

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary

REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
DURING 65TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
OF FOLGER SHAKESPEARE LIBRARY

April 22, 1997

The East Room

9:23 A.M. EDT

MRS. CLINTON: Good morning and welcome to the White House. I am delighted to have all of you here. I know it was a late and glorious night last night and I am impressed that so many of you were able to make it here this morning to be part of this celebration for the Folger Library and to really commemorate the extraordinary contributions that all of you have made to the arts and culture, not only here in our Capital City, but in our country.

I know that last night was successful; I can see the looks on the faces of the people I've already greeted this morning, and I would like to thank Mrs. Faruki*, a friend of mine and a wonderful supporter, for her work on behalf of the gala, and I'm delighted that she has her entire family here with her.

I also want to give a special welcome to Dr. Gundesheimer*, who will be speaking in just a moment, for his commitment to this enterprise. And I also want to thank the Shakespeare Guild President, Dr. John Andrews, and the entertainers who have donated their time to this gala. Dame Diana Rigg, known to so many audiences in the United States, for her many, many roles. I think particularly of the chilling Mrs. Danvers -- (laughter) -- and the even more chilling Medea. (Laughter.) Among her many honors, she was named a Dame of the British Empire by the Queen in 1994, and I've always thought that that was a remarkable accomplishment and am delighted that she is with us.

Marvin Hamlisch, who has brought so much joy to so many of us because of his musical talents I know added a great deal to the enjoyment of last evening, and I'm so -- also pleased that the Miami Ballet, and particularly two of its principal dancers could be part of that celebration.

The two dancers you saw last night, Ileana Lopez* and Franklin Garner*, are not only dancers on stage, they are partners in life and, their dance, I think, as we know from watching and enjoying dance, is a universal language, as is Shakespeare.

I also want to welcome Sir, Derek Jacobi*, who is known for so many of his roles over the years. He's played Hamlet, I'm told, 379 times. And I want to congratulate Sir Derek on receiving the Shakespeare Guild's Sir John Gielgud Award for Excellence in the Dramatic Arts. Anyone who has followed his career knows how well deserved that recognition is.

But mostly, I want to congratulate the Folger and its generous patrons, so many of whom are gathered here in the East Room, for 65 years of careful curating to make available the unique and massive treasury of William Shakespeare's works to scholars and educators and audiences around the world. It is so critical -- I think it probably always has been -- but particularly today that those who are committed to the arts and all of its many manifestations are even more visible and public in that commitment to demonstrate that the arts are not a luxury, not some marginal activity that only a few people benefit from, but that, instead, it really is the stuff of life, and it gives all of us who care about the quality of our life together an opportunity to know more about ourselves, know more about one another, to deepen and richen the human experience.

I'm always struck by the debate over the arts in our country because I think that it is so misplaced. There are so many needs that the arts communities around the United States have that can only be addressed by a partnership between those in private life through individual generosity, corporate generosity, and those in government who support the arts as an integral part of our national identity.

Whenever I'm in this room thinking or talking about the arts, I remember that despite my great affection for William Shakespeare, this house was burned by the British in 1814 -- (laughter) -- and it was a rather remarkable occasion on many counts, because James Madison was our last President who actually was a Commander-In-Chief in the field, and he was out trying to stave off the ultimate disaster, unsuccessfully, and Dolley Madison, one of my predecessors, about whom I continually learn interesting facts, was here preparing a meal for her husband and his officers upon their return when word came that the British had broken through the lines. And I see the Ambassador from our great friend, Great Britain here. (Laughter.) And Mrs. Madison, Mr. Ambassador, was told to flee, and to flee immediately because the British were coming.

And what did she do? Well, she stopped long enough to take a few of the treasures from the White House, most prominently this wonderful Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington. And I often tell visitors here, and particularly members of Congress and others, that when it came down to a decision about what was emblematic of our country and what needed to be saved for future generations, it was not a balance sheet, it was a portrait of our First President, and that the arts have -- (applause) -- the arts have sustained and entertained and challenged and provoked us and no one more than I believe, than William Shakespeare. And so the work that you have done is not only significant in and of itself, but significant to all of us who care about what kind of country we live in and what legacy we leave to our children.

So I want to thank you for that, and I want to be sure that each of you know how grateful the President and I are for your leadership on this count. I was looking desperately when I returned from Philadelphia in the wee hours of the night for something I could say that would be appropriately Shakespearean, and I couldn't decide amongst all of the very many options available to me, and I was talking with Dr. Gundersheimer* as we came in and I said, well, really, you know, the play's the thing and the Folger does it better than anybody else. (Laughter.)

So with that, please let me introduce the man who has been the director of making sure the play is, indeed, the thing. (Applause.)

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So, as Dr. Gundersheimer said, I must return to Philadelphia, and I wanted to greet as many of you individually as I could before I am rudely whisked away, and I apologize that I won't, I don't believe, get to greet all of you before I have to leave. But you are a hearty band -- (laughter) -- and we will greet as much as we can on this day.

So with that, please join me in the Blue Room for a receiving line, and then the reception will be in the State Dining Room. Thank you very much.

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