

Bryan Co-Edits Festschrift in Honor of His Former Advisor

Dr. Eric Bryan, associate professor of English, is the co-editor of a new book titled *Literary Speech Acts of the Medieval North*. This is a collection of essays written in honor of Dr. Thomas A. Shippey, professor emeritus at St. Louis University. Shippey was a formative figure in Bryan's and many other students' lives and careers.

As Bryan advances in his own career, he has an ever-growing desire to bring scholars together in meaningful ways. The volume is one way of doing that. The essays were written by eleven different scholars, including Bryan and his editorial collaborator, Dr. Alexander Ames of the University of South Carolina. "We live in a time when the world needs its scholar-teachers in the liberal arts to be a unified force," Bryan says.

Published in May 2020, the book focuses on speech acts in medieval literature from the northern world (i.e., from what is now Northern Europe, including the British Isles, Iceland, and Scandinavia). More specifically, it is concerned

with the connections between utterances and their cultural and interpersonal context. These connections create a kind of meaning that goes beyond the simple grammatical and semantic meaning of the utterance.

Linguists often assume that language is an arbitrary thing—that the sounds we use to make words do not have any particular connection to meaning other than what is (arbitrarily) agreed upon by a language community. This is true, says Bryan, but when those arbitrary sounds are uttered in a specific way at a specific time and place to a specific person who has a specific assumption about the world, the speaker, and themselves, the arbitrary nature of language falls away and a specific, multifaceted meaning is produced. Essentially, a speech-situational context produces a unique linguistic meaning. The essays in the volume examine these fixed moments in time and linguistic circumstance and the ways in which unique meanings are created in conversations.

Literary Speech Acts of the Medieval North

ESSAYS INSPIRED BY THE WORKS OF THOMAS A. SHIPPEY



Edited by

ERIC SHANE BRYAN
ALEXANDER VAUGHAN AMES

Dr. Bryan provided the following commentary about the cover illustration: "It's an illumination in a manuscript from around 1300 (Stowe MS 49 fol., 122r). What you're seeing is a group of people on a journey, perhaps a family or a father and sons. The words you see above their heads are what you'd have to call medieval speech bubbles, so we're looking at a conversation (in Middle English). One is complaining about the heat ('hi dýe fore hete; hi dýe for hete') while another complains about the cold. Some complain about having to carry too much weight. It's interesting because we're seeing a visual representation of an argument, which is just the sort of thing the volume is meant to consider: verbal exchanges in specific contexts. I can't claim to have found the image. My co-editor, Lex Ames, found it."