

Andrew Mattison  
Seminar: Caroline Shakespeare

My seminar was quite small. I started with five and lost two as things went on. If I had it to do over again I would have chosen a broader topic. Still, I had three excellent papers with much in common, and the four of us, along with an insightful auditor I invited to sit at the table and participate fully, had a lively conversation, not only about these three papers but about the period under discussion and a number of possible approaches to it, both those represented by the seminar papers and others. Following the lead of some of the best seminars I've been in, I took a quite active role in shaping the conversation—I did not ask participants to read their responses to each other's papers, and I did not rigidly assign times to papers. Instead, I asked my participants questions designed to continue our discussion beyond the papers themselves, seeking the points of commonality between the things they had written about. I have attended larger seminars than mine that took a similar approach, and though it is more work for the leader, who must come up with a long list of questions and discussion points, I believe it is worthwhile in shaping a coherent conversation on a topic rather than a sometimes disjointed series of mini-conversations about individual papers, and it is also closer to what I understand a seminar to be.

My initial letter is below; because the seminar was small, I asked all participants to comment on all papers, in a manner they chose (though all of them ended up writing in detail about each paper, even though I hadn't specifically asked them to). Had the seminar been larger, I would have asked the participants to address one or two papers in detail but also to discuss points of commonality between other papers.

Dear colleagues,

I am delighted to welcome you to the Caroline Shakespeare seminar for SAA 2016. I write for a couple of reasons. First, I'd be grateful if you could write back and confirm that I have the right email address and that (as far as you know for now, of course) you are still planning to attend SAA. I'd also like to reintroduce the seminar itself, discuss a few things about how I'd like to go about it, and go over some deadlines, most of which are driven by SAA's own deadlines.

As you can see from the attached participant list, our seminar is smaller than many with five participants (six including me, and surely I count), although I am told it might still grow if there are late registrants; if you know people who might be interested, please let me know right away. (I'd like to include people who work primarily on Caroline literature and thus may not be SAA members, but they have been harder to recruit for obvious reasons.) Regardless, I'm hoping the smaller size will allow for a somewhat more free-ranging discussion, as well as potentially more feedback on each paper than is common in a big seminar. This is what I'd like you to do (note that some deadlines are earlier than usual because SAA is in March rather than April this year):

By January 1, please send me a brief abstract or description of your paper -- no more than 300 words, and tentative is fine. I'll combine these into a single document and circulate it to you. By Monday, February 8, follow with the paper itself. These should be on the short side -- 9-12 pages; 3500 words or fewer. The SAA requires that I have your papers by February 15 or they

cannot print your name in the conference program; of course, the earlier I get them and circulate them the more time people have to read them.

By Monday, March 7, please read the papers and send me your thoughts about them, in 1 to 3 pages. You are welcome to write about issues some or all of them have in common, things that are revealed by reading them together, or to respond in depth to some of them more than others, as you wish. I will combine your thoughts into a single document and add my own.

In New Orleans, I am hoping to have a discussion not only about the papers you've written but more broadly about Shakespeare's role in the Caroline period and the methodological questions raised by the seminar topic and your various responses to it. To point toward some of those issues, and to give you more of my own thoughts about the topic, I've attached my original proposal for the seminar, which is longer and fuller than the brief version in the SAA Bulletin.

Thanks very much to you all, and I look forward to hearing from you and meeting you in New Orleans.

Best wishes,

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