

SAA Seminar 2016: 'Shakespeare and Riot'  
Edel Lamb (Queen's University Belfast) & Fiona Ritchie (McGill University)

We found leading the SAA seminar to be a very rewarding experience. We were glad to lead the seminar together. Not only did it allow sharing the workload; it enabled us to think together about how to explore diverse research interests in the seminar format. The seminar required significant work from us in the months before the conference and we asked a lot of our participants. However, we felt that this allowed more productive discussion during the two-hour session.

A copy of our initial email to participants below shows the various activities we asked of the group. We found it particularly useful to ask participants to immediately share their reason for selecting the seminar. This was helpful for us in determining how we would run the seminar, and also gave the group a sense of the range of research interests. Another useful activity was the creation of a group bibliography on Google Docs. This not only created a sense of shared research interests during the period of preparation, it has remained as a shared resource that reflects the work of the seminar participants.

We divided the larger seminar group in smaller groups of 2-3 people in advance of the seminar and asked participants to write responses to the other papers in their small group. This was a useful way of developing connections between the papers, and it allowed us to devise larger research questions that built on individual and shared research interests. We circulated these questions in advance of our meeting and then used them as the basis of discussion during the seminar. The advantage of this was that the seminar was not used to rehearse the individual arguments of papers but instead as a time to explore common research questions. We also shared this list of questions with auditors (in addition to abstracts) so that they could follow the seminar discussion.

We opened the seminar with small group activity. We asked each small group to take 5 minutes to consider how the papers in their group defined our key term (riot). This was partly devised as an ice-breaker activity (as we had not been able to organize a time for participants to meet in advance of the seminar), but it had the added advantages of building on the small group work that we had asked of participants in advance of the seminar, encouraged everyone to engage with key shared questions, highlighted the range of approaches taken by individuals and opened up to larger group discussion.

One participant highlighted that it would be helpful to circulate notes of seminar discussions after the meeting. We were happy to do this as it allowed us to create another shared record of the work of the group. However, as we had not taken comprehensive notes during the seminar and we wanted the document to be an accurate reflection of the group discussion, we asked participants to contribute to this final task. We created a document on Google Docs and asked everyone to add a few points on their experience of the seminar. Many participants were keen to contribute to this document. We found it to be a useful way of recording seminar discussions and also of forging a sense that the seminar was only the starting point of our discussions!

\*

\*

\*

Dear colleagues,

We are delighted to welcome you to the 2016 SAA seminar 'Shakespeare and Riot'. With 15 participants, we look forward to a lively discussion in New Orleans. As those of you who have attended past meetings of the SAA know, seminars offer participants the opportunity to share ideas and sources, to engage in discussion of the issues raised by the papers at the seminar, and to receive productive feedback on work in progress.

To set the context for the seminar, we have included a longer seminar description at the end of this message. In addition to traditional papers, responses and seminar discussion we hope that you will join us in compiling a shared bibliography (instructions provided below). We have established the following schedule for the seminar, and will send you reminders as deadlines approach.

**By Friday 30<sup>th</sup> October:** Please respond (to [e.lamb@qub.ac.uk](mailto:e.lamb@qub.ac.uk) and [fiona.ritchie@mcgill.ca](mailto:fiona.ritchie@mcgill.ca)) to acknowledge the receipt of this email and to confirm your participation in the seminar. We would be grateful if you would write a couple of sentences explaining why you are interested in the topic. Please also confirm that your email address is the preferred one for correspondence over the next few months.

**By Friday 4<sup>th</sup> December:** Please email us a working title and an abstract (250-300 words) for your proposed paper. We will compile and circulate a document containing the abstracts so that all participants have a sense of the work being done by other members of the group while writing papers. Additionally please add information on 2-3 books or articles that you have found most helpful in thinking about the seminar topic to our collective bibliography, accessible at the following URL:

....

This bibliography will remain accessible to everyone after the seminar. We hope that you will continue to add to it as your ideas develop and that this will become a shared document of useful sources for us all.

**By Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> January:** Please email your completed paper (2000-3000 words). We will circulate the papers to all participants. You are expected to read all the papers prior to the seminar, some of which you will engage with more specifically as a respondent. Shortly after receiving all the papers, we will cluster them in thematic groups and assign respondents for each paper (see below).

If you would like to provide a revised abstract for your paper, please also do so by this date. Hard copies of abstracts will be provided to auditors at the seminar.

The SAA dictates that only those seminar members who have completed their assignments can be listed in the conference program. It is therefore essential that you send papers by this date so that we can notify the SAA office of your participation in the seminar.

**By Friday 26<sup>th</sup> February:** Please email your responses (approx. 500 words) to the members of your thematic group, copying both of us. These responses are meant to stimulate conversation across papers. Responses should engage the issues a paper raises rather than critique its substance, style, or structure.

Also, please ensure that your SAA membership, conference registration, and related matters are up-to-date.

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> March:** We will forward to all participants a list of guiding questions for the seminar based on our readings of the papers and responses.

**Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> – Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> March:** We will meet at the SAA conference for the discussion. We do not yet know the timing of the seminar. We hope that we will be able to meet for a drink in advance of the seminar. We will suggest a time and location when we have more details about the conference schedule.

We look forward to meeting you all in March. In the meantime we are excited to begin our conversation.

Edel and Fiona

\* \* \*

### **Description of seminar**

From the Shrove Tuesday apprentice riots to depictions of the angry mob in *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar*, to the Old Price riots in London (1809) and the fatal Astor Place riot in New York (1849), Shakespeare's plays were produced within, represent and have often invoked moments of riotous behaviour across time and space. More recently Shakespearean drama has been used as a mediating and therapeutic force in instances of national discord (for example in prisons). How does Shakespeare operate both to instigate riot and reconcile violence? This seminar will explore the multiple connections between Shakespeare and riot throughout history. Papers might consider (but are not limited to) any of the following topics: how riot was staged by Shakespeare and his contemporaries and why early modern drama engaged with public unrest; the ways in which Shakespeare and his works function as sites of rivalry and disorder (or are used as a mediating force) in theatres,

commemorations, reviews and the media; instances of social unrest, riot and mutiny in response to performances and appropriations of Shakespeare. The seminar will consider riotous behaviour as depicted in or in response to Shakespearean drama with a particular emphasis on theatrical performance. When do text and performance overlap to create moments that are particularly productive of disorder? What is the role of the dramatist, the performer or the spectator in instigating riot? We seek to analyse what is at stake in Shakespearean riot in terms of economics, class politics, social order, cultural heritage, national and politicised identities. Does this vary across media, across history or across national or geographical boundaries? What is the relationship between theatrical discourse and civic disorder – social, political and national? We also intend to explore the critical methods that might be deployed to consider the topics of riot and civic disorder in relation to drama and theatre. Is it possible to recover an event as transient as riot, especially in relation to the ephemeral theatrical moment? What sources might we use and how should we read them? Our goal is both to probe specific instances of Shakespearean riot and also to develop methodologies for the study of theatrical disorder.