

SAA 2015 Seminar: Shakespeare's Foreign Policies

Seminar Leader: Dr. Thomas P. Anderson

1) Thomas J. Moretti, Iona College

Abstract: The Vulnerabilities of the Conquering King in *Henry V*

This paper examines the ways that aggressive foreign policy in *Henry V* exposes vulnerabilities in king's two bodies. The play not only discloses tensions between the king and his subjects, but it also conflates physical exposure with political vulnerability in the imagined body of Henry V. By the end of the play, his aggressive policies in France both risk exposing the extremities and sexual extensions of Henry's body and fail to avoid domestic strife after foreign conquest. Ending a decade of tumultuous foreign crises in the Low Countries, in Ireland, and elsewhere, *Henry V* stands as the capstone of Shakespeare's many dramatic attempts to consider the consequences of a number of foreign policy options. It troubles the political stance that aggressive foreign policies—diplomatic and militaristic—strengthen the monarch's position at home and abroad.

2) Joshua S. Smith, Penn State University

Abstract: "No Encrease of Their Dignity": Crowns and Kingship in *Edward II* and *Richard II*

This paper examines the complicated relationship between crowns and kingship in English history and two early modern history plays: Marlowe's *Edward II* and Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Before the Reformation, the coronation ritual (the monarch's oath, unction, crowning, and receipt of homage) was thought to be a necessary religious rite that conferred monarchy; after it, authorities both religious and civic insisted that coronation was merely a symbolic confirmation of a power that passed to the next monarch immediately upon their predecessor's death—in the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury whilst crowning Edward VI, "the solemn Rites of Coronation . . . be good Admonitions to put Kings in mind of their Duty to God, but no encrease of their Dignity." This historical dichotomy, in which the ritual either creates or confirms, is especially interesting in the light of history plays by Shakespeare and Marlowe, wherein kingship is comprised of possession of the crown and the rightful monarch's body—kingship is both conferred and confirmed. My paper focuses on *Edward II* and *Richard II* as parallel texts that call explicit attention to the role of the crown in constituting the monarchy, and utilizes the theories of Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett in order to argue that just as performance itself is an assemblage of material actants, so onstage kingship: body and crown are portrayed not hierarchically, but as actants in a dynamic network, each constantly affecting and being affected by the other.