

Peter D. Holland
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Slumped on the couch at home in Cambridge on the afternoon of New Year's Eve, finally having to admit that there was no way of finishing any more of the things I had promised to do before the end of the year, writing, in my head, the apologetic notes to friends ("Sorry but my article will be a little late arriving..."), I was channel-hopping when I lighted on a television game show called *Identity*, hosted by, of all people, Donny Osmond. The single contestant was confronted by ten people on stage and by a list of ten jobs and simply had to match each to each. It wasn't hard to guess that the man with a dog-collar was the vicar – but which was the fashion buyer or the embalmer? As the contestant made a choice and locked it in and the drums rolled expectantly, Donny turned to the figure on stage with a wonderfully over-emphatic question: "Number 5, 'Airline pilot', is that your identity?" – and it always was.

Pleased as I was that the contestant guessed them all and won £10,000 and determined that I would never again reach the stage of watching another episode of the programme, I started to wonder who would ever guess any of us. "Number 7, 'Shakespeare scholar', is that your identity?" What on earth does a Shakespeare scholar look like? Look round your table and try to define the similarities in those sitting there. About the only ones I know are that Shakespeare scholars spend far too much of their income buying books and are workaholics. Not easy to *see*, is it? And, more importantly, is being a Shakespeare scholar my 'identity'? Clue to my profession, of course, and even perhaps vocation and certainly delight and sometimes curse – but 'identity'? We have all spent enough time worrying about the history of the construction of subjectivity to know it is only locally, incidentally true, immanently present in particular circumstances. I am not sure that I am a Shakespeare scholar when in line at the supermarket checkout. But to my classes I fear that that DWEM (dead white European male) defines this WEMNDY (White European Male Not Dead Yet). Especially in America where students – well, at Notre Dame anyway – seem afraid of using my name and address me only as 'Professor', that must be my identity for part of the day anyway. Ever since, many, many years ago, I was taught that Claudius is unnamed in the performance of *Hamlet*, the name existing only in a stage-direction and a speech-prefix in Q2 and a stage-direction in F1, I have enjoyed the play's sense of identity without name, social and familial and political and other definitions trumping the purportedly baptismal – like the metamorphic identities of the Henry-Harry-Hal individual trinity (three-in-one) in *Henry IV* or the very different, semi-anagrammatically integrated Viola-Olivia-Malvolio of *Twelfth Night*. Identity and name and role and role-playing merge complexly into something called character in ways we have long been trying hard to understand.

At other times I obviously have different identities that are defined by changes in name, another version of role-playing. Recently, because of my research work into the more recherché areas of Shakespeare performance, I have become Leontes Romano and Peter Leonsbane. The first is my Second Life avatar – and I am prepared to bet that half the room is thinking 'Get a life!' and the other half 'What on earth is he talking about?' and that the division is largely age-defined. In the astonishing virtual world of Second Life, a space which has many millions of members, one's presence is as a computer-generated figure that does not carry your name from the 'real world' and functions as the Second Life identity for your avatar. Of the quickly available pregenerated looks I chose the young man with beard and glasses (well, I didn't want to be the Easter Bunny) and was pleased to find that that image was there defined as 'City Chic'. Then I settled down to choose my name. Last names are taken from a limited list. No "Shakespeare" on it and I couldn't see myself as Shostakovich but I did spot Romano. Of course, of possible first names Giulio was already taken and so was Peter. So Leontes seemed the next best possible as long as I could resist the threat that 'nomen est omen'. Since which time, Leontes Romano has been trying to get a seat in the Second Life Globe Theatre where the Second Life Shakespeare Company has been giving online virtual performances of the first scene of *Hamlet*, performed live by avatars. Hmmm. Virtual Shakespeare performance is a new concept for me. Web-streamed performance, of course, but virtual performance?

Meanwhile, in what seems like another part of the virtual forest, Peter Leonsbane, another virtual alter ego, has been entering ‘Arden – The World of William Shakespeare’, not another part of the Arden Shakespeare editions empire but another virtual world and a series of game quests (‘You’ve bought the edition, now play the game’) created by Ted Castronova, an Associate Professor at IU-Bloomington and creator of the IU Synthetic Worlds Initiative, helped by a MacArthur Foundation grant of a quarter of million dollars and with Linda Charnes as his Shakespeare consultant. Leonsbane is a good cleric avatar because there wasn’t one for a Shakespeare professor. The trope for the quest is that it is a world dreamed by Shakespeare. One’s first encounter in Arden is with Peaseblossom, who will answer questions. If you want to know what to do in Arden, Peaseblossom tells you:

Once you are in the Eastcheap Tavern, talk to Falstaff to start a quest line involving Mistress Quickly. Another quest in the Tavern, from the Nurse’s Servicingman Peter, involves talking to rude mechanicals and thieves. Outside, there’s a fool in town who gives you Shakespeare trivia... In the School, talk to Goodman Dull at the right time to see a scene from *Love’s Labour’s Lost*... Outside the Tavern, Mr. Cates will start you on a quest that mimics the plot of *Richard III*.

By now, thoroughly confused by the simultaneity of existence of many plays at once and the lack of even fake Elizabethan diction, I talked to Falstaff whose first reply goes:

First time in the Eastcheap Tavern in Ilminster, eh? Ah ill place indeed. I have been struck down by Fortune, landing here to be ministered by ill companions and worse ale. Had the golden Harry done his part, we’d all be well.

Which at least has a decent quasi-Shakespearean pun in it, though I am still confused by the fact that the Boar’s Head Tavern in Eastcheap seems to have metamorphosed into the Eastcheap Tavern in Somerset where the action lies. It took me ten minutes to find the torch that I needed to get out of the tavern’s front-door. Then I ran around looking for people for a while and got a quest from Mr Cates and that’s as far as I got. Ah, the joys of online gaming!

It’s a relief to read the answers to the FAQs on the Arden website, posted in 2006, long before the game was developed, let alone released:

16. If I play this game can I skip my Shakespeare class?

No. No game can replace detailed, intellectual analysis of the texts under the guidance of a trained mentor. That’s what you do in class.

Whew! But online gaming and questing are the tip of the new Shakespeare internet iceberg. On YouTube you can watch three different versions of *Macbeth* acted out by Lego figures, one a rap version, you can watch the demolition of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, or you can watch someone called Lucy Pinder sprawled on a bed in a negligee reading, for example, Volumnia’s speeches in Act 3 of *Coriolanus* or Katherine from *Henry VIII*. In anticipation of the RSC production this summer of *Hamlet* starring David Tennant (who plays Dr Who on tv), YouTube hosts a 24-second video of ‘The Doctor Does Shakespeare’ with ‘There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so’ (2.2.249-50) spoken by Tennant as Dr Who, entirely made up of clips of each word in turn taken from different moments in the series, created with a kind of obsessive perseverance reminiscent of that staple of detective fiction, the letter constructed out of words clipped from newspapers. YouTube Shakespeare is a source of fairly endless fun but also of a wholly new form of Shakespeare event.

Meanwhile, on the website of the Stratford Festival in Ontario, before buying tickets for their 2006 production of *Coriolanus*, you could have clicked on links that would have given you a series of 'Top reasons to see this show' (including the fact that it stars Colm Feore whom 'you might have seen in' a series of major movies and tv mini-series, that 'you might not get another chance' because it is rarely performed, that the 'story is shockingly relevant today' finding 'eerie parallels in our post-911 world'). But if you had world enough and time, you could also have watched interviews with designer, actor, composer and others, and, most remarkably of all, hours and hours of video-logs and blogs about the production during rehearsals, including a vlog diary in many segments by the director, made at a series of junctures during the weeks of pre-production, rehearsals and previews that analyzed how well the process was going, described progress and anxiety, documented hopes and fears, joys and sadnesses, indeed very nearly all the predictable clichés of the emotional roller-coaster of creating theatre. As I worked through it I kept thinking that Cimolino was vlogging a dead horse.

Through November 2007 I read, week by week, the accumulating rehearsal diary for Nicholas Hytner's National Theatre production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. I could see how, at least in the eyes of the diarist, Hytner explored possibilities, allowed the actors to find character and meaning, from the director's speech at the first rehearsal, the first read-through and the designers' showing of set models and costume designs onwards.

Whatever else is virtually happening out there on the web, for someone interested in Shakespeare and performance, it is offering access to process, to the usually closed world of rehearsal and experiment, to the inevitable finding of the truth of Samuel Beckett's lines in *Worstward Ho*, lines that Carol Rutter has suggested are the mantra for the teacher but which also serve the theatre company and the Shakespeare scholar too (but never the game-show contestant): 'No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.' W.C.Fields offered a rather different version of the old adage: 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again. Then quit. There's no point in being a damn fool about it.' But we needn't go there.

It is too early and too tough as yet for me to theorise the changes that the web is bringing to our work, just in my own area of concern the significance of access to new kinds of performance, the new access to old kinds of performance, the new availability of the textualised world – what did you do before EEB, Daddy? – and so on. But Beckett's words are central to our activity. Given the recent fascination with inter-lingual punning in Shakespeare, I offer the thought that our work here, at this SAA conference and in our professional identities, is always about trying, SAA-ing, essaying, creating Montaignean investigations of the possibility of thought in the essay, SAA. Perhaps those here who work in theatre might like to think of Claudius' comment to Laertes and hesitate before talking here about their work: 'If this should fail,/ And that our drift look through our bad performance, / 'Twere better not essay'd.' Those who worry about the morality of their work might think of Edmund on Edgar's supposed letter: 'I hope, for my brother's justification, he wrote this but as an essay or taste of my virtue.' Just as all our students and all of us as well have echoed Claudius at prayer: 'Help, angels! Make assay.' Our work here at an SAA conference is and should be a series of tests and trials, experiments not conclusions, hypotheses not proofs, making assay in our essays, trying and trying again, failing but failing better.

There is one piece of work, though, that we honour today as a triumphant success. This year marks the first award of the J. Leeds Barroll Prize for the best dissertation in Shakespeare studies in the previous year. The runner-up was Allison Hobgood of Emory University, for her dissertation, directed by Richard Rambuss and Patricia Cahill, on 'Affecting Passions on the Stage: Audience and Early Modern Drama'. But the award committee has decided that the inaugural winner is Christopher Crosbie for his dissertation at Rutgers, directed by Emily Bartels, on 'Philosophies of Retribution: Kyd, Shakespeare, Webster and the Revenge Tragedy Genre'. Christopher is now at Trinity College, San Antonio (and I promise that this was no Texan primary plot). A revised version of one chapter of the thesis has appeared in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, reading *Titus Andronicus* in terms of early modern thinking about Aristotelian

principles of moderation, something that all of us on the committee thought couldn't be done and were then thoroughly convinced could be. I ask Leeds to come up to present the award and Chris to receive it.

The award marks, of course, a new venture for SAA, the organization that offers you 'change you can believe in'. If the length of the Trustees meetings reminds some of us of the Texas caucuses last week, at least our meetings are nothing like as chaotic and we come up with incontestable results. We have now agreed another new venture, research travel awards, that Coppélia will describe later. SAA, Yes we can. SAA, Yes we can. Your trustees need to continue to find ways to make SAA of year-round benefit to our members, not just an organization that holds a superb annual conference.

But our major changes this year have been a move of SAA HQ from the University of Maryland to Georgetown University. I want to welcome our two new staff members: Janice Delaney, our new Publications Manager and Donna Even-Kesef, our new Memberships Manager. But I also want to speak of Michele and Lee. Lee Tydings, who was program coordinator, was the unsung hero of SAA. Most never met her. She never came to the annual luncheon. But tirelessly she worked in the office and at conference, keeping SAA running through the year, solving problems, making all smooth and efficient. Michele Osherow was our Assistant Director and, when Lena was on leave, served a year as Executive Director. It is typical of Michele's calm and deep commitment to SAA that, when there was a possibility recently that Lena might not be able to be at here this week, she stepped into the breach or up to the plate (choose your preferred metaphor cliché) and offered to run the administrative side of the conference. To both Lee and Michele, our deep thanks for all you have done to make our work easy, enjoyable, even fun.

To the 2007 Program Committee that put together this year's conference program, Lars Engle, Tony Dawson, Julia Lupton and Laurie Shannon, thanks for giving us such a wonderful programme; to this year's local arrangements committee, Lars again, thanks for making us so welcome in Dallas; to the three trustees who leave office today, Garrett Sullivan, Mary Ellen Lamb and previous president Georgianna Ziegler, thank you for all your contributions, invisible to almost all here, magnificent to those of us who have shared the work with you.

And then to Lena Orlin, well, our thanks are inadequate. I have worked with many, many academics who take on administrative roles in a variety of contexts. Some are appalling and should be kept away from committees at all costs, some are fairly adequate and a few are really rather good. But there's only one Lena. It's not just that she has an eye for detail that makes the conference run so breathtakingly smoothly, it's not just that she has a visionary eye to the long-term future of the Association. It is not just that she is unfailingly thoughtful, caring, committed, concerned and, well, right-thinking. It is that, in so many ways, and insofar as one person can be, she *is* SAA, and never in the essaying, trying, Beckettian sense I was playing with earlier. 'Fail again. Fail better'. Lena Orlin? You've got to be joking. The word 'fail' isn't in her vocabulary. Lena, we owe you and you'll have to accept we just can't ever repay.

Finally I want to thank Michael Warren, my predecessor as the only non-citizen of North America to be SAA President. To Coppélia, I offer the title of one of Donny and Marie Osmond's greatest hits: 'I'm leavin' it all up to you'.