

Monika Smialkowska and Edmund King

## **Commemorating Shakespeare: Conflict, Co-operation, Capital**

Dear Participants,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our seminar at the 2016 SAA meeting. We are delighted that you can be a part of what promises to be a rich and varied set of discussions, and we are looking forward to meeting you in person in New Orleans.

This seminar draws on our shared interests in the ways in which Shakespeare has been commemorated throughout history, particularly in times of political crisis, such as the First World War. From Garrick's Jubilee of 1769 to the 2016 'Wonder of Will' series, organised by the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Bard has been memorialised in an astonishing variety of locations and formats. Apart from honouring Shakespeare, these commemorations have often served different individual and political agendas, ranging from Garrick's promotion of himself and of Stratford-upon-Avon to the British Council's current marketing of Shakespeare as a 'global' writer. Consequently, we believe that exploring and theorising Shakespearean commemorations can give us an insight into important intersections of culture and politics, history and the present moment, the personal and the social.

It is our hope that this seminar will draw attention to the implications of a wide range of Shakespearean commemorations in a variety of local and global contexts. By refining and broadening our understanding of this rich and diverse field, past and present, we hope to extend critical awareness of how a powerful cultural icon, such as Shakespeare, can effectively structure people's everyday (and festive) lives, by upholding (and questioning) existing cultural hierarchies and determining different kinds of value.

We attach below our full, original proposal for this seminar in the hope that this prompts further ideas. However, we are delighted by the broad range of interests represented by our participants, and we encourage you to devise responses to these issues that will broaden our collective thinking about Shakespearean commemorations. We look forward to hearing your thoughts and answering any questions you may have!

Monika and Edmund

### **How will the seminar work?**

For those of you who are new to the SAA conference format, please note that the SAA seminars work differently to many academic events you may have encountered before. The key difference is that we don't read out or present our papers in the seminar itself, but circulate them in advance (via email). Everybody reads all the papers before we meet, which enables us to comment on them in the seminar, teasing out the key issues, identifying common strands, asking questions, and theorising the entire field. We hope that the schedule

below will give everybody enough time not only to prepare their own papers, but also to engage in detail with the work of other participants. Our aim is to enable a lively and constructive discussion, which will advance the debates surrounding the aesthetics and the politics of Shakespearean commemorations. This is why it is crucial that everybody reads everybody else's paper in advance of the seminar. To help us structure the discussion, we are also asking each participant to take on the responsibility of providing written feedback on the paper of one other participant (we'll assign respondents). The format of this feedback is entirely up to you, but we suggest that you include a couple of questions that you would like to ask about the material, in order to stimulate further discussion. You may also want to give a thought to common threads between the paper you are responding to and other contributions, so that we can see emerging patterns and key elements of the debates. Of course, we will be happy for all of us to talk to one another informally in the weeks leading to the seminar. For this purpose, we ask you to allow us to share everybody's email addresses.

### **Schedule of Work**

October 2015 – the list of seminar participants circulated by Monika and Edmund.

1 November 2015 – the deadline for applying for travel grants.

16 November 2015 – deadline for submission of paper titles and abstracts to Monika and Edmund (maximum 300 words).

1 January 2016 – conference registration opens (please note that after the pre-registration time the conference fee increases by \$30).

8 February 2016 – deadline for submission of complete papers to Monika and Edmund (maximum 4,000 words)

16 February 2016 – complete papers circulated to everybody by Monika and Edmund. An individual respondent assigned to each paper.

14 March 2016 – deadline for submission of responses to one's assigned paper (maximum 750 words; send to Monika and Edmund).

23 March 2016 – the SAA conference opens. Please, come along having read all the papers in our seminar.

26 March 2016 – the SAA conference ends.

### **Full proposal**

2016 marks the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shakespeare's death. Cultural organisations are planning a series of commemoration events to mark the date. The British Council, for instance, asks "how a playwright from the Midlands came to be enjoyed all over the globe," and plans to host a series of events that will celebrate Shakespeare as a "living writer" with a global presence. The alacrity with which cultural and quasi-governmental groups are attaching their names and missions to the Shakespeare anniversary gives us an opportunity to critically examine the phenomenon of "commemorative Shakespeare." What and whom are we celebrating when we commemorate Shakespeare? How does Shakespeare signify politically in these events? How can an historical study of previous Shakespeare commemorations help to inform critical practice in the present? This seminar invites papers that cover a broad range

of dates and events in the history of Shakespeare commemoration, from the Shakespeare jubilee in 1764 to the 2016 Shakespeare events themselves. Papers might examine the three-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 1916 in the context of global conflict; Shakespeare commemoration events around the world; or the links between Shakespeare commemoration and the assertion of nationality or cultural identity. Speakers will be encouraged to think about the motivations behind the act of commemorating Shakespeare. How do commemoration events enable social, cultural, or linguistic groups to construct a collective identity or differentiate themselves from rival groups? How does the act of commemoration itself generate cultural, social, or monetary capital?