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Seminar 7: “Both in Reputation and Profit”: Kinds of Capital in the Early Theatre
44th Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of America
New Orleans, LA, 23-26 March 2016

Seminar Description from the SAA Bulletin: The commercial enterprises of performing plays and running early modern playhouses were hedged around by negotiations with the Master of Revels, civic authorities, and patrons. Within the theatrical profession, obligations and fellowship colored contractual relationships. That players’ activities were preparatory “to do his majesty service in their quality” was not just a convenient fiction. How service, quality, profit, and reputation fed one another will be this seminar’s central question.

Welcome to the work of Seminar 7, “Both in Reputation and Profit”: Kinds of Capital in the Early Theatre.” As the description above suggests, we will be examining the purely commercial business of making money from the theatre, in so far as one ever can, in relation to the ways in which social, political, and artistic status may have helped or hindered that end in early modern England. Several directions suggest themselves: did, for example, James Burbage’s status as a leading player in the service of the Earl of Leicester, a very powerful figure indeed, ease his way in negotiating the building of the Theatre, and if so why did he leave Leicester’s service, apparently, in the earlier fifteen eighties? Why would Will Kemp leave the Chamberlain’s men when it must have been apparent that their fortunes were rising, and thereafter, apart from the morris dance, lapse into relative obscurity? Did court appointments—Lowin’s as porter, Taylor’s to the Revels—involve solely personal profit, or did they in some ways strengthen the company as a whole? You will, we are sure, think of many other angles of approach, and we look forward to hearing about them. New evidence is always welcome, especially when it upsets tidily arranged applecarts, as are well-argued challenges to received thinking.

The work of the seminar, as is usual, will involve proposing a topic for a paper addressing our general theme and developing it into a written essay to be shared in February. After the papers have been written, participants will respond in groups to others’ papers, and the seminar leaders will produce responses, defining some questions and themes for discussion before our meeting in New Orleans.

Timeline:

October 27th: Upon receipt of this email and no later than October 27th, we ask that you notify us of your intention to take part in the seminar and confirm or correct your contact information as printed in the attachment.

December 16th: Please email a title and abstract of your seminar paper to us. The maximum length for abstracts is 250 words. Once we have collected these, we will share them with everyone in the seminar.

February 12th: Please send your final seminar paper to us by email. We will batch the essays and distribute them to seminar participants. In addition, by this date, we would

like to have a final copy of your abstract (maximum 150 words), so that we can circulate a packet of abstracts to all of the seminar auditors. Essay length should be kept to no more than 3000 words, counting all notes, bibliographies, charts, and appendices. (Longer pieces might be possible in certain cases, but should be approved by the chairs in advance.) Use a twelve-point, single-spaced font, following seminar custom in recent years. In order for your name to be on the program, the SAA mandates that by February 15th, all seminar leaders must send in the names of participants who have completed their work. The 15th, then, is a hard final deadline. Our internal request for submission of papers and abstracts by February 12th allows for some breathing space to everyone as we comply with this constraint.

February 22nd: By this date, we will inform you about how we have organized the seminar members into response groups based on papers.

March 8th: Please send your group members and us your short responses to their papers. The suggested length for each response is 300-500 words. The most successful responses offer specific feedback for their fellow group members, as well as observations of shared themes and two to three broader questions for the seminar.

March 14th: We will send out our responses and discussion questions to guide our seminar conversation in New Orleans.

March 23rd-26th: Seminar meets; precise date and time TBA.

Theater History Dinner: Following tradition, we ask you to save the date for the annual theater history dinner for Friday, March 24th. In the meantime, we welcome suggestions for New Orleans restaurants that will accommodate large parties and can offer a prix fixe menu with several options.