the far-off past “before 1975” and forward to a time when our successors might be going to conferences on other planets—all in the interest of representing and maintaining intellectual and cultural succession. “Before 1975” . . . Leeds’s irony touched on a crucial matter—that the work of our predecessors is part of what we are today.

One of the great virtues of the SAA has always been its openness, let us hope to our own past as well as to new people and new ideas. Openness was the basis of one of the SAA’s greatest contributions to scholarly life in North America, the much-imitated system of seminars, which was, I believe, developed for the ISA meeting in Washington in 1976 (the credit here belongs primarily to Ann Cook) and became a staple part of our meetings the next year when there were four seminars offered with a grand total of 42 participants. Three years later, in 1980, the number had jumped to ten, with 150 participants, and by 1990 there were 25 seminars and workshops involving around 400 people (and by now we typically run around 35 such sessions). This is a record of extraordinary success—we were clearly doing something right. In 1977 the inaugurating topics were: “Shakespeare and Italy,” “Identifying F composers,” “Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean roles,” “Audience Response.” Such topics haven’t disappeared but new ones have, needless to say, been added. By 1991, there were seminars on bastards, dramatic dialogue, colonialism, the English church, and cross-dressing (this last perhaps in homage to the memorable plenary session on “Erotic Politics” the year before in Philadelphia, when the speakers, in a natty *coup de théâtre*, changed clothes and even gender before our eyes). And the diversity continues.

In the stream of all this change, there are, as I said, important currents of continuity—perhaps more than anything the work of predecessors, such as C. L. Barber, Bernard Beckerman, Sam Schoenbaum, and the others I’ve named (and many I haven’t named); but there are also more embodied pleasures to be remembered. One way of writing the material history of the SAA (should I send this in to *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*?) would be to chronicle our receptions. One of my personal favorites was in Montréal in ’86, champagne among the orchids and bonsai trees in the botanic garden, courtesy of the grandiose mayor Jean Drapeau who brought Montréal the fame of Expo 67 and the infamy of the Olympics in ’76. Others will remember Vizcaya in Miami last year with its parrots, the huge sides of beef in Texas, Arthur Erickson’s airy Museum of Anthropology in Vancouver, the wonderful governor’s hacienda in Santa Fe, and the Union League club in Philadelphia where the men were required to wear jacket and tie (no turtlenecks!) while women, as the Bulletin said, were given “somewhat wider latitude.” Then there were the excursions, such as the “hill country BBQ” at the “Salt Lick” in Driftwood, Texas (though the beer reportedly ran out); or that to Kiana Lodge near Seattle where the hickory smoked salmon pleased but a late night boat trip and a nasty turn in the weather saw many a chilled conferee eager for the haven of the Four Seasons.

I picture our imaginary future chronicler struggling with the meaning of such events; it would help if s/he had access to the soundscape, what we might call the acoustic world of the SAA—for it is the *talk*, above all, that stands out in memory. Anyone who has ever been on an SAA bus will testify to the amazing din that normally sedate Shakespeareans can make when they all talk at once. (And because one of the rules of SAA life is that buses always go astray at least once a conference, there’s plenty of time to raise this kind of benign assault.) In my experience the only place that ever succeeded in silencing Shakespeareans was a Japanese temple in Kyoto (on the SAA tour prior to the Tokyo meetings). I have a lovely photo of a troop of our members picking their way gingerly across an ornamental pond on strategically placed stones, with a temple reflected in the water behind—quieted temporarily by the meditative nimbleness of the moment.

You could all supply your own examples to our chronicler, and my aim is chiefly to stir individual memories in the interest of the kind of collective memory I began by invoking. On this material theme I can do no better than recall C.L. Barber's "saturnalian pattern" and the festive "rituals of pleasure" that it structures—"through release to clarification" in his memorable formulation. For the SAA, the festivity is as important as the history or the intellectual debate—it frames it and gives it life. Shakespeare, not surprisingly, knew something about this (what doesn't he know about?):

True it is that we have seen better days . . . [*says Duke Senior to Orlando*]  
True it is that we have seen better days . . .  
And sat at good men's feasts, and wip'd our eyes  
Of drops that sacred pity hath engender'd,  
And therefore sit you down in gentleness  
And take upon command what help we have . . . .

Memory modulating into welcome and festivity. Memory-making is a recurrent motif in Shakespeare, as with Henry V before Agincourt, or Hamlet with his ghostly father, Leontes with his daughter. "All shall be forgot," says King Henry, and it's true enough, despite the efforts of old men to remember and embellish their memories "with advantage"—all shall be forgot. But there is a time in between, rather a long one, and it's that interim, to adapt Hamlet's phrasing, that is ours. Henry realizes that the mechanism of prolonging memory consists mainly of narratives: there's a grace in the telling. That's what makes for both continuance and cohesion, for a sense of something larger than we are as individuals. His purpose may indeed be propagandistic—but so in a way is mine. The Association that we value and commemorate today exists to extend memories and traditions, as well as to provide us with stories—the stories that Shakespeare tells, and the ones that we tell: anecdotes like those I've regaled you with, and larger stories about what we know and knew, what our predecessors have thought and written, what we might one day think and set down—to provide us with stories, if not till "the ending of the world," at least for a good time to come.

I've been a member of quite a few scholarly organizations but the SAA is the only one that stirs the kind of sentiments in me that I hope have been apparent in what I've been saying, so let me close by declaring what a privilege and pleasure it has been for me to serve as President of this association, as I now, literally and figuratively, step down to make way for our next president, Susanne Wofford.