

EUROPEAN SHAKESPEARE RESEARCH ASSOCIATION Annual Congress,

Shakespeare and Form: 'To set a form upon desired change'

Bangor University, Wales, 27-30 July 2027

CALL FOR PAPERS : Seminar 9: Forms of Shakespeare's Diplomacy

Convenors: Nathalie Rivère de Carles (Université Toulouse Jean Jaurès), France & Helen A. Hopkins (Birmingham City University, UK)

This seminar investigates Shakespeare's diplomacy as a set of theatrical, political, and cultural forms: embassies, intelligence networks, ceremonial encounters, negotiated speech, translation, performance, heritage display, and later uses of Shakespeare as cultural capital. It will explore:

- how diplomacy within Early Modern plays depends on forms: letters, reports, oaths, staged audiences, theatrical entertainments, curatorial narratives, and embodied performances of civility or threat
- how drama stages the fragile procedures by which states, courts, and individuals form relations across difference
- how playing companies have performed and/or participated in diplomacy from the early modern era until now (performing for ambassadors, negotiating patronage, censorship, audience reception, and transnational theatrical exchange, operating as cultural intermediaries through international festivals, touring productions, education programmes...)
- formal and informal ambassadorship from early modern times until now, and the models of negotiation generated through varied uses of Shakespeare's works and cultural capital
- how Shakespeare becomes an object of heritage diplomacy: curated through archives, museums, anniversaries, diplomatic/commemorative monuments, exhibitions, festivals, and touring productions that present him as a shared cultural inheritance while often reproducing hierarchies of nation, empire, race, gender, and class
- how plays and institutions produce diplomatic knowledge: teaching audiences to read gestures, decode equivocation, evaluate testimony, and imagine political community beyond national borders

The discussion will move from early modern diplomatic forms to Shakespeare's afterlives in official cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, soft power, and heritage policy. Attention will also be given to deformation: failed negotiations, distorted information, imperial appropriation, and the conversion of cultural prestige (soft power) into political force (as cooperation or coercion).

The wider aim is to reassess "Shakespearean diplomacy" as both an early modern practice of relation-making and a modern instrument whose global circulation may enable conversation, domination, or critique. In this way, we engage with the discourse around the decolonisation of Shakespeare. This process will therefore be treated not as the rejection of Shakespeare, but as a method for interrogating the colonial uses of the "Bard," recovering plural performance traditions, and rethinking heritage as a contested diplomatic space.

By bringing together approaches from literary criticism, theatre history, performance studies, critical heritage studies, gender studies, race studies, and new diplomatic history, the seminar asks whether Shakespearean drama merely reflects diplomatic culture or actively theorises it.

Abstracts (250-500 words) should be sent to both nrivere@univ-tlse2.fr and helen.hopkins3@bcu.ac.uk by **4th December 2026**

Acceptance notification: 16th December 2026.

Details about the Congress can be found here: <https://www.bangor.ac.uk/sah/the-european-shakespeare-research-association-esra-2027>