

## The Shakespeare Guild Award

### Remarks by Robert MacNeil

Folger Shakespeare Library  
Washington, D.C.  
April 24, 1994

It is a pleasure to be at the Folger. In the vaults beneath us I had one of the most exciting experiences of my cultural life. It was an opportunity to hold and turn the pages of some of the extraordinary collection of Shakespeare First Folios and Quarto editions. If I remember correctly, there are sixty-three First Folios here, as compared with three in the British Museum.

It is a pleasure always to be associated with John Andrews, the most reasonable, well-tempered Shakespearian scholar I know. He has debated the cantakerous A. L. Rowse on our program. He's been an infinitely patient adviser to the putative television series on Shakespeare conceived by the team that produced *The Story of English*, but -- like many things on public television -- far too long in the womb.

And John Andrews is the editor of a wonderful new edition of Shakespeare, appearing under the Everyman imprint. His good-humored but profound scholarship, the single-column text with really useful notes on the facing page, make these volumes a pleasure to read.

Since the age of 17 I have, like Ben Jonson, held the man Shakespeare something this side idolatry. I was 17 when I was taken to see Olivier's *Hamlet*. Before that, Shakespeare had been boring and irrelevant to me. But that day his words made a kind of sense I had never encountered. They lifted me to a not-quite-earthly plane, transported me for long moments into another realm of time and being, a poetic world in which the flow of words controlled the weather and the climate, the cast and light of the day, and the mood of the people.

'Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out  
Contagion to this world.

The sounds of the words put a precious mist over reality, and I was inside the mist. And I think I have been inside it ever since.

In a sense I owe him my career as a broadcaster, because playing Shakespeare in college brought me acting jobs on the CBC, and that led to more general broadcasting.

My first wife and I spent the first week of our honeymoon at Stratford-on-Avon, at a time when you could see a different play every night for five nights. One consequence of that marriage was my son Ian, who is now a theatrical designer in London and recently designed the sets and costumes for the RSC's *Macbeth* with Derek Jacobi. And Ian designed the National Theatre revival of J. B. Priestley's *An Inspector Calls*. That amazing production (if I may be permitted a commercial) opens on Broadway this Wednesday night. One of the Olivier Awards for that production was Ian's.



Of course it is fitting that there be awards commemorating Laurence Olivier. It is just as fitting that there be an award honoring his great contemporary John Gielgud. We cannot hear the great voices of the past, but it is safe to say that in our time no actor has spoken Shakespeare with a finer ear for the poetry, or a voice more perfectly tuned to the music, than John Gielgud. Shakespeare could not wish a more noble interpreter. So I believe the Shakespeare Guild does honor to itself by devising this way of honoring Gielgud, now and long into the future. And I am flattered to have a small part in bringing it about.

Shakespeare had the confidence to predict that generations hence, "in accents yet unknown," people would be speaking his words. After four centuries it is astonishingly true. There may have been five million English speakers when he wrote. Today some 350 million people are native speakers of English, and closer to a billion -- nearly a fifth of the earth's population -- use some English. No language has ever been more widely scattered and used than English. And those hundreds of millions of people, most of them quite unknowingly, speak Shakespeare every day of their lives. His influence on our language and our most everyday expressions and ways of thing is phenomenal.

I don't know of any neater expression of it than this by the British journalist and essayist Bernard Levin, from his book *Enthusiasms*. "If you cannot understand my argument, and declare 'It's Greek to me,' you are quoting Shakespeare; if you claim to be more sinned against than sinning, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you recall your salad days, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you act more in sorrow than in anger, if your wish is father to the thought, if your lost property has vanished into thin air, you are quoting Shakespeare; if you have ever refused to budge an inch or suffered from green-eyed jealousy, if you have played fast and loose, if you have been tongue-tied, a tower of strength, hoodwinked, or in a pickle, if you have knitted your brows, made a virtue of necessity, insisted on fair play, slept not one wink, stood on ceremony, danced attendance (on your lord and master), laughed yourself into stitches, had short shrift, cold comfort, or too much of a good thing, if you have seen better days or lived in a fool's paradise -- why, be that as it may, the more fool you, for it is a foregone conclusion that you are (as good luck would have it) quoting Shakespeare; if you think it is early days and clear out bag and baggage, if you think it is high time and that that is the long and short of it, if you believe that the game is up and that truth will out even if it involves your own flesh and blood, if you lie low till the crack of doom because you suspect foul play, if you have your teeth set on edge (at one fell swoop) without rhyme or reason, then -- to give the devil his due -- if the truth were known (for surely you have a tongue in your head) you are quoting Shakespeare; even if you bid me good riddance and send me packing, if you wish I was dead as a doornail, if you think I am an eyesore, a laughing stock, the devil incarnate, a stony-hearted villain, bloody-minded or a blinking idiot, then -- by Jove! O Lord! Tut, tut! for goodness' sake! what the dickens! but me no buts -- 'it is all one to me, for you are quoting Shakespeare.'"

SOUTH PAVILION  
WOTTON-UNDERWOOD  
NR. AYLESBURY  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

March 16. 54.

Dear Mr. Andrews.

I need hardly say how grateful and flattered  
I am to know that I am so happily remembered  
by so many American friends.  
It is a great blessing to me to know  
that my work has brought me so  
many dear friends over these long years,  
and that I am still able to keep on  
working, even though I fear my  
appearances in the life there are  
over now.

Please give my love and greetings  
to all who are at the celebration  
you are so kindly sponsoring - and  
I only wish I could have been  
able to join you myself and  
respond in person to your great  
warmth and kindness.

My times in America have  
brought me so many cherished  
memories, and I always feel it  
is my second country.

Very sincerely

John Rogers.



# Chronicle

## ■ A New York Observer goodbye ■ Honors

about: for the Dalai Lama, Margaret Thatcher, eight black superstars and John Gielgud.

SUSAN MORRISON, who has been the editor of The New York Observer since August 1992, will leave the newspaper next month, according to an announcement made yesterday by Ms. Morrison and ARTHUR CARTER, the publisher of the weekly. The statement did not say whether she was stepping down voluntarily or because her contract would not be renewed when it expires in August, but it did say that Mr. Carter "hopes a new editor will be at the newspaper in early June."

In a telephone interview, Ms. Morrison said: "Editing this paper is one of those thrilling, seat-of-the-pants operations done at a fast pace. It is one of those jobs that should have term limits."

She and her husband, DAVID HANDELMAN, a senior editor at Vogue, expect their first child around May 25.

"I will be at the paper until I give birth," she said.

As surely as tulips bloom at this time of year, so do organizations roll out their annual awards for accomplishment, service, performance. With the pace of presentation ceremonies accelerating, herewith a sampling of honors newly bestowed or about to be.

The Dalai Lama will receive two tributes this week. Today, he is to be awarded an honorary doctor of humane letters degree by Columbia University at a special convocation in the rotunda of Low Memorial Library.

Tomorrow, he will be presented with the Peace Award of the New York Lawyers Alliance for World Security, at Saint Peter's Church on Lexington Avenue. The award will be given to him by a non-lawyer, RICHARD GERE, who has campaigned for



Dalai  
Lama



Margaret  
Thatcher

the restoration of rights to the Tibetan people.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center will name Lady MARGARET THATCHER its Humanitarian Laureate tonight at a dinner to be attended by 800 people in the Marriott Marquis Hotel on Broadway. She is being cited for her efforts to make it easier to prosecute Nazi

war criminals living in Britain, for helping to convince former Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev to ease restrictions on Jewish immigration to Israel and for her support of Israel.

A women's enterprise tips its hat to men: On Friday, Essence Communications, which publishes Essence magazine, gave its first awards to eight outstanding men at star-studded festivities in the Paramount Theater in Madison Square Garden.

The winners: DENZEL WASHINGTON; the Rev. JESSE JACKSON; EDDIE MURPHY; QUINCY JONES; SPIKE LEE; Dr. BENJAMIN S. CARSON Sr., director of pediatric neurosurgery at the Johns Hopkins Hospital; JOSEPH E. MARSHALL Jr., a founder and executive director of the Omega Boys Club

of San Francisco, and ROBERT P. MCSES, director of the Algebra Project.

Then there is the honor to be accorded Sir JOHN GIELGUD. He is to have his name attached to an award that is being established by the Shakespeare Guild.

JOHN ANDREWS, president of the guild, said Sunday at the Folger Shakespeare Library, in Washington, that the prize, to be called the Golden Quill, would be given annually to a performer, director, producer or playwright whose work embodies the theatrical contributions of Sir John.

Mr. Andrews said that Sir John, who turned 90 on April 14, had agreed to allow the award to be made in his name but regretted that he was not able to travel for its announcement.

NADINE BROZAN