

William Germano
Shakespeare and the Dictionary

October 26, 2015

Dear Shakespeareans,

Welcome to “Shakespeare and the Dictionary,” our SAA seminar scheduled for New Orleans, a city for which adjectives have yet to be exhausted. The meeting will take place March 23-26, 2016.

This morning I stopped by Dean & DeLuca, my local fancy food store here in Manhattan, where I discovered that they sold *medlars* – I don’t think I’ve ever seen a medlar before and I’m certain that I’d never seen the word before reading Shakespeare. At that long ago moment, whenever it occurred, Shakespeare *became* my dictionary, as he has for me countless times since, and surely as he has for countless readers since the seventeenth century.

Our seminar is about Shakespeare *and* the dictionary, but also Shakespeare *in* the dictionary, the dictionary *in* Shakespeare, the fate of reference books (some of us remember a time before the internet when *reference books* stood as an epistemological category), Shakespeare’s use of foreign words, Shakespeare and his contemporary sources of linguistic information, recent book history events such as the *Alvearie*, and the cultural functions of such totemic objects as F1 (and latterly the rise of Q1) as well as the OED.

You are this year’s seminar #46 – this isn’t a “taught” event but a collective one, and the seminar will be enriched by your contribution. You can approach the markers “Shakespeare” and “dictionary” and put them into whatever productive relationship may inspire you. The result should be a short paper at the treacherous length of “no more than ten double-spaced pages.” That is, a successful SAA seminar paper is likely to be neither lecture nor article nor ten random pages untimely ripped from a chapter. Instead, it’s intended to be a small stage for a useful idea. Your paper will be the object of critical reflection by a small number of seminar participants to whom the task will be assigned, but you should count on everyone around the table having read your contribution by the time we get to NOLA.

If I may, I’d like to steer everyone away from choosing a single dictionary *entry* and framing a paper around that point of departure. Detailed etymologies and usage histories of specific words will always interest literature people, but in our two hours traffic of the seminar table we might want to take aim at more expansive and ambitious targets.

So think big. Take risks. But seriously, no more than ten pages, double-spaced.

Many of you are veterans of the SAA seminars, but if you are new to the system the procedure is straightforward and stern in a friendly way:

By December 1st please email me an abstract (300 words) of your paper.

Papers are due January 15th.

In early February I must report to the SAA who has fulfilled their obligation to the seminar and who has not. SAA rules are strict on this point: the seminar leader must identify anyone who hasn't, at which point that person's name will be removed from the program.

Once papers are in I'll group them and provide further instructions as to how we will prepare and interact, typically by asking each seminar participant to write a page or two of response to a couple of papers. No one will be asked to respond to all the seminar's papers, but I'll strongly encourage everyone to read all of them.

I include here the names and emails of all the participants. Things sometimes shift and people are obligated to withdraw, but this is the list. In the SAA tradition, the table will be shared by people at all stages of an academic life.

We're particularly fortunate to have Marjorie Garber, Zachary Lesser, and Robert Watson among our group. Given their considerable experience in the field I may offer them the option of a slightly different contribution to the seminar. If you haven't read *Shakespeare After All*, *Hamlet after Q1*, or *Back to Nature* I recommend that you do, not so much for the seminar per se but because these are strong and pleasurable works that help us think smarter about Shakespeare.

I'm very much looking forward to our engagements over email and to the gathering of the seminar clans in New Orleans. Every SAA seminar is always too short, but the conference itself is always fun and the conversations are always excellent.

For those of you going to MLA in Austin in January I'm afraid this is the first time in decades that I won't be at the meeting. I will be at or near some of your schools between now and February, though, if you want to get in touch (ASU on Friday November 13, Irvine January 15, Northwestern January 29).

Of course, feel free to email me should you have any questions. I'll be in touch in mid-November with a gentle reminder that abstracts are due by December 1.

Happy thinking!

Bill Germano

William Germano
Professor of English Literature
Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art
41 Cooper Sq
New York, NY 10003

Registrants for Seminar 46. Shakespeare and the Dictionary

Faith Acker
faith.d.acker@gmail.com

Heather M. Ackerman
Arizona State University
hmackerm@asu.edu

John Henry Adams
Arizona State University
jadams29@asu.edu

J.K. Barret
University of Texas at Austin
jkbarret@austin.utexas.edu

Kristen Abbott Bennett
Stonehill College
kbennett@stonehill.edu

Gwynn A. Dujardin
Queen's University
dujardin@queensu.ca

Jeffrey Galbraith
Wheaton College
jeff.galbraith@wheaton.edu

Marjorie Garber
Harvard University
garber@fas.harvard.edu

Zachary Lesser
University of Pennsylvania

zlesser@english.upenn.edu

Elizabeth Pentland
York University
pent@yorku.ca

Susan E. Phillips
Northwestern University
susie-phillips@northwestern.edu

Kyle A. Pivetti
Norwich University
kpivetti@norwich.edu

Jan Katherine Purnis
Campion College at the
University of Regina
jan.purnis@uregina.ca

Marjorie Rubright
University of Toronto
marjorie.rubright@utoronto.ca

Robert N. Watson
University of California, Los Angeles
rnatson@ucla.edu

Victoria Marie Hope White
University of California, Davis
vmwhite@ucdavis.edu