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As you will have discerned from the cover of your program, we are now enjoying the 39th Annual Meeting of this organization—some enjoying it perhaps more than others—and 39 seems an appropriate age for retrospection, a vantage point from which to recall the origins of the Shakespeare Association of America and to reflect on ways that such hindsight can be made useful, especially as we prepare for the celebration of our fortieth anniversary in Boston 2012. So, much of this talk is about you, about how you have created and sustained this organization. As Theseus reminds us, St. Valentine's day is past, but that fact does not prevent me from offering what is essentially a Valentine to the SAA, a billet-doux to an institution that I consider the most rewarding affiliation of my professional life. Much of this will be about memory. A friend of a friend recently went to Europe, and since my friend is an art historian, he was eager to talk to her when she got back. When he eagerly inquired whether she had seen the Piero della Francesca in Arezzo and the Giogiones in Venice, she instantly silenced him: "Stop," she said, "I don't remember artists, I don't remember dates, I only remember slights." Now I *could* take that route; most of us could happily take that route. But not today. These remarks are almost entirely affirmative, frankly celebratory, or, as I have learned to say recently, celeBRAYtory. Call me Pollyanna. These are my reflections on how the SAA has been meaningful to me. In other words, it's not really about you; in the genuine spirit of the academy, it's about me.

I have attended, without exception, every single SAA meeting since 1981. Call me Justice Shallow. Knowing as I do something about the demographics of this organization, I am aware that many of you were not yet born in 1981. You in particular may need to be informed that in the 1970s American academics did not regularly go to conferences. There was the MLA, but regular meetings about particular authors or topics were exceedingly rare. All that would change radically as the twentieth century hurtled to its end, and the example of the newly created SAA did much to help create the sense of stimulation and joy in talking with like-minded people about one's disciplinary passion.

The Shakespeare Association of America in its present form was founded in the early 1970s, thanks almost entirely to the enterprise, persistence, and imagination of J. Leeds Barroll. After the first organizational session in 1972, hosted by O. B. Hardison at the Folger Library, the first full meeting of the association was held at the Washington Hilton in March 1973. Gerald Eades Bentley at Princeton was the first President, Madeleine Doran of the University of Wisconsin the second, Harry Levin gave the first Annual Lecture, and about ten minutes after the commencement of the first meeting Ann Jennalie Cook began to see to it that things ran smoothly, officially replacing Leeds Barroll as Executive Secretary in 1975. It was she who devised and nurtured the formula that has contributed perhaps more than anything to the success of the SAA, the scheme that has been much imitated by other organizations; I refer to the system of the seminars. Now I'm not going to rehearse from this podium the particulars of organization and administration that attended the creation of the Board of Trustees, established the protocols for the annual meeting, and secured the future of the Association, but many of those historical details are fascinating, and after I have finished I hope you will take the opportunity to become more acquainted with some of this history.

I said that I have attended every meeting since 1981, but this is in fact my thirty-second meeting, my first being in 1977, April 7 through 9, precisely thirty four years ago this weekend. I was teaching in Mississippi, my first job, and since the conference was being held at the Fairmount Hotel in New Orleans, the refuge to which on the weekends we regularly fled anyway, my wife and I and a colleague decided to attend. Here is my program for that meeting. The opening reception was unusually swank, held at the antebellum home, on a splendid corner of St. Charles Avenue, of the president of Tulane. For those of us who had been banished by the job market to the nether regions of the academy, it was, intellectually speaking, a heady couple of days. On Saturday afternoon, we had to choose between competing sessions.

The first offered talks by Richard Wheeler and C. L. Barber, the former no slouch and the latter, in my eyes—youthful eyes at the time—one of the gods of the discipline. But I went instead to the other session, in which the two speakers were Fredson Bowers and Stephen Orgel. Bowers gave a paper on the short-line pentameter in *Cymbeline*, which he resolutely insisted on pronouncing Cymbe-line (long i), and Stephen Orgel gave an early version of the now classic article later published in *Critical Inquiry*, “Shakespeare and the Kinds of Drama.” The weekend offered other exciting Shakespearean moments. Norman Rabkin sat behind me in one session and commented, *sotto voce*, very generously on the papers he was hearing. That is also the meeting at which two of our members, and members seems to be the requisite noun, found themselves, after a visit to some of the watering holes on Toulouse Street, with a pair of airline hostesses skinny-dipping at midnight in the pool of the Fairmount Hotel.

If subsequent meetings have not been, for me, quite so intellectually dazzling or so socially adventurous, there have been memorable moments at all of them. At a lunch during one early meeting I sat next to a charming woman, very aged, who had been, at Radcliffe in the 1920s, a student of George Lyman Kittredge himself, and much of the lunch was given over to her regaling us with stories of the great man she referred to affectionately as Kitty. I recall the opening reception in Miami held at Vizcaya, one of the most beautiful houses in America, with sumptuous food and attendants holding real parrots on their wrists, all of this arranged by the late and much lamented Peggy Endel. At the other end of the meteorological scale, many of you will remember the freak snowstorm in Montréal in 2000 when departing flights were cancelled and whole packs of us had to slide our way back to the hotel in taxis that we couldn't afford, to spend another night at the Queen Elizabeth hotel, that we couldn't afford. Somewhere among my financial records is a copy of the check for a dinner for eighteen, all of us stranded, all of us strapped for cash, and all of us trying to figure who had the salmon and who had the crème brûlée and to pay for them in at least three different currencies. In another key, I remember a brilliant one-hour lecture on *Twelfth Night* delivered by Stephen Booth in Nashville, 1984, in which I re-learned a play which I already knew practically by heart. In 1993 we were treated, in Atlanta, to the first public showing of Branagh's *Much Ado*; at the end of the screening, the clueless assistant producer, really a gopher from the studio who had carried the reels of film—you remember reels of film—had carried the reels of film in a can to Atlanta, was instructed by several of our members in how they might have helped him improve the film. In Minneapolis in 1982 I had to come to terms with the demand by my undergraduate Shakespeare teacher, George Walton Williams, that I henceforth address him not as Dr. Williams but as George. Seattle, 1987: we take a ferry for an hour and a half into Puget sound, enjoy an open-fire salmon feast at the Kiana Lodge, and then, on the way home, find that our busses are hopelessly lost in the woods, and so we spend a miserable three hours, exhausted, hung over, and really sick of one another. The late '80s witnessed the European invasion. At that same Seattle meeting, with G. K. Hunter and Jonathan Dollimore on the same podium, the tensions of generations and critical polarities bubbled to the surface in a series of sneers and insults; I'm afraid poor Professor Hunter, who had initiated the sniping, got the worst of it; the session ended with Peter Stallybrass rising from the audience and defending Dollimore by comparing the salaries of the two speakers. On a more harmonious note, I think of the delicious evening air in the garden of the Nasher Museum in Dallas in 2008. In Cambridge in 1984 the hotel had made a spectacular error and booked us in with another conference, and the two meetings overlapped for a day. Since there simply were not enough beds, we all had to bunk together, or not at all. I slept with David Hoeniger, the distinguished and then ancient editor of the Arden *Pericles*. In Austin in 1989, at still another outdoor cookout, when the queue for the ladies rooms became intolerably long, Phyllis Rackin led a raid on the men's porta-potties, offering her colleagues a literal case of gender transgression. I omit much. Physically graceless and self-conscious to a paralytic degree, I myself do not dance, so I do not attend the Malone Society Dance, what began, in fact, thanks to Tom Berger, as the Malone Society Sock Hop, and so I leave it to others to record its history.

But enough with the anecdotes. Let me talk more seriously about the genuine virtues of the organization, the way that its past has made it important and useful to so many people. Call me Nestor.

The governing idea of these serious reflections is that the SAA has grown and thrived because it fosters community, and that this function is especially valuable in the academic realm, where the buffets of our daily lives leave us damaged and in need of solace, and necessary in these days of public disdain, when our public service causes us to be regarded as, at best, self-servers, and at worst, parasites.

A cardinal virtue of the SAA is its non-exclusivity. It has succeeded to the extent that, unlike the rest of the academy, it does not resemble the culture of the American junior high school. Personally, I see that in a scholarly sense the organization has both protected me and forced me to change, and both of those actions I have learned to welcome. Years of meetings have altered my opinions about people I thought I didn't like and increased my tolerance for critical positions I thought I could not endure. Interested as I am in rhetoric and poetics, I found in SAA programs arranged between about 1985 and 1995 much to doubt, to resent, and to protest. Therefore, to borrow a line from Fran Liebowitz, I spent much of the nineteen-eighties smoking cigarettes and plotting revenge. But I also found that there were in fact others who shared my passion for poetry, and that the Board and the Program Committee, despite a lack of personal interest felt by many of their members, looked out for us, made sure that at least one seminar was devoted to a topic that the language nerds would find attractive. And now there are more of us. Critical fashions change, graduate students turn from a received approach or popular topic and seek something fresh, sometimes a reconstituted version of what others have been interested in for a long time. Many people that I judged on an external basis turned out to be much more stimulating, much less dogmatic, and much more personable than I had prejudicially decided that they were. The effects of proximity, repeated encounters over time, informal conversation, exchange of papers in seminar, hearing them from the podium, sessions at the bar—all these influences and experiences have changed me, enriched me, made me more tolerant, intellectually more open, critically more rounded, a more sensitive reader, a better teacher. And, of course, the organization has changed my opinion about people I thought I liked and then found out I didn't, but we'll leave that strand for another occasion.

One reason that the SAA stays personal is owing to the careful construction and manipulation of the program by the members of the Program Committee and the Board of Trustees. Thanks to the structure which gives us only two sessions at one time, a meeting thus supplies an unusual opportunity for shared experience. Instead of thirty simultaneous sessions, many featuring three speakers and four audience members (this count includes the mother of one of the speakers), with everybody else down the hall trying to get into the one room to hear Annabel Patterson, the SAA invites us to hear either session A or session B. Such an arrangement encourages informed discussion, provides an easy entrée into a conversation with people you don't yet know. There are also the ancillary sessions and events that the conference has spawned: the Teaching Shakespeare workshops organized first by Peggy O'Brien from the Folger's Education department, the play readings begun and continued by Audrey Stanley and now the group from *Shakespeare Bulletin*, the early visits of the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express. Flipping back through my various programs, I recall some immensely inspiring, informative, indeed transformative presentations from the podium. Lectures of various sorts, from a range of perspectives, on topics that were dear to my heart and topics I thought I didn't care much about. I also remember some panels that didn't fly, despite the eminence and talent of the speakers and the timeliness of the subject. Sometimes you just can't tell.

Another virtue of this organization is its anti-hierarchical bias, its effort to bring together in scholarly conversation the veteran and the novice. There is the seminar, of course, but also vital is the open-paper session, an equalizing feature of the conference since its early days, in which a committee of members reads anonymous submissions and thereby constitutes one or two sessions at the meeting. Some members use this method for getting on the program repeatedly. Some very important names have appeared on the program by this means; and I should add that some very important names have found their entries rejected. I recall a very early meeting when a young assistant professor who had read her paper in the open session visibly grew in confidence and self-esteem as she persuasively responded to the

ancient worthies who were peppering her with questions. The seminar system is the great defence against clannishness: oh, sure, there is the theater history group, and these days the religion crowd—ever more crowded nowadays—but the practice of first-come first-served keeps things fair and allows for fascinating interactions. Between youth and age, for example. In the first seminar in which I enrolled, one of the participants was a venerable colleague of mine, by then a bit doddering, a little self-important, still smarter than anyone else in the room, but a little past his prime. At the end of the session, or rather, at the end of the drinks following the session, a young seminar member turned to me with tears in her eyes and said, “Take care of him.” It is also worth mentioning, in this respect, the efficacy of the occasional bus-ride in furthering such togetherness. When we sometimes take hired buses to receptions or other conference events, sitting down on the first available seat on the bus affords us the chance to meet and get to know people we don’t know and even to talk to people we have admired for many years. *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare* came into being because I sat down next to Karen Henry from Bedford St. Martins on such a bus ride in Kansas City in 1992.

Finally, the organization has prospered because it is responsive. The self-study that I reported on in the President’s Letter in the January Bulletin was an effort to take advantage of our members’ imaginations, to harness their intelligence for the purpose of making the organization more like what you would like it to be. If you have serious suggestions or concerns about the operation of this outfit, your officers want to know about them. As I said at the end of my letter in the January bulletin, the floor is always open.

One way of locating the distinctive flavour of the SAA is to recognize the value of the personal. Its virtues stem directly from the acumen of those who founded the organization and the hands-on labor of those scholars who have risen to its stewardship. There are many people who ought probably to have been mentioned: the almost thankless post of head of the local arrangements committees. How many of us could have done as Suzanne Gossett did last year, raising \$50,000 to defray the inevitably high costs of our meeting in Chicago? It is also true to say that the secret of the SAA’s success over the past forty years can be captured in the following nine proper nouns: Ann Jennalie Cook, Nancy Elizabeth Hodge, Lena Cowen Orlin. These three extraordinary people have managed and sustained the Association, the first from 1975 to 1987, the second from 1987 to 1996; and the third from 1996 until, I hope, 2096.

I propose that we begin today the process of creating a multiform archive for the Shakespeare Association of America, an electronic collection of data both bibliographical and personal, an assembly of information that will help to flesh out the history of this organization from 1972 and that will establish a format for sustaining and recording the scholarly activities and views of current members as we move further into the twenty-first century. To begin with, we need a database of published work by SAA members, and particularly of work that began life in SAA seminars or on SAA panels. Several years ago one of our former trustees served on the board of the American Council of Learned Societies and was discouraged to find that the SAA was not an affiliated member, that we were, in effect, not even recognized by the ACLS as a scholarly organization. Part of the problem is that we do not have an official publication, a scholarly organ that documents and disseminates our work. Although many scholarly books in their prefaces acknowledge the organization and leaders and other members of the seminars from which they emerged, we lack a systematic bibliography or database for the organization and its members. It is therefore vital that we undertake to record and make known the abundance, the excellence, and the availability of our members’ productions.

Second, in addition to the bibliographic record, we should establish a space for personal documentation. The SAA, as I hope I have been able to indicate, is as strong as it is largely on the basis of the personal relations that the organization has fostered and that make it such an immense pleasure. Much of that personal interaction is irrecoverable. But much of it is alive in your memories and in your diaries. Leeds Barroll and Ann Cook have both composed memoirs of several pages about their roles in the

foundation and establishment of the SAA. And we would like to use their recollections as the basis for an archive of members' histories, reflections, and ongoing concerns. I hope to establish a system whereby the President will appoint a member of the Board as an archivist, charged with responsibility for receiving and editing members' submissions and arranging for them to be posted and made available to the rest of the membership. The Web, of course, is perfect for this purpose, and you will be hearing more from us about the development of this corner of our website. We would like to hear from you about what such an archive would look like, and once it has been established, we would like you to contribute.

In addition to the reminiscences I have already mentioned, there is another item that can serve as a beginning for the archive. This document, a fragment, really, was recently discovered in a mayonnaise jar wedged behind the photocopying machine on Deck B of the Folger Shakespeare Library, forgotten and, according to Betsy Walsh, who discovered and authenticated the piece, undisturbed for over three decades. Composed sometime in the mid-1970s, apparently, the work is anonymous, but its legitimacy can hardly be doubted, given the insider knowledge displayed by the author and the accuracy of the predictions set forth therein. It is entitled "A Lyrick Ode Upon the Foundation of the Shakespeare Association of America." I hope you won't mind if I conclude by reading it.

Descend, Urania, furnish flutes and tabors
 To aid these feeble honorific labours,
 Support my limping metre, forcèd rhyme,
 And help commemorate this blessed time,
 Inspire me to poetic exaltation,
 Commensurate with this great Association,
 This IAMB without peer or counterpart,
 Devoted to exploring Shakespeare's art.
 Praise Barroll, Bentley, Hardison, and Mack,
 Those men on whom the grateful will look back
 And eulogize the task they undertook,
 But not just men. *Cherchez la femme*—Ann Cook,
 Whose influence exceeds the males' by far,
 As *mater* of the Conference seminar.
 Suppress, O Muse, details of trivial nature,
 Such as the struggle over nomenclature:
 Most favoured SAA, but nonetheless,
 One faction tried to call it ASS.
 Had they allowed that acronym so heinous,
 I'd not invoke Urania, but Uranus.
 Applaud, O Muse, their bringing to fruition
 A golden age of Shakespeare erudition.
 Their vision ushers in a purer state
 In which real scholarship can dominate,
 Creates a new spring conference, one that's free
 Of ills that now attend th'academy.
 All scholars, for example, will disdain
 To scan their seminar papers on the plane;
 They'll read them in advance, and several weeks
 Before th'event, write elegant critiques,
 Then on the day each piece will get attention,
 Creating dialogue without dissension.
 No longer will our famous scholars write
 Their papers in their rooms the previous night.

No speaker will exceed the time allotted,
And no one, neither veteran nor hothead,
Would from the podium be such a jerk,
To quote from only his own published work.
No members over coffee will rehearse
That old complaint that things can't get much worse,
Nor shall the theorists deplore a schism
Twixt feminists and New Historicism.
No more will pairs of randy students dare
To carry on a conference love affair,
Permitting the demands of vengery
To make them oversleep the plenary.
No more will conference-goers need a truncheon
To score a decent table at the luncheon,
Nor shove their fellows to luxuriate
In dining at the table of the great.
We'll meet in glorious cities and eschew
All damp suburban outposts like Bellevue.
Soon malice, egotism, envy, spite
Will vanish, leaving general delight;
All members will respect what others think
And nobody will have too much to drink.

At this point, ladies and gentlemen, the manuscript breaks off, perhaps evidence that the poet had begun to lose heart as he or she warmed to the theme of future harmony. Call me Colley Cibber. Thank you for your attention, and see you in Boston.