

Performing Women/Performing Gender in the Age of Shakespeare and Beyond, SAA 2019

Leader: Melinda J. Gough

Initial Welcome Letter

26 October 2018

Dear all,

Welcome to the SAA seminar 'Performing Women/Performing Gender in the Age of Shakespeare and Beyond'!

This document sets out plans for the next few months, including deadlines for precirculated work, and explains how we'll stay in touch. I hope you find it helpful.

SEMINAR TOPIC

Here is the seminar abstract, as found in the Bulletin:

What new questions are generated about gender in plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries once we take seriously the documentary evidence now available concerning early modern women's performance history? How can knowledge of women's performance in Italy, Spain, France, and northern Europe, and of encounters between continental mixed-gender and all-male English companies through travel or contact at court, change how we approach these plays as students and teachers, literary critics, editors, and/or theater practitioners?

Recognizing that early modern women's performance is now well documented -- thanks to the Records of Early English Drama project and records-based performance history work focused on Italian commedia dell'arte, Spanish comedia, and, to a lesser extent, performance practices in early modern France and northern Europe -- this seminar takes as its starting point the need to explore, more fully, the impact of women's performance on the writing, teaching, editing, and staging of continental and English canonical Renaissance drama.

What new research questions, for example, might be generated once we take seriously the impact of women's performance on a broad range of cultural production from the period, both on stage and off? How might attention to the mixed-gender troupes of Italy, Spain, and France and to women's amateur performance in England inform how students and teachers approach early modern drama and other forms of literature in the classroom? how scholars approach these plays critically (as editors and literary critics)? how theatrical practitioners (including professional companies dedicated to the classical theatrical canon) approach these plays in contemporary stagings?

I imagine that in response to such questions, written contributions by seminar participants are likely to engage a wide range of topics and formats. One type of contribution might be a paper investigating the ways that early modern women's performance helped to shape how early modern playwrights approached their craft – impacting the development of particular character types, for example, or prompting innovations in genre and theme. A second, more explicitly transnational approach might explore synergies between the performance skills required by Shakespeare's boy actresses and those pioneered by women in continental mixedgender troupes. A third strand of written work might map and/or theorize editorial practices for early modern plays and their connection (or lack thereof) to documentary evidence regarding early modern women's performance. A fourth type of project might explore how research on early modern women's performance impacts the kinds of approaches to plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries taken up by actors, directors, and audiences in later periods (for example: what connections, if any, can be drawn between the history of women's performance and contemporary innovations in casting -- for example, commitments to gender parity in professional theatre companies, or to all-female productions of Shakespeare's plays?). Finally, an equally important contribution to the seminar might include a draft syllabus or assignment tied in some way to our central topic, accompanied by discussion of how we might use your teaching ideas to engage our own students -- through a particular set of readings or a particular set of pedagogical exercises, for example -- in thinking through resonances between the history of gendered performance on the early modern stage and how those plays are performed, and analyzed, today.

PLAN FOR THE SEMINAR, including DEADLINES

Once I receive your abstracts (for the abstract deadline, see below), I'll divide you into groups of three or four based on broad thematic and/or methodological headings. Your paper **MUST** be sent to me by 16 February, 2019. Once all the completed papers are in, each of you will read all of the contributions and comment on what you think are some commonalities between the papers as a whole; in addition, I'll ask you to read the papers in your group with particular care and assign you to write a short response to two of them. I'll then post some discussion points before the seminar. This will enable you all to receive feedback on your work and help us to have a wide-ranging discussion during the seminar itself.

Based on the successful use of Dropbox in other seminars, I plan to use it as a means for our group to share abstracts, papers, and responses. For more information on downloading and accessing Dropbox, and to sign up for an account, see <https://www.dropbox.com>

When I create the Dropbox seminar folder, you will receive an email with a link that will allow you to post your abstracts and papers, and also to access those of others (be sure to check your junk folder in case your invitation from Dropbox is moved there).

If you run into difficulties with the Dropbox platform, or have any concerns about using it, please let me know as soon as possible.

Here's our timeline for the coming months:

- ASAP: Upon receipt of this email, please send me a quick reply to acknowledge receipt and to confirm your participation. Please confirm that the email address listed at the end of this document is your preferred one. In the same email, please also send me the following

- 2 sentences about why you chose this seminar.
- 2 sentences about your SAA experience, if any. If this is your first time at the SAA, it would be great to know that in advance. If you're a regular, let me know a little bit about your previous experience with SAA seminars. I'm interested in what has generated lively and collegial discussion in the past.

- By 14 December 2018: Please post to our Dropbox folder, as a Word document, a file with your title and a brief abstract (ca. 250 words) for your written contribution.

- 1 January 2019: SAA conference registration opens.

- By 16 February 2019: Please post your final paper to Dropbox as a Word document. Out of courtesy to everyone's workload, your paper should be no longer than 3,000 words. Please also post your updated abstract (the SAA asks that we circulate the abstracts to seminar auditors, to help include them in our discussion).

NB: This February deadline is very important, as I will need to inform the SAA no later than Monday 18 February that I have received your paper in order to confirm your involvement in the seminar. If you miss the deadline, I'm afraid you won't be able to join us in the seminar itself!

- By 9 March 2019: In order to facilitate discussion and to ensure that everyone receives a response to their work, I will allocate each of you to a smaller group of three or four people. I'll ask you to read this smaller group of contributions with particular care, and assign you to write a short response (ca. 300 words) to two of them. These responses are intended to stimulate discussion across papers and should engage with the issues raised rather than critiquing substance, style, or structure.

- By 30 March 2019: Please post your responses to each other's papers to Dropbox and include a list of two or three important commonalities between papers: these lists will strongly inform the basis of our discussion.

- By 9 April 2019: I'll post some discussion points based on your responses and my own ideas in order to create a framework for the seminar.

- 17-20 April 2019: Our seminar in DC (exact date and time still to be confirmed by the SAA).

It would be great to meet in DC before we convene for the seminar so I'll be in touch, in early April, about arranging a pre-seminar drink or meal.

As a final note, you can find more information on the SAA's seminar policies at

<http://www.shakespeareassociation.org/seminars> -

and

<http://www.shakespeareassociation.org/seminars-and-workshops/guidelines/>

I'm greatly looking forward to working with you all in the run-up to the conference and to seeing you all there.

Sincerely,

Melinda

goughm@mcmaster.ca

FOLLOW UP EMAIL early January: reminder re. paper deadline, setting up meal

Dear all,

I hope this message finds you all well — and a belated happy new year!

My hope is that you all received the Jan 1 email with information about how to register for the conference (remember that the early bird rate runs until 1 March only) and how to make hotel reservations. In the SAA Bulletin, attached to that email and also available here — <http://www.shakespeareassociation.org/wpcontent/uploads/2019/01/Jan-2019-bulletin.pdf> — you will find a full conference program. According to that program, our seminar has been scheduled on **Saturday 20 April from 4-6 pm.**

Thank you, everyone, for uploading your paper abstracts to our shared Dropbox folder. I'm genuinely excited by the range of approaches and types of contributions our group plans to offer. I'm also delighted that Peter Parolin has agreed to serve as respondent for our session. In this role, Peter will help to identify some larger points of connection, and divergence, across the papers, with a particular focus on keywords that arise out of the papers as well as published work related to our topic. Thank you, Peter!

I want to remind everyone to please upload your seminar paper (3,000 words maximum) as well as a revised abstract (if relevant) to our shared Dropbox folder **on or before Saturday 16 February**. If you have any difficulties with Dropbox, you are welcome to email me the paper, and I'll upload it for you. As I've mentioned previously, the SAA requires seminar leaders to confirm receipt of participants' papers on Monday 18 February, which means that if I have not received your paper by this date, you unfortunately will not be able to participate in the seminar.

This coming week, my hope is to reserve a table for us at a nearby restaurant or pub, for an informal gathering prior to our actual seminar meeting. There's no obligation to come, but my hope is that the opportunity to put faces to names in advance of our formal session will help to break the ice and encourage the kind of collegial atmosphere amongst participants that will really help us to make meaningful contributions to shared discussions at the seminar itself.

I propose that we meet up at the Thursday evening reception, at 7:30 pm or so, and then go out for dinner together — does that work for others? The reception starts at 6 pm so that will give us time to mingle more widely before finding one another. Assuming this plan suits, I'll follow up with the concierge at the hotel to arrange a dinner reservation for 7:30-45 ish, and send details about where specifically — in the hotel lobby for example — we should meet.

Please send me a quick one-line reply letting me know whether Thursday dinner is feasible — so that I will have numbers when reserving a table. My hope is to find somewhere within walking distance of the conference hotel with gluten free and vegan/vegetarian options, and hopefully with reasonable prices. (Do let me know if you have additional dietary restrictions that I should take into consideration, and I'll do my best to accommodate them.)

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Thanks again,

Melinda

FOLLOW UP email one month prior to conference: instructions for responding to papers, details re. meal

Dear all:

Thanks to everyone for submitting their papers for our SAA seminar “Performing Women/Performing Gender in the Age of Shakespeare and Beyond.” To help lay the groundwork for productive and collegial discussion at the seminar itself, and to ensure that everyone receives a response to their work, I've devised the following roster for who will comment in writing on which papers in advance of our meeting. Each person will read all ten papers, of course, but I'm asking that you read with particular care the two papers I have assigned to you and that, by April 5, you write a short response (about 250-350 words) for each of these two papers.

Sarah – comments on Hailey and Deanne
Hailey – comments on Deanne and Natalia
Deanne – comments on Natalia and David
Natalia – comments on David and Dorothy
David – comments on Dorothy and Jessica
Dorothy – comments on Jessica and Katelyn
Jessica – comments on Katelyn and Susan
Katelyn – comments on Susan and Tara
Susan – comments on Tara and Sarah
Tara – comments on Sarah and Hailey

Please note: these written responses are intended to stimulate discussion across papers and should engage with the issues raised rather than critiquing substance, style, or structure. The precise format and content is up to you, but here are some ideas. Responses might attempt to

briefly summarize in your own words the main claim or thesis of the paper as you understand it. They might offer a thought or two about the most exciting contribution or contributions that the paper makes to our larger seminar topic. Written responses might highlight questions the paper raises, for you, with respect to your own research and thinking. Additionally, they might identify aspects of the argument that could be made more clear for future readers – through additional explanation or examples, for example, or through the introduction of new frameworks, theories, methodologies, or primary/secondary sources.

By Friday April 5, please post your two written responses to our shared Dropbox folder. By that same date, please also upload **a brief list of common threads** (in terms of content or methodology) that bring the papers into dialogue with one another and/or point to promising directions for future work related to our shared topic. If each person can list one or two threads for discussion across the papers as a whole, that would be fantastic; point form is perfectly fine.

By April 15, I'll upload to the shared folder a collated document outlining some additional discussion points for our seminar based on my own thinking as well as the collective set of written responses and lists of commonalities you'll have provided, along with key terms and concepts contributed by Peter.

I'll write separately with details about the dinner on Thursday evening. In the meanwhile, if you've not yet managed to RSVP but would like to join us, please let me know asap, and certainly no later than next Friday March 22, so that I can increase our table size (no doubt large tables will be harder to come by, the closer in time we get to the conference itself).

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to be in touch via email.

I look forward to meeting everyone in person, in just over a month's time!

— Melinda

Final Pre-Seminar Email, a few days before the conference

Dear all,

In conversation with our respondent, Peter, I've pulled together some of the themes and issues that link our papers and responses.

Please see attached (I will bring printed copies to the meeting, but if you can look this over beforehand, that would be fantastic).

As this handout hopefully makes clear, we have divided participants into three smaller groups. After introductions, a short overview of our topic (by me), and a brief set of comments responding to the papers collectively (by Peter), we'll divide into these groups for approximately 20-25 minutes.

The small groups will hone in on the particular topics and questions assigned to them (listed on the attached handout). We have included suggestions for which papers speak to the various topics most obviously — our hope is that this will give each group some starting points but of course we are keen to have fluid discussions, so please feel free to raise other papers, along with other ideas or questions, as they arise.

After 20-25 minutes in the smaller groups, we will reconvene as a large group, at which point I'll ask each small group to share one key insight, and/or one further puzzle or query, arising from your discussion.

Peter and I hope that this format this will allow everyone to contribute and will mean that each paper is discussed in some way. You will want to bring your own detail to the points we have pulled together, and we look forward to hearing your thoughts on this and on questions of particular interest to you.

Finally — if we have time, we will also take a stab at the brainstorming pedagogy exercise on the handout (bottom page 2). If we can manage it, this should be a great way to engage auditors and to think outside the box in relation to our topic!

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to email me.

Again, thanks for your wonderful papers and responses to one another. I am excited for our discussion.

Safe travels, and see you soon,

Melinda

Handout for use at seminar itself

Performing Women/Performing Gender in the Age of Shakespeare and Beyond

SAA 2019, Washington DC

Group A: Katelyn, Susan, Natalia, David

How does attending to genre, and to women's performances in and beyond those of commercial theatre, shape the methodologies we employ (and insights we produce) when researching women's performance? What counts as 'performance'?

- David considers the distribution of women's lines in different genres; Dorothy highlights lead female roles in Jacobean tragedies; Katelyn, as noted in Jessica's comments, analyzes how generic expectations germane to tragedy shape Desdemona's "abject subjection."

- Deanne unpacks convent performances and civic pageants; Hailey takes up ballad performances; Sarah explores networks of performances in aristocratic households and the traces of those performances in letters and published texts.
- Susan's paper asks us to consider a woman poet's self-promotion as performance, and together with Natalia's, which reads (auto)biography and playtext palimpsestically, pushes the boundaries of what we mean by "performance" as a keyword within our field.

What are some of the purposes of women's playing, as mapped in our papers? What conditions allow women's performance to proceed? What are some of its impacts?

- Many papers question what women are trying to accomplish in performance: Katelyn on Desdemona's performance of the double bind; Susan on Lanyer's satirical treatment of gendered codes of piety; Deanne on performances by girls as activating ideas of holiness; Sarah on performance as a form of advertisement on the marriage market (possibly also a cure for disease of the mother); Tara on the capacity for women's performance to unsettle notions of gender; Jessica, Katelyn, and Dorothy on women's performance as opening up (or failing to open up) new readings of female virtue, sincerity, and agency.
- David maps how the availability of trained professional actresses in Spain (as opposed to their paucity in England) leads to more substantial female characters; Tara and Jessica both address how contemporary women actors expand and extend their professional careers through access to "male" roles.

Group B: Jessica, Tara, Dorothy, Peter

How might attention to women's performance help us think about performance itself as a means to unsettle patriarchal categories of social difference?

- Susan, Natalia, and Dorothy all consider the act of performance as a way to potentially scramble the gendered landscape (eg. the narrator's performance in *Salve Rex Judaeorum* in Susan's paper, Catalina de Erauso's in Natalia's paper, Josette Simon and Joan Iyiola's performances in Dorothy's paper).
- Tara takes up questions of audience response explicitly; this question is also relevant for Susan's thinking about readers in *Salve Rex* and Katelyn's paper on the audience's implication in *Othello*.

How does our sense of the actor's identity (specifically their gender and race) shape our understanding of the play being performed?

- Dorothy, Jessica, and Tara all confront putting contemporary women into women's roles originally played by boys (Dorothy) and men's roles originally played by men (Jessica and Tara); Tara looks too at men playing women's roles. How do such

casting practices shape our sense of the textual issues at play; how do the bodies, and the actors' use of them in particular ways, generate significance?

- Deanne's paper, or Hailey's, or Natalia's, might reframe the question. Instead of asking how subsequent casting practices (eg. women in men's roles) make us rethink old plays, we could ask how a prior or simultaneous history of performance (girls performing in various performance genres and modes, women singing as Eleanor, Catalina de Erauso/Guzman's non-binary performances of gender) shapes how gender functions in male-authored play-texts.

Group C: Sarah, Deanne, Hailey, Melinda

Consider marginalization as a conceptual category for understanding women's performance. What does overcoming marginalization look like, during the early modern period and in our own research?

- Sarah and Deanne undertake archival work that uncovers rich, coherent networks of women's performance, networks that have been marginalized from the point of view of canonicity. How might archival discovery reshape the categories we use to think about women's performance?
- Hailey's paper on ghosting foregrounds women's performance to flesh out our understanding of male-authored characters on the professional stage: here, women's embodied performance is marginalized, but the known cultural context of the ballads is powerfully felt.
- David's comparative paper asks how material performance conditions can either encourage or marginalize women's presence in play-texts. Deanne and Natalia, too, consider different national instances of women's performance. What possibilities for centering women's performance can be illuminated by attention to play-texts (and their "ghostings") from more than one national tradition?

How does attending to a wider range of performance modes – in particular, to song – impact our understanding of women's performance?

- The idea that acoustic worlds or songscapes are critical for understanding women's performance, articulated by Sarah, also holds for the work on ballads and music in Hailey's and Katelyn's papers, and underpins Natalia's questions about the physical voice being essential to the performance of gender.
- Dorothy's paper might be relevant to this topic also, given that Maria Aberg's Duchess featured stunning musical performances by women, including Joan Iyola singing as the Duchess.
- Relatedly, Sarah asks: how do we edit/annotate performance texts in ways that highlight the (gendered) songscapes in which these texts are embedded?

Final exercise idea:

In groups of 3-4, brainstorm a subunit of a course -- a particular set of readings or a particular pedagogical exercise, for example – designed to engage students in thinking through resonances between the history of gendered performance on the early modern stage and how those plays might be read, studied, and/or performed today.