

**Phyllis Rackin**  
**Address in Albuquerque, 15 April 1994**

This is usually the time when I go out for a cigarette. On the few occasions when I have stayed, I've heard some remarkable examples of postprandial wit and eloquence. Totally incapable of either, I'll keep the rest of my presentation short—for my sake as well as yours.

First I want to offer a very warm welcome to everyone, and especially to the new members. My own first SAA was terrifying. At the reception, everyone else seemed to know everyone. I stood around like a clod, eating too much so I'd have something to do. Then Georgianna Ziegler came to my rescue and introduced me to some of her many friends and admirers. My seminar was equally intimidating. The one I had chosen had to do with issues of gender and sexuality, and among the other members was a male scholar well known for his contentious style. I tried to sit back in my chair out of his sight and to avoid making eye contact with anyone at the table. I said not a word. At one point in the discussion, however, the subject turned to menstruation, and the consensus seemed to be that Shakespeare's contemporaries regarded it as an object of shame and disgust. I couldn't resist interjecting that in Shakespeare's time, menstruation was commonly referred to as "flowers," and suggesting that we think about the difference between the implications of that term and the more modern designation as "the curse." To my surprise and delight, my intervention seemed to be well received, the intimidating male scholar was reduced to speechless embarrassment, and I left the seminar feeling much better about myself and the seminar experience. So my advice to new members is, even if you didn't feel comfortable this year, come back: it gets better.

I'd also like to welcome some of the distinguished visitors who are with us today: Allesandro Serpieri, the President of the Shakespeare Association of Italy; Roger Pringle, the Chairman of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust; and Richard Peck, the President of the University of New Mexico.

I'd also like your assistance in thanking some of the people who have worked very hard to provide us with the manifold pleasures of this meeting: Barry Gaines, the Chair of the Local Arrangements Committee, for a difficult and demanding job, well and cheerfully done. We should also thank the other members of the local arrangements committee: Bill Bridges (New Mexico State), Juliette Cunico (Bradley University), Lars Engle (University of Tulsa), Margaret Ferguson (University of Colorado at Boulder), Cheryl Fresch (University of New Mexico), Nancy Gutierrez (Arizona State University), Earlene Hammock (University of New Mexico), Sara Hanna (New Mexico Highlands University), Robert Hunter (Southern Methodist University), Brother Andrew Lacoste (College of Santa Fe), David McPherson (University of New Mexico), Meredith Skura (Rice University), Rudy Troike (University of Arizona), John W. Velz (University of Texas at Austin), Mary Bess Whidden (University of New Mexico), Hugh Witemeyer (University of New Mexico), and Carole Yee (New Mexico Tech).

We should also express our gratitude to our hosts—the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of English, and the College of Education at the University of New Mexico—who have entertained us so royally. In addition, we are indebted to the following sponsoring institutions: the Arizona State University College of Arts and Sciences and Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, who made it possible for graduate students to attend the conference; the University of Arizona College of Arts and Sciences; the University of Arizona Department of English; Bradley University; the College of Santa Fe; the University of Colorado at Boulder College of Arts and Sciences and Department of English; the New Mexico Endowment for the Humanities; New Mexico Highlands University School of Liberal and Fine Arts and Department of Communication and Fine Arts; New Mexico State University College of Arts and Sciences and Department of English; the New Mexico Tech Vice President for Academic Affairs and Department of Humanities; Rice University; Southern Methodist University; the University of Texas at Austin; and the University of Tulsa Henry Kendall College of Arts and Sciences and Department of English.

In addition to the generosity of all these institutions, we are also indebted to the devoted labors of many of our own members. First the seminar leaders: having done it twice, I know how much time and effort is involved in making a seminar happen. Will this year's seminar leaders please stand? Second, the outgoing Trustees, for three years of devoted service to the Association and the sacrifices that service involved: being unable to participate in panels and often unable even to hear them because their presence was demanded in the endless meetings required to plan the panels and seminars they couldn't attend. Will Joel Altman, Leah Marcus, and Linda Woodbridge please stand? We all owe Linda Woodbridge a special debt, not only for her service as Vice-President and President of the Association, but also, even as those labors seemed finally to be coming to an end, for accepting the responsibility of chairing this year's Nominating Committee. We are also indebted to the other members of the Nominating Committee—David Bergeron, Bill Carroll and Valerie Wayne—who gave us a slate of candidates so outstanding that many of us had a hard time deciding where to cast our votes. Finally, we should express our gratitude to Tony Dawson, the head of the Program Committee and to the other hard-working members of that committee, for providing an array of panels and seminars that must have been very rewarding for those of you who had a chance to attend (“she said resentfully”). Will Tony Dawson, Al Braummuller, Fran Dolan, and Georgianna Ziegler please stand to receive our thanks?

The greatest debt of all, however, is the one we owe to Nancy Hodge for the many services large and small, most of them unknown and unacknowledged, that keep the entire operation going. And we should thank Nancy's staff: Jill Bagwell, her administrative assistant; Tricia Stevens, Lee Gibson, Catherine Jones, and Mary Anne Puckett.

Finally, I would like you to help me welcome the new members of the Board: the incoming Vice-President, David Bevington, and the new Trustees, Coppélia Kahn and Paul Werstine.

Since this is the closest thing we have to a plenary business meeting, I'll take a few minutes to make some announcements and to report on the results of my request in the January *Bulletin* for comments about the present procedures of the Association and suggestions for change and improvement.

The first announcement is a reminder that in response to popular demand a new Directory of Members will be produced this summer and that it will include FAX numbers and e-mail addresses, but only if you send them to Nancy in time so she receives them before August 1. The same deadline applies to any changes you want to make in your directory listing or address.

The second announcement comes from Herb Coursen, who would like to have abstracts of seminar papers for inclusion in the next issue of *Shakespeare and the Classroom*, which will be devoted to conferences and their findings and speculations. If you haven't yet seen this journal, Herb has left complimentary copies of Issue Number 3 on one of the tables in the book exhibit. Needless to say, all subscription orders will be greatly appreciated.

Finally, I'm happy to announce that the Shakespeare Association now has an archive. What it contains so far is a manuscript narrative of its beginnings, along with some published accounts of early meetings, both contributed by Leeds Barroll, the founding father of the Association, who not only served as its first Executive Secretary but also took out a personal loan to cover the start-up costs! Alfred Harbage, Leeds recalls, was invited to join, “but declined with the observation that beginning such an organization was unrealistic.” Additional contributions to the archive, in the form of personal recollections and/or printed records, are hereby requested and should be sent to Nancy Hodge.

I also want to report on the results of my request in the January *Bulletin* for comments—pro and con—about the present policies of the Association and suggestions for new directions we might want to take. Nancy tells me that 2000 people received the January *Bulletin*, but I received only ten responses, which

means one of two things—either most people are pretty happy with the SAA just as it is, or else very few people read the President’s Letter.

The letters I did receive, although too few to provide anything like a representative sample of members’ opinions, were thoughtful and thought-provoking—and also remarkably disparate in the opinions they expressed. Of the three members who wrote about excursions and tours, for instance, one thought they were splendid, and the other two would have preferred to have more time for seminars and panels. On the question of plenary sessions, one member would like to hear a single long paper by a prominent invited speaker. Another wrote, “NEVER [all caps] let one member monopolize an audience for an hour.” And so it went.

Several of the letters argued in favor of diversity and inclusiveness, although here too opinion was divided—most of the writers urging that the Association continue its commitments to openness and democracy, but one complaining that just the opposite was true—that a small in-group “controls everything” and that the same “predictable names” keep appearing on the programs and on the slates of candidates nominated for elections. I don’t think this is true now, and neither do the Trustees; but to be sure that it won’t be true in the future, the Trustees have established guidelines for future chairs of the Nominating and Program Committees, reminding them of the need to choose their members with an eye to diversity of institutional affiliation, geographical location, scholarly interest, gender, generation, political commitment, etc. Since the committees are relatively small, however, they will still need your help if the selections they make are to represent the full range of members’ interests.

The divergence of opinion expressed in the letters and the fact that they represented such a small sample of opinion made it impossible to make policy changes on their basis, but the letters reinforced my conviction that the strength of our Association, like the enduring value of the texts we study, rests on the diversity of interests we serve. I always remind my students that Shakespeare’s plays were produced for the entertainment of a heterogeneous audience and performance on a thrust stage—both of which meant there was no single privileged point of view. I like to think that the same thing is true at an SAA seminar table and in the governance of our Association. I think we have to keep hold of that principle. But to do so requires maximum participation by members, not only in the academic work of the seminars but also in the workings of the Association. We have to respond to the annual calls for proposals for seminars and panels, and more of us will have to contact the head of each year’s nominating committee with suggestions for the slate. Please note that this year’s chair of the nominating committee is Georgianna Ziegler. There is also a provision for additional nominations by petition: any nominee supported by a petition signed by 20 members is automatically slated as a candidate. I don’t know whether that has ever happened at all—certainly not within recent memory. I’m ashamed to admit that I never even knew this was possible, but, as I learned yesterday, it is part of the Constitution of the Association, a copy of which will be included in the new Directory, for the edification of all. I also want to encourage everyone to vote. Although we have over 800 members, there are never more than 350 ballots to be counted.

I don’t know whether you could tell how nervous I am today, but I am. On one occasion, several years ago, I sent in a paper for the open submission competition, but it was rejected (it was a *good* paper, too!), so this is the first time I’ve spoken in public at the SAA; and, as you’ve undoubtedly noticed by now, postprandial oratory is not my genre. So I’ve been terrified for two years at the prospect of having to give something called a Presidential Address. Other than that, I’ve enjoyed the opportunity to serve as your president, and I want to thank you for giving it to me.