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## SHAKSPER Roundtable on Intentions: The Origins of the Collaboration with *Style*<sup>1</sup>

Now in its twentieth-first year of serving the academy, SHAKSPER is an edited and moderated, international, e-mail distribution list for discussion among Shakespearean researchers, instructors, students, and anyone sharing their academic interests and concerns. The SHAKSPER digests are delivered, archived, and managed with L-Soft's LISTSERV® software. In addition to the regular mailings to subscribers, anyone can use the Internet to access the archives and the list's other materials from the SHAKSPER Web site <[www.shaksper.net](http://www.shaksper.net)>. The list's more than 1,000 members have enrolled from sixty-eight countries; they include prominent Shakespearean textual scholars and bibliographers, editors and critics, as well as university, college, and community-college professors, high-school teachers, undergraduate and graduate students, actors, theatre professionals, authors, poets, playwrights, librarians, computer scientists, lawyers, doctors, retirees, and other interested participants. SHAKSPER endeavors to emphasize the scholarly by providing the opportunity for the formal exchange of ideas through queries and responses regarding literary, critical, textual, theoretical, and performative topics and issues. Announcements of conferences, calls for papers, seminars, lectures, symposia, job openings, the publication of books, the availability of online and print articles, Internet databases and resources, journal contents, and performances and festivals are regular features as are assessments of scholarly books, past and present theatrical productions, and Shakespeare and Shakespeare-inspired films as well as citations and discussions of "popular" culture references to Shakespeare and his works. SHAKSPER also provides occasion for spontaneous informal discussion, eavesdropping, peer review, and a sense of belonging to a worldwide scholarly community. Besides the archive of past discussions, the SHAKSPER Web site includes "A Selected Guide to Shakespeare on the Internet," an international directory of Shakespearean institutions, organizations, libraries, and journals, and a bibliography of poems, novels, plays, and films inspired by Shakespeare and his works, and much more.

## **The Origins of the SHAKSPER Roundtable**

In the early 1970s, the U.S. military developed the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), a bombproof, distributed packet-switching network, which went worldwide with the Department of Defense's connecting ARPANET supercomputers to other supercomputers at University College in London and at the Royal Radar Establishment in Norway. As proficiency with computer applications began to spread from the military to scientists and librarians and eventually to academics in other disciplines, e-mail was generally the entry-level Internet application adopted by most. E-mail could be archived and organized on electronic bulletin boards with Usenet newsgroups being generally employed for messages of a mundane nature while listserv software became the preferred method for distributing messages among members with more scholarly or focused interests. In the early 1990s, hypertext, a protocol for information distribution that embedded links in a text to connect it to other texts, was developed by the European Laboratory for Particle Physics (CERN) and became the basis for such graphical interfaces as the then popular Mosaic program, transforming the Internet into the World Wide Web and thoroughly changing computing by opening it to the general public, profoundly changing the users on and the content of the Internet.

I initially became interested in the potential of academic listservs when I attended a panel at the December 1989 MLA convention in Washington, DC, and heard Willard McCarty, then of the University of Toronto, deliver his paper "Humanist: Lessons from a Global Electronic Seminar." A few months later in April 1990 at the SAA Annual Meeting in Philadelphia, I met Kenneth Steele, a graduate student from the University of Toronto who had been working with McCarty. A few months after that (July 1990), Steele launched SHAKSPER, and I was one of the list's founding members. I was soon assisting Steele; and, in June 1992, I completely took over for him when he left academia for the commercial world of Internet start-ups. At that time, SHAKSPER had grown from its original dozen members to around 300, virtually all from academia. The opening of the Internet beyond the military and the academy occurred rapidly and transparently with the introduction of graphical interfaces and the subsequent proliferation of Internet Service Providers (IPOs) like AOL (America Online) and CompuServe, services which increased the numbers of non-academics having access to the Internet. Many of these early users of the Internet saw themselves as staunch defenders of free speech and abjured any attempts to reign in or control what they had to say. I was far less interested in preserving SHAKSPER as a bastion of free speech than I was in observing how the conference was participating in the shaping, with similar

lists, of a new discursive academic idiom, one that was not as formal as that of print journals but that was more decorous than ordinary conversation or than the virtually anything goes culture of unmediated Internet bulletin boards and chat-rooms. Daily discussions on SHAKSPER could not possibly reflect the formality of published articles in print journals, nor did I expect them to. Members enjoyed their ability to respond quickly to each other, and the vitality and spontaneity of SHAKSPER's exchanges was a quality I wished to preserve. By the middle of the 1990s, SHAKSPER's members had become a mix of academics, some prominent specialists in their fields, and of non-academics, enthusiasts with varying degrees of knowledge of scholarly academic matters.

Even though SHAKSPER was from its birth an academic conference, diversity and inclusiveness were always encouraged. Although I did not recognize it then, the expanding access of the Internet beyond academia with the mounting presence of personal computers as familiar items in many middle- and upper-class households significantly contributed to the rise in the number of subscribers and with this rise to slow and subtle changes in the nature of the list itself. Beginning in the mid-1990s, meta-discussions concerning SHAKSPER's purpose, mostly initiated by academics on the list, began to appear with increasing frequency. In October of 1995, Jonathan Sawday asked, "What, exactly, does this list think it is for?"<sup>2</sup> Six months later, Michael Saenger wrote, "It occurred to me that we really have a problem. I realize this is a sensitive issue, but the proliferation of junk is making it hard to take the list seriously at times. Many valuable contributors have tuned out after reading careless and incorrect postings. The basic idea of this list is a noble one—a truly democratic forum for ideas, a way of weaving anyone with a modem into the academic community. And it is not naive questions that bring the list down so much as selfish and lazy ranting. So what's the solution?" About a year later, Gabriel Egan, replying to an oversimplified response to a matter that involved complex textual problems, posed this question: "Are we really still a viable conversing community?" Excited by the increase in the number of members, I was not, *at the time*, particularly worried about these inquiries.

I struggled for a long time about how I should intercede in conversations on the list. I had no desire to micromanage; yet, in late December 1994, I realized that continuing to permit discussions of matters pertaining to the so-called "authorship" question condemned me to endless repetitions of the same arguments by fervent partisans on both sides of the debate—so I banned these discussions permanently. I continued to format and lightly edited the contributions; otherwise, I tried to stay out of list exchanges, generally only intervening to kill endless threads that have

degenerated into two or three members trading barbs with each other. However, changes in the late 1990s began to give me pause. Unsophisticated questions and discussions multiplied, including threads that treated characters as if they were real persons. In late May 1994, in response to a naïve question about Cordelia, Terence Hawkes asserted: “Cordelia is not a real, live flesh and blood human being. In consequence, she has no ‘character,’ and it does not ‘develop.’” Discussions of characters *were* occasions for remarkable witticisms like Louis Scheeder’s response to the question of whether Hamlet and Ophelia had sexual relations—“Only in the Chicago Company”—and Terence Hawkes’s “The theory shared by a number of MY colleagues is that Hamlet and Ophelia had textual relations.” *Some* of the discussions treating Shakespeare’s characters as if they were “real” people were indeed fascinating. Striving to find a legitimate reason for exploring the psychological justification for characters’ actions, some in these debates, myself included, wanted to distinguish between textual and performative characters—characters in texts and characters in performances—the work of criticism and the work of actors preparing for their roles. Nonetheless, discussions of characters as “real persons” generally without any reference to sophisticated theoretical or performative matters continued. Interest in characters and their motivations, especially as related to a “pet” theory about Shakespeare or about a particular play, has been the central location of contention on SHAKSPER, emanating often from exceptionally vocal and passionate non-academic members. These disputes greatly complicated my role as moderator.

As I said, I did not want to moderate list discussions draconically, but I did expect members to behave civilly toward each other. However, as the 1990s progressed, traffic on the list dramatically increased. List discussions were becoming dominated by a handful of members, some of whom could be counted on daily to submit multiple posts, oftentimes multiple responses to the same thread. The subjects of these threads frequently tended to involve characters’ motivations or thematic discussions of the meaning of events in a handful of favorite plays, from enthusiasts who ardently believed they understood that particular play better than anyone who had come before them and who also were seemingly unfamiliar with or hostile to post-modern theoretical criticism, criticism that rendered their attempts at establishing a single, undisputed interpretation moot. Regularly, “pet” theories that academics found preposterous were being advanced. Long-time members conveyed to me that during these years the excitement they initially had when they joined the list was diminishing with the number of times a day they found themselves hitting the delete key, usually when they discovered a submission

from one of these frequent posters. If this were not enough that a few members were dominating list postings with subjects not of interest to the core members for whom the list had been established, these discussions also were becoming more rancorous. In April 2000, I asked members to count to ten before they hit the reply key. In a subsequent post, I clarified what I meant, urging subscribers to practice self-moderation. My mailbox was flooded with expressions of support, but a new pattern developed: I would admonish the members about list traffic, about a handful of members dominating list conversation, about incivility, frequently with implied threats of my setting up guidelines or limiting postings, and matters would quiet down for a while, only to return to the previous state after a respite. I continued to be concerned that the very people I was cultivating, those for whom the list was founded, were unsubscribing out of disgust.

It seemed that no matter what I did, the hostile, acrimonious, and sometimes downright unkind posts continued. Clearly, something had to be done, but I was at a loss to figure out just what I should do. In May of 2002, my frustration was palpable as I asked members to pre-format their submissions, to consider that some exchanges may be more appropriate offline than online, and to pick their fights more carefully by limiting the number of replies each posted daily. I complained that I thought that some members were treating the list more like a “chat room” or a venue for electronic exhibitionism than as the academic forum it was intended to be. One day, I even invited members to “act as moderator” and reply privately to me whether they judged the digests of that day appropriate or not appropriate for the list. The next day, I reported the distinctly divergent results; some would have posted around half of the twenty-seven digests, while others would not have excluded any, expressing a sense of liking the list exactly as it was and not wishing that there be any changes.

At some point during these years, Patrick Finn asked me to write an essay about SHAKSPER for a special issue of *College Literature* dedicated to Shakespeare and technology. While I was writing this essay, Christy Desmet and her colleagues asked me if I would participate in an SAA seminar “Shakespeare Readings, Societies, and Forums” for the 2006 Annual Meeting. I agreed; and while working on my seminar paper in late 2005, the SPARC 10 Unix computer that was the SHAKSPER fileserver for almost ten years crashed and died. Before the new server was operating, I had an eight-week break from my SHAKSPER editing duties and used the time to concentrate on these two essays. As I reflected on SHAKSPER’s evolution and the changes that had taken place since its founding until that time, I had an intuitive flash—I realized that 1995 was the watershed year in SHAKSPER’s

history, the year that the membership broke the 1,000 mark *and* the year that the first meta-discussions concerning SHAKSPER's purpose began. As I teased out my thinking, what I realized was that the changes in the discourse on the list could be directly attributable to its changing from a virtually all academic conference in the early 1990s into one in which the membership that was composed half of scholars and half of non-academics, each with conspicuously different interests. When SHAKSPER came back online in February 2006, I announced a new policy: I resolved to become a more active moderator and to post only messages I believe were of interest to the academic community of Shakespeare scholars. I was not restricting the membership in SHAKSPER or limiting who could post. The source of the post was not the issue; what was important instead was a post's relevance to the broad scope of academic Shakespeare studies. After a while, I realized that simply being a more active moderator was not the only strategy I needed to implement to regain the academic focus of the list and to entice members who had resigned or become inactive to return: I proceeded to plan several new features I would institute in subsequent years: "Cook's Tour of Internet Resources for Students and Scholars of the Early Modern Period"; Roundtable discussions, concentrating on significant topics derived from issues of contemporary interest in the discipline; and the SHAKSPER Book Reviews (SBReviews), reviews overseen by a Moderator and Panel responsible for selecting the books for review and the peers to review them, then vetting submitted reviews prior to their distribution as digests, digests which are then archived on the SHAKSPER Web site.

### **SHAKSPER Roundtable: Presentism**

On June 21, 2006, I disclosed the first of these new features that I hoped would aid me in my recapturing SHAKSPER's founding purpose, the SHAKSPER Roundtable. The following week I shared my preliminary thoughts for how such a feature might work:

- Roundtable digests would be distinguished from "regular list" offerings;
- Only one Roundtable discussion would run at a time;
- Roundtable discussions would have a "guest moderator," who "would edit and oversee the contributions and determine when the discussion had run its course."

The comments I received were favorable. Over the next few weeks, I made further suggestions about how this feature might operate. Even though I had

had a number of people who said they *might* be interested in guest moderating a Roundtable discussion at some point, no one was willing to come forward then. In my enthusiasm, I neglected to realize that the members who I would have liked most to conduct a Roundtable were already intensely engaged with their scholarship. Further, the momentum I had started was slowed by a several-week interruption in my conducting SHAKSPER business so I could take a few weeks off to travel to the UK for the International Shakespeare Conference in Stratford-upon-Avon and to attend theatrical performances there and in London. Before I left, I issued a call for volunteers to conduct Roundtable discussions, but I returned to a new semester with no proposals or expressions of interest and no time myself to start a new project. In early December, I brought up the Roundtable again, making more suggestions for possible features and procedures.

By the New Year, I finally had a volunteer: the distinguished Professor Hugh Grady of Arcadia University agreed to be Guest Moderator for a Roundtable on Presentism, a topic I was particularly interested in and one for which he was one of the leading theoretical proponents. I introduced Professor Grady on Thursday, January 11, 2007, and posted his reading list. After acknowledging that we were charting new territory, we began the first SHAKSPER Roundtable, "Presentism Now," on Monday, January 29, 2007, with Hugh Grady's essay "Why Presentism Now?" A week later, two members had replied and their responses and Grady's introduction to them and comments on them constituted the next digest in the Presentism Roundtable. I was disappointed that there were only two responses and expressed my hope that "in the following weeks more members will feel inclined to contribute/participate in this Roundtable." In the next week's digest, I quoted from a message that I was sent suggesting the relatively modest number of responses offered in the first two weeks were a sign the issues raised were of interest only to a few academics. My response to this message was to sketch a history of the changing critical paradigms in the last 80-100 years of academic Shakespeare criticism to propose that the age of New Historicism was ending and that Presentism deserved to be investigated as a possible new direction for the field. As much as we could, Professor Grady and I tried to follow this pattern throughout the first Roundtable: a more or less weekly digest I distributed that was introduced by and then concluded with commentary from him as the Guest Moderator. By mid-March, Grady and I had decided that the Roundtable was winding down, and he called for final comments. Then on June 6<sup>th</sup>, the Roundtable came to its formal conclusion when I posted Grady's summary statement and my concluding observations. Grady judged the Roundtable a modest success. He observed that the topic had been discussed on

the list in a “fragmented and partial way,” and he had hoped that by his beginning with “a longer than usual (for SHAKSPER) opening statement-about 2500 words, roughly the length of a 15-minute oral presentation” that he could address some of what he “considered several misunderstandings of Presentist criticism, particularly its relation to Historicist criticism, that had been aired previously.” Except for an exchange between David Lindley and John Drakakis, Grady felt that his attempt to “conduct discussions according to the norms of professional academic discourse” had been “undermined by the many readers who simply do not share in nor recognize these norms.” I found Professor Grady’s analysis a forthright, honest assessment of the difficulties we both had trying to conduct a professional-level discussion among SHAKSPER’s diverse subscribers.

### **SHAKSPER Roundtable: Shakespeare’s Intentions<sup>3</sup>**

In the fall of 2007, a lively discussion on “Authorial Intentions,” (September 10 through October 18) took place on SHAKSPER. Early in this discussion, John V. Knapp, a Professor of English at Northern Illinois University and editor of the journal *Style*, sent the list a Call for Papers with a suggestion:

I have followed the “Authorial Intention” thread with considerable interest since the issues surrounding authorial intent have been a major topic of conversation for several decades now for those working with narratives. However, this issue has not been discussed as widely nor in quite the same way for those working with the drama . . . I think the readers of *STYLE* would be very interested in reading a special issue on authorial intent in drama. As such, I would like to issue a Call for Papers (CFP) that could grow out of any round-table conversations (suitably edited, of course) about authorial intent in dramatic literature, especially concerning major authors like Shakespeare, Marlow, Chekhov, etc. What might begin as an extended argument in the round-table could then get developed into full-blown mini-essay exchanges, gathered in one issue of *Style*.

The post continued with an offer to me to contact him to explore a possible collaboration. Since I am the only one who can send postings to the members, before I distributed Professor Knapp’s message, I contacted him and made an offer of my own that I announced in an Editor’s Note I appended to his posting:

I am constantly looking for interesting ways that SHAKSPER can make contributions to the academic community. Consequently, a collaboration such as the one John Knapp suggests here fascinates me.

This sort of collaboration could occur as the result of a number of different structures . . . . For this to happen, John and I would need a guest editor who, as I see it, would moderate the Roundtable and then edit the special issue of *Style*.

To my delight, Cary DiPietro, one of the thoughtful contributors to the first SHAKSPER Roundtable and to the “Authorial Intentions” thread applied for the

job of Roundtable Moderator and journal Guest Editor. Through e-mail exchanges, John Knapp and I decided that DiPietro was the person we were looking for to conduct our collaborative experiment.

On April 3, 2008, I introduced DiPietro as guest moderator for the second SHAKSPER Roundtable, "Shakespeare's Intentions," and provided background of the Roundtable procedures. In addition, this posting included the reading list that anyone planning to participate in the Roundtable discussions was expected to know as a condition for participation. DiPietro's introduction of himself was written in a way to get readers to begin thinking about some of the theoretical implications of the concepts of authorial intention in general and of Shakespeare's intentions in particular. DiPietro further explored some of the issues associated with the works on his reading list, providing an overview of each. Having actively participated in the first Roundtable and benefitted from the groundbreaking work of Hugh Grady, DiPietro set out to model the level of discourse with which he intended to conduct discussions during this Roundtable. He and I had exchanged e-mails discussing some of the strategies we would use to avoid the pitfalls Hugh Grady wrote about in his concluding statement assessing the first Roundtable, strategies to avoid postings from members who were not observing "the norms of professional academic discourse," by "avoiding ad hominem," and more importantly, of "taking responsibility for understanding what one is critiquing" by knowing the works on the Reading List and the issues being debated. We decided, first, simply not to include any submission that we deemed was not following these norms. Some we would reject outright; on others, DiPietro would provide feedback to the submitter who would be given the opportunity to rewrite and resubmit should he or she decide to do so. If I recall correctly, some did not take DiPietro up on his offer, while others did; and in at least one instance, a submitter did multiple rewrites before we were finally satisfied with the posting and included it in a digest. DiPietro, of course, always had the final word as Guest Moderator, but he relied on my experience with editing SHAKSPER and permitted me to share with him any problems I had regarding a submission.

In the second installment, DiPietro prefaced his opening statement, "Shakespeare's Intentions," by further explaining some of his plans for conducting this Roundtable. He began by praising the first Roundtable moderated by Hugh Grady, adding based upon e-mail exchanges, that Grady would have "preferred to have seen more contributions during the actual Roundtable itself." Therefore, to stimulate discussion, DiPietro announced that he had "solicited a number of leading contributions from the SHAKSPER community to headline the discussion

for each installment.” These solicited contributions would be “organized topically,” with each installment identifying the upcoming “topic and leading contributor, inviting SHAKSPEReans to contribute on the topic, to respond to earlier topics or contributions, or to open up new avenues for discussion in other directions.” To facilitate the eventual migration of the Roundtable to the special issue of *Style*, he requested contributors to adhere to the MLA format and documentation system in the Roundtable itself.

On Monday, April 28, 2008, after a week of puzzlingly not having received responses to DiPietro’s preliminary statement, I decided, upon consulting with him, to repost both the Reading List and the essay. A few days later, on Friday, May 2, 2008, although I cannot recall the exact reasons—to keep the momentum, to stick to the schedule, or because DiPietro was just excited with the materials he had on hand and was anxious to get that material before the list to be read—we proceeded to distribute the next Roundtable digest. John Drakakis contributed the leading essay to this digest, which he concluded with an observation I felt identified the principal shortcoming with our first Roundtable:

. . . the previous “Roundtable” strands have petered off into obscurity simply because particular contributors used the opportunity to parade thoughtless prejudice. Perhaps on this occasion, we might pause to think about how we might take the debate forward without getting bogged down in entrenched positions.

I associated Drakakis’ “entrenched positions” with the attitudes of some of those, generally non-academic, members who were seemingly hostile to post-modern theory and practice and not shy about letting their prejudices be known: Ron Rosenbaum’s *Shakespeare Wars* had after all been a lively topic of conversation on the list during the eighteen months since it was published. Two contributors replied to the May 2, 2008, Roundtable digest; and I judged, at the time, that these responses were comments upon the process rather than part of the Roundtable discussion itself. I, therefore, published them the following Monday (May 5, 2008) in a digest that I titled “Meta-Comment on Intentions Roundtable.” On reflection, I now believe that I was mistaken not to see these two as responses that belonged to the Roundtable itself and not distinct from it. Also, the next day, I distributed a highly favorable comment from the previous Roundtable’s Guest Moderator, Hugh Grady:

A quick observational comment on the in-progress Roundtable: the first two substantial posts by Cary DiPietro and John Drakakis constitute some of the best critical argumentation ever to appear in SHAKSPER in my experience.

I suppose that in my rush to post the early responses and Grady's praise, I had inadvertently created a muddle, but the confusion turned out to have a useful consequence—I had failed to observe my procedures for posting all Roundtable contributions together in a weekly digest; however, in doing so I had resolved another difficulty with the evolving Roundtable model. My hope had been that if I held off and posted Roundtable replies so they would only be sent roughly once a week, rather than as they arrived, as with the daily threads on the list, that I would be discouraging responses “on the fly,” and thereby striving to encourage contributors to reflect upon their submissions before sending them off, rather than posting them to the list “i’ th’ heate.”

With the next week's leading essay, we got back on track with our established procedures. DiPietro announced that the next Roundtable installment would include two leading essays. Then, as had been our procedure since the beginning, we reproduced the weekly contributions after the leading essay. During this time, I exchanged private e-mails with DiPietro exploring the consequences of my slips in distributing both what I had labeled the “meta” digests as well as the Roundtable responses to Drakakis' essay. Because of these deliberations, I opened DiPietro's next formal Roundtable digest with an Editor's Note in which I announced a change in procedure:

Cary DiPietro and I have decided to try a new procedure for this Roundtable discussion. I will post responses to any of the contributions in this digest as they appear without comment, and then a week later Cary will put together a digest of all of the previous week's discussions, of any essays that he has asked various Shakespeare scholars to contribute to the Roundtable, and of his comments as guest moderator. We are interested in seeing how this procedure will affect the Roundtable. We want to encourage thoughtful response rather than off-the-cuff ones, but we would also like to encourage greater participation.

Throughout the run of both Roundtables, I had received occasional e-mails expressing disapproval with my not posting responses as they arrived and waiting instead for the “official” weekly digest. These e-mails were expressing dissatisfaction with the established procedure, suggesting that the delays were disrupting the flow of the exchange of ideas. By attempting to have it both ways, as it were, we were striving to determine whether we might encourage greater participation while maintaining a more elevated level of discourse, one of the reasons for pursuing the Roundtable-style exchanges in the first place. We were interested in seeing if we might affect the rhythms of the Roundtable exchanges by encouraging greater participation without negatively affecting the quality of those contributions. I think the change in procedures succeeded. What we accomplished by this procedural change was to enable in the roughly daily postings to maintain the excitement so much at

the foundation of the list's appeal by enabling participants to give and to receive feedback more swiftly from each other than had been the case with the original approach, while the weekly summaries enabled the moderator to step back and from this removed perspective to comment on any rhythms or trends this vantage made evident. Although not ideal, this approach let us have as much as possible under the circumstances of the enthusiasm of the daily posts and the reflection of the moderator's weekly overview.

As the new arrangement structured the discussions publicly in a cadence that enabled participants to respond rapidly, and while we held off the guest moderator's reflective meta-commentary until publication of the weekly digest, DiPietro and I also began to develop something like a good-cop/bad-cop rhythm behind the scenes. Over the years as SHAKSPER's editor, I usually erred on the side of inclusiveness when it came to posting members' submissions to the list, an approach that led to my distributing the vast majority of messages sent to me. However, this habit of working exacerbated the problem that arose in the first Roundtable, that some members were less interested in participating in the substantive matters under consideration than they were in voicing their disapproval of the postmodern enterprise upon which Presentism is based. The result was more a clash of cultures than an investigation of the subject. Aware of this dynamic, DiPietro and I were staunchly committed not to repeating it in the second Roundtable. To do so, we more aggressively monitored what submissions we included, rejecting some and returning others to the poster for the opportunity to rewrite, a task that DiPietro was far more adept at than I had been. I continued to control the technical presentation of the postings, while DiPietro acted as the intellectual gatekeeper behind the scenes. This arrangement allowed us to control the content, guarding against submissions that strayed from discussion topics thereby addressing the major difficulty of the first Roundtable.

A further factor in maintaining the focus of the discussion was the presence of the solicited/leading essays from established scholars, who represented various theoretical and critical approaches to Shakespeare studies as currently practiced. To begin, there was DiPietro's introductory essay, "Shakespeare's Intentions," which surveyed the topic in relations to Shakespeare studies and set the tone for what was to follow. In addition, there was a substantial reading list, the foundation upon which the Roundtable discussion would proceed. DiPietro had outlined the aspects of Shakespeare and intentions he wished to be addressed during the discussions and invited essayists with specialties in those areas beforehand to investigate them in leading essays. DiPietro had a fully developed plan for the Roundtable he was guest moderating from the start, and he followed that plan as those discussions unfolded.

DiPietro's careful planning exemplifies my intention for the Roundtable project, to have in-depth discussions of topics of current interest to the discipline, discussions that differed from the ordinary, less intentional threads that develop during daily exchanges on the list. The Roundtable project was a venture I devised to recapture the original purpose of SHAKSPER, to provide a forum for the Shakespeare academic community. By the end of June, it appeared that interest in this Roundtable was waning, and DiPietro was ready "to wind down towards a conclusion."

In his role as journal guest editor, DiPietro invited participants in the Roundtable to submit essays for consideration for inclusion in the special issue of *Style*, the concluding step in our collaborative enterprise. In addition, to the leading essays, which were revised as a result of the Roundtable exchanges, a well-known narrative theorist and literary critic, Peter J. Rabinowitz, author of *Before Reading* (1987, Ohio State UP); *Authorizing Readers* (1997; with Michael Smith; Teachers College P, Columbia U.); and *A Companion to Narrative Theory* (Blackwells, 2008, with James Phelan), was asked and agreed to participate in the collaboration by providing the perspective of someone well-acquainted with intentions in prose fiction. The intention of inviting Rabinowitz to contribute an essay was to integrate the two disciplines—drama and prose fiction—to the extent that both are concerned with authorial intentions. While Rabinowitz made it clear from the beginning that Shakespearean scholarship was not typically his area of scholarly concern, we asked that he bring to bear on the writings in this collection a critical viewpoint to which few Shakespearean contributors could lay claim. He has graciously done so.

What conclusions can I draw from this experience? First, Roundtables are a lot of work. Second, this one might never have occurred had there not been an interesting thread on the subject that ran for approximately a month as an ordinary SHAKSPER discussion, prompting John Knapp to bring up the possibility of collaboration between SHAKSPER and *Style*. Third, the success of this project owes a great deal to the work of the intelligent, thoughtful young scholar who agreed to guest moderate it and did so with noteworthy planning and diplomatic moderating. And, finally, the exercise as productive as it was might never have come about without the carrot of the collaboration with the print journal *Style*. This carrot may have influenced the decision of those who volunteered to write leading essays for it and may also have influenced the guest moderator to take on this daunting task. If I am correct about this final point, I can conclude that until electronic projects such as this one carry the same respect in the academy that a scholarly publication does, future Roundtables may be doomed never to come about.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I have two versions of this essay. The shorter one appears here while the longer one is downloadable from the SHAKSPER Web site at <http://www.shaksper.net/~hcook/style.pdf>. Links to all references to SHAKSPER discussions are included in the Endnotes of that version.

<sup>2</sup> Interested readers may locate quoted materials by using either the Search or the Browse functions at the SHAKSPER Web site.

<sup>3</sup> As of the writing of this essay, the information on the “Shakespeare’s Intentions” Roundtable has not been mounted in the Roundtable section of the SHAKSPER files server. As a way to fill that void, I have mounted an Adobe pdf file containing all of the files that constitute the complete second Roundtable at the following link: [http://www.shaksper.net/~hcook/RT2\\_Intentions.pdf](http://www.shaksper.net/~hcook/RT2_Intentions.pdf).