

Barbara A. Mowat

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I've always thought of this luncheon at our annual meeting as a festive occasion, and no time for contention or for partisan exhortation. Yet, these days, the most seemingly banal, benign, or cliché-ridden statement about Shakespeare could easily be a red flag to someone in this room. The fact that we live in a world where every Shakespearean verity is being challenged makes for lively seminars, provocative scholarly papers, and exciting classrooms, but complicates the task of addressing the gathered members of our association without dividing the ranks. To make matters worse, I'm only too aware of the fact that there is little I can say to you on the topic of our shared interest—that is, Shakespeare—that you don't already know. Fortunately, the Folger Shakespeare Library, where I work, is not short of arcana.

For example: In March of 1952, a wealthy American sold his magnificent collection of Shakespeare folios and quartos to Dr. Martin Bodmer of Geneva, Switzerland. The event caused quite a stir. It was recounted in articles in both *Shakespeare Quarterly* and *Shakespeare Survey* and written up in the March 12 *New York Times* both on the front page under a banner headline and in a separate op-ed piece. It's the tone of the *New York Times*' coverage that catches my interest. After opening with the sentence "The A.S.W. Rosenbach collection of Shakespeare folios and quartos, famous around the globe, has been sold for considerably more than \$1,000,000," the front page article continues with the statement: "A history-making event in the book world, the transaction was the first to take from these shores a collection of books long recognized as being without peer in rarity and quality." The writer's seemingly blissful ignorance that these rare volumes had a point of origin on quite other shores is matched in the conclusion of the newspaper's op-ed piece, which congratulates America on sharing its cultural treasures with the benighted Swiss:

Shakespeare belongs to the ages and to the world. If some of Shakespeare's quartos and First Folios are in Switzerland instead of here, we need not feel badly.

This little story of the Rosenbach-Bodmer sale offers a glimpse into a phenomenon that has in many ways already been well explored—that is, the phenomenon of Shakespeare in America—but it strikes me that this is a topic worth our returning to today. After all, here we are in Washington, D.C., surrounded by national monuments and other reminders of things American (if our friends from Canada and Mexico will allow me, for this occasion, to equate America with the United States). And surely no focus could be more apt for a meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America—nor is there, surely, anyone with a more complicated, more interested, view of it than a Shakespearean resident at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

Actually, the Folger Library itself, encapsulating as it does a bit of the Shakespeare in America phenomenon, provides a rather obvious place to start. Much of its story you've read in Mike Bristol's *Shakespeare's America/America's Shakespeare*, but let me remind you of its general outline, adding a bit and giving it a Folgerian twist. The story is classic "America meets the Bard."

It begins in the late-nineteenth century, when a less-than-wealthy American kid named Henry Clay Folger makes it to Amherst College, hears one of the last lectures ever given by America's own Ralph Waldo Emerson, is inspired to read Emerson's works, finds a published version of an address Emerson had given in Boston to celebrate Shakespeare's 300th birthday, is once again inspired, buys a cheap edition of the plays, becomes enamored of Shakespeare, marries a girl as obsessed by Shakespeare as he, makes a lot of money, and starts buying everything by and about Shakespeare that he can find.

I'd like to pause at this point to note a couple of moments in this story that, if you are in favor of Shakespeare in America, are strangely fortunate. The first is the anomalousness of Emerson's effect on the

young Henry Folger. Emerson had never been popular at Amherst; this particular lecture was pitifully underattended; and Emerson, 76 at the time, had grown so feeble and inattentive that Susan Dickinson (Emily's sister-in-law), who was very fond of Emerson, wrote, after hearing the lecture, "We could have wept." But Henry Folger attended and was impressed. The second oddly fortunate fact is that Henry, in seeking out Emerson's published writings, did not stumble on Emerson's rather ponderous essay on Shakespeare in *Representative Men*, with its occasional attacks on Shakespeare's unfortunate bawdy and tendency to play to the crowds, but found instead a brief, rather charming appreciation that Emerson had composed for Boston's Saturday Club's Tercentennial celebration. It's easy to see how this little address could have spoken directly to an imaginative young man. I especially like the whimsy with which Emerson ends the address, crediting the late date of the First Folio's publication with allowing the settling the America:

The Pilgrims came to Plymouth in 1620. The plays of Shakespeare were not published until three years later. Had they been published earlier, our forefathers, or the most poetical among them, might have stayed at home to read them.

If we move forward to 1928, the next big moment in the Folger Library story, we observe America and Shakespeare once again coming together in unexpected ways. The moment involves the then-Librarian of Congress; it involves Mr. Folger—who has by now bought massive numbers of Shakespeare folios, quartos, editions, and translations—along with rooms full of materials about Shakespeare: playbills, chests made from the Shakespeare oak, paintings of characters in the plays, curios, critical and interpretive works—as well as an entire city block of Washington property quite close to the Capitol where he secretly plans to build a home for his collection; and it involves the Congress, where a bill has been introduced that would, if passed, allow the Architect of the Capitol to pluck down all the houses standing on that very property if at any time in the future the Library of Congress should express a need for the space. The Folger Library's box of 1928 correspondence—letters, telegrams, copies of the *Congressional Record* and of bills before the House of Representatives—tells a wonderful story of catastrophe averted—wonderful, that is, if you're in favor of Shakespeare in America. Mr. Folger happened to see a notice of the Congressional bill in the *Washington Post*, wrote to the Librarian of Congress, Herbert Putnam, just in time to have debate on the Congressional bill delayed, and persuaded Putnam and through him the Congressmen promoting the bill to amend it to spare the property where the Folger Library now stands. Mike Bristol quotes part of Mr. Folger's initial letter to Putnam, where Folger explains his desire to build a Shakespeare Library in Washington, noting that he has been under pressure to house his collection in Stratford-upon-Avon, but that he prefers not to do this, since his ambition is to "help make the United States a center for literary study and progress." The letter goes on (and this part is not included in Mike's book):

Two universities in the Unites States have approached me to locate the collection with them, making flattering offers providing quarters and supervision for it. But I have always preferred to consider Washington as its permanent home, being satisfied that it is of sufficient value and importance to add to the dignity of your city. Until I saw this newspaper mention of the Library [of Congress] expansion, it had never occurred to me that the site I had selected might be considered within the zone of possible government territory.

The picture of Shakespeare and Congress fighting over a little, if valuable, patch of ground which, though owned by Henry Clay Folger, had suddenly become "possible government territory," along with Mr. Folger's nod in the direction of the dignity of Washington, are matters that we might well pause over. But of more interest, I think, is the central matter of Mr. Folger's decision—not Stratford, not a university (even one promising "quarters and supervision"), but Washington. He underlines the significance of this decision

in a letter a few days later, in which he says to Putnam that, if the property can't be guaranteed free from future government annexation,

the best plan will be to arrange for a location at one of the universities, where a warm welcome is promised. But the ideal location is Washington, and the best site in Washington is the one now secured, providing there is an assurance of permanency.

Bristol sees in this decision and what followed from it a monumentalizing and an institutionalizing of Shakespeare, but my own sense of it—sitting, as I normally do, at a desk from which I can observe the Congress and the city at work and the thousands of tourists who walk past the Folger on their way to or from the Capitol or the Supreme Court, often stopping to pose in front of the statue of Puck—is that the Library, sitting as it does just by the Capitol and the Court, fully Elizabethan on the inside, fully marbled on the outside, emblemizes the complex and mutually determining ways that Shakespeare and his works are embedded in American government and public and private life.

Of course, this symbiotic relationship may exist only in the eyes of a Washington, D.C., resident. I acknowledge a perception of a particularly strong connection between Shakespeare and this city, one that the city's residents are more than usually aware of these days with Michael Kahn's productions at the Shakespeare Theatre often speaking directly to concerns that are, of course, national, but that have a particular resonance within the Beltway. The rapt and uneasy silence with which Washington audiences experienced Kahn's production of *Measure for Measure*, which played here in close proximity (in both time and space) to the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings, comes first to my mind. But I also think of how his production of *Troilus and Cressida* managed to surface the generational questions that inform the politics of sending young men to war, and the consequent discomfort and sense of dark shared memories one felt in the audience of that play. I think as well of the city's overwhelming reaction to Kahn's sequence of productions of Shakespeare's English history plays, with, most recently, standing room audiences for his *Henry VI* and anticipation already building for its sequel in *Richard III*. With the subtlest control of silences and emphases, Kahn throws into relief the raw ambition, violence, and betrayal that are the stuff of both Shakespeare's history plays and of the political struggles reported daily in the *Washington Post* and so familiar to Washington residents. We Washingtonians are aware of the special frisson that comes from sitting in the theater alongside the nation's Senators and Supreme Court Justices while—through Kahn's productions or through, for example, Joe Banno's recent *Merchant of Venice* and *Cymbeline*—Shakespeare anatomizes our current national scene. (The jolt to the spectator's psyche is even more potent, and more ambiguous, when such national decision makers take walk-on parts in the productions, which they on occasion do.) Even travelling productions, such as the RSC's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, assume a special local color when performed at the Kennedy Center in the presence of, say, the First Family and the British Ambassador.

And it seems to have been thus from the beginning in this city. Where else could you find sixteen distinguished Senators and Representatives drafting and publishing a letter in the local paper that begs Miss Charlotte Cushman to prolong her engagement in the city in order to appear “in her sublime rendition as Hamlet”? This was in 1861. Or where else—on a more somber note—would a Shakespearean like John Wilkes Booth—in 1863 the lessee and manager of the Washington Theatre, and, as he advertised himself, “the Peoples Favorite Tragedian” in his starring role in *Othello*—be able less than two years later to walk into the President's box at Ford's Theatre and with one shot permanently alter American history?

Granted, then, that Washington and Shakespeare are interlinked in a special way. But it's hard for me to believe—though this may be inside-the-beltway hubris—that something which significantly affects Washington will lose all force as it reaches the city limits. Just as the laws passed on the Hill and the decisions handed down at the Supreme Court have an effect on the most distant farm in North Dakota or

fishery on the Willamette, so, I believe, influences on the Capitol, on the Court, and on the President and his staff have far-reaching effects. I think Mr. Folger knew this. I think that's why he wrote to Putnam: "the ideal location is Washington, and the best site in Washington is the one now secured"—i.e., one that sits cheek-by-jowl with the Capitol and the Court, a constant reminder of a richer world—at the very least a linguistically richer world—than anything our country's present moment can afford us.

It's humbling to think about the position of the United States right now—so very powerful, so very young, and with so much still to learn. I find it somehow heartening that Shakespeare's words and characters and stories have so infiltrated our collective psyche that we can scarcely escape them. I hate the ubiquitous linking of Hillary Clinton with Lady Macbeth—largely because I find it so inapt—but I'm pleased that the nation has an image of female power that, even if evil, transcends the everyday of suburbia or soap opera or local or national politics. I felt some discomfort in the national representation of Nicole Brown Simpson as Desdemona—but, again, considerable pleasure that there remains in this country so much awareness of Shakespeare's endlessly intriguing tale of racial and gender high tragedy. Dick Morris's presentation of his fall from grace (as Clinton's chief adviser) as Shakespearean in magnitude and of himself as a Shakespearean tragic hero seemed to me quite ludicrous—as a commentator on NPR put it, "Shakespearean" now means when bad things happen to you because you're a jerk." But it's good to know that the concept of Shakespearean tragedy is far from dead in this country: no one, so far as I heard, asked Morris what a Shakespearean tragedy is.

When, from my office window, I watch tourists and young Supreme Court and Congressional staffers stand bemused before the inscription under the Folger's statue of Puck: "Lord, what fools these mortals be!"—as when I see them studying the carvings on the Library's facade, one saying to another, "Look, there's Hamlet"—"That must be Falstaff"—I feel my spirits lift a little. It's as if there's something feeding us through these words and these characters, and it's food that our hearts and imaginations badly need. It's of a different order from the lessons or moral gleanings that people find in Shakespeare, which come and go with the times. Walt Whitman's claim that readers of Shakespeare's plays "may discover [in them] the scientific inauguration of modern democracy" is far more attractive than President John Quincy Adams's "The moral of [*Othello*] is that the intermarriage of black and white blood is a violation of the law of nature"—but neither "lesson" seems to us today to have much to do with Shakespeare. Fortunately, as I said, such saws and instances come and go. What seems to stay rather steady is an awareness of the characters and their stories that in some inexplicable way keep telling our own stories, though speaking as we only wish we could speak.

I'm suggesting, then, that Shakespeare has seeped into the American consciousness in ways that have had and continue to have an effect on America, some of it, at least, for the good. I suggest as well that America has had an effect on Shakespeare. As a nation we're a Johnny-come-lately to Shakespeare, in part because the United States was founded so comparatively recently, but also because several factors—Puritan dominance, the closing of the theaters for several years by the Continental Congress in 1774, the paucity of libraries and theaters in colonial times—served as early obstacles to the spread of knowledge about or interest in Shakespeare's plays. These works did not figure largely in America until the 19th century, and until the middle of the century were presented primarily in editions derivative from English editors and in productions dominated by English actors. But by the mid-to-late 19th century, America had begun to act, edit, and teach Shakespeare. Since then, to chronicle only a few notable achievements, Americans have produced not only the Hinman collator and the Norton Facsimile First Folio, but also Kittredge notes, the authorship controversy, new historicism, the SHAKSPER computer bulletin board, and SAA seminars. We've also produced such giants as Fredson Bowers, Sam Schoenbaum, and Madeleine Doran.

When I look to the immediate future, I see no abating of the impact of Shakespeare on America or

of America on Shakespeare. This spring, the Folger's celebration of its 65th anniversary will culminate in a reception at the White House, and, when the Helen Hayes Awards are presented for D.C.'s outstanding 1996 theatrical productions, Kahn's *Henry VI*, *All's Well*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, the RSC's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Banno's *Cymbeline* are all in strong contention for prizes. (Among the just-announced nominations for the year's best theater—most outstanding production, director, actor, actress, etc.—Shakespeare productions appear in 10 of the 14 slots for which those productions were eligible, with more than one nomination in some of the slots, and with both Kahn and Banno nominated for outstanding director.) The nation's media are much exercised over the fact that many top American universities no longer require a Shakespeare course for an English major, but most of my colleagues report increased demands for their Shakespeare courses, and on "Third Rock from the Sun" and in "Star Trek," Shakespeare is thriving, with the second translation of a Shakespeare play into Klingon now underway, the Klingon *Hamlet* having already been published.

And this meeting itself, gathering as it has done more than 700 Shakespeareans from eighteen nations, stands as testimony that America continues to have an impact on the world's thinking about Shakespeare. I hope, then, that as you see productions, listen to papers, learn from each other in seminars, and enjoy the cherry blossoms, the monuments, the museums, and the general Washington scene, you will think with pleasure about the contribution we are this week making to the continuing Washington/Shakespeare connection. America may not always be good for Shakespeare, and vice-versa, but I would argue that overall the symbiosis is a positive one.

