

SAA Seminar on Virtual Shakespeare 2019

**Welcome letter:
October 13, 2018**

I'm delighted to welcome you all to the SAA seminar on "Virtual Shakespeare," our adventure in exploring the impact of digital technologies and modes of performance on thinking about Shakespeare and theatre. As I suggested in the short description of the seminar for the Bulletin, I'm hoping we can explore this theme broadly, not only thinking about Shakespeare in digital form, including videogames, digital performance, and cybernarrative, but also expanding to general theoretical issues concerning theatre and virtuality: for example, performance through avatars and live-action roleplay, gameplay live-streaming, or modes of experimentation with narratives and interactivity.

Attached you will find a list of seminar members, with e-mail addresses: please reply right now to this email to confirm you received it and let me know your preferred email address. (I'm also attaching this letter as a Word doc.)

As most of you know, SAA seminars spread out the work over the five months before we meet in April to discuss the papers we have circulated in advance and to ponder the challenges in undertaking this field of study. Your paper should be no longer than 3000 words (including notes); it can be shorter. You may explore any of the topics listed above; if you have questions about what you might write, just let me know by email.

To make sure all runs smoothly, I'm asking you all to complete certain tasks by certain deadlines spread over those five months. I'll facilitate the sharing of our work through the creation of a shared DropBox folder. If you have any trouble using DropBox, I'll find an alternative.

The most important deadline of all is February 18, 2019: that is the day I need to tell the SAA who has completed the advance work for the seminar and who has not. Anyone who cannot written their paper by then cannot be listed in the program.

Here is the work plan, with deadlines:

Immediately: Confirm you have received this email and let me know your preferred email address. I will then invite everyone to the shared DropBox folder for the seminar

November 1. Send me the tentative title of your paper and a brief bio. I will circulate the list by email and put it on the DropBox folder.

December 1. Post on the DropBox folder your paper title and a brief abstract of your proposed paper (200-300 words).

December 1. Email to me four essential bibliography items: I will collate them and create a group bibliography. We may discover one or two items we think we should all read before we meet in April.

January 1. Registration for the conference opens. Don't forget that, in order to participate in the conference, you also need to make sure that your membership is up to date.

February 15. The absolutely last deadline for posting your paper of 2000-3000 words to the DropBox folder. I will send you reminders on February 1.

March 11. I will assign clusters of papers and response circles, asking each participant to be particular familiar with the papers in their cluster, and to respond in writing (with no more than 250 words), to one paper: the response should suggest to the writer what the reader found most compelling about the paper, and what the reader would like to hear more about.

April 5. Paper responses due: the response should be emailed to the paper writer, with a copy to me.

April 17-20. We meet together, finally, in Washington, DC. I will let you know as soon as I know when our seminar is scheduled. I hope we can also gather together informally before or after the seminar. More information about that later.

Do please let me know if you have any questions: you can contact me by email at bushnell@sas.upenn.edu; my cell phone number is 215-840-3054 (don't call my office phone number).

I'm eagerly anticipating what I am sure will be an exciting conversation in the months to come.

Yours, Rebecca

Emails before seminar:

Email 1.

Dear Virtual Shakespeareans:

Thanks to you all for submitting your excellent papers on time: I'm happy to report that with the exception of Briony Frost, who had to drop out of the seminar early, we are all still together, and the papers are posted on our DropBox site.

The next step of our process is the cycle of paper responses. For those of you who are new to SAA seminars, this step allows for seminar members to receive some direct feedback on their essays, in order to guide them in developing their work further. It also allows us to spend the time we have together in April dwelling on the broader questions at stake in teaching, staging, reading, and researching Shakespeare in the context of digital culture. I would, of course, welcome your suggestions about topics we should address at our meeting.

I have grouped the papers into what I see as clusters around a theme, while there are clearly overlaps. This will help us organize our discussion in April, and I would ask each participant to be particularly familiar with the papers in their cluster.

Performance

Bloom
Borsuk
Cavecchi
Pye

Digital forms/remixes

Fazel
Holl
Martins/Sagres
Lutz
Walton

Audience, social media, networking, pedagogy

Lathrop
Turchi
Williams
Martins/Sagres

Gaming and immersion

Harrison
Walton
Bloom
Borsuk

In addition, I am assigning the following pairs of writers, who should respond in writing (about 250 words) to each others' papers. The response should suggest to the writer what the reader found most compelling about the paper, and what the reader would like to hear more about. (Because Martins and Sagres are co-authors, I'm having them do two responses, and they get two responses.)

Those paper responses are due by **April 5**: they should be emailed to the paper writers, with a copy to me.

Paper response pairs:

Bloom and Borsuk
Lathrop and Williams
Fazel and Holl
Pye and Cavecchi
Harrison and Walton
Lutz and Martins/Sagres
Turchi and Martins/Sagres

Finally, since our seminar ends at noon on Thursday April 18, we could continue our conversation over lunch: do let me know if you'd be interested, and I'll try to reserve us a table in the hotel. I'll send a reminder closer to the date.

I'm looking forward to spring in D.C (since spring has not yet come to Philadelphia...)
Yours, Rebecca

Email 2:

Virtual Shakespeareans,

I've enjoyed spending time with your papers in the last few days. I've learned a lot from all of you, and I anticipate a lively conversation next Thursday morning.

After reading them all, I've come up with a basic set of questions to frame our discussion. They are certainly not the only ones we might want to ask, and I encourage you to suggest more. But here are the questions that occurred to me.

What are the different forms of the digital object, when it comes to Shakespeare? What are the affordances of extant digital tools and modalities?

[If you have time, and you have not already done so, you might take a look at Christy Desmet's essay on "Alien Shakespeares 2.0" at <https://journals.openedition.org/shakespeare/3877> , since several people refer to it]

Given these reflections on digital tools and objects, how do we best evaluate remixes of digital and/or analog forms of Shakespeare, and how do we understand their social and cultural functions?

What are the implications of digital technologies for the performance of Shakespeare? Do these technologies not only shape but also redefine what performance is (e.g., GIF, social media)?

How might digital tools and practices transform our Shakespeare pedagogy? What are the benefits and risks?

What are the ethical issues raised in all of these papers, with ethics broadly construed: for example, the ethics of immersion, ownership, commerce, access, or discrimination?

In the last 15 or 20 minutes of the session, I do plan to open up the conversation to the auditors (if we have them). I will have copies of your abstracts to share with the auditors.

Let me know if there are other big topics you think we should take on.

Once I get to DC, I'll reserve a table for us for lunch at the hotel restaurant (right now it looks like about 9 or 10 of us).

If anything comes up, don't hesitate to email, text or call (at 215-840-3054).

Yours, Rebecca