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Twine Game: Reflection

My Twine game is called “Merry Wanderer,” and is an interactive approach to critically approaching three Shakespeare plays: the comedy *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the revenge tragedy *Titus Andronicus*, and the historical tragedy *King Richard III*. The player chooses the play which they experience through a medley of choices and chance: for example, if they are more inclined towards power and revenge, they end up with *Titus Andronicus*. The goal of the game is to introduce the player to some critical approaches to studying Shakespeare plays, such as the experience of the theatre and the idea of “life’s a stage”, the hierarchical historical narratives which inform popular culture such as plays as well as approaches to studying history, and the dubious issues of consent involved in the love plots which are so popular. These ideas are presented as the player moves through the different streams, offering various interpretations of the experience of being immersed in Shakespeare plays. The format of the insertion into the play is relevant as well: in *Dream*, the player experiences some characters of the play as if they were real people. In *Titus*, the player experiences a corporeal Elizabethan theatre. Meanwhile, in *Richard III*, the player is transported back to one of the controversial historical mysteries, the murder of the princes in the tower, which shapes the way the play following it is interpreted and constructed.

The overall structure of the game is of a graduate student who is working on a dissertation about Shakespeare, and who is constantly procrastinating finding “greatness” by doubting their abilities to breathe new life into scholarship. The player experiences anxieties with performing, either through teaching or publishing/speaking at a conference – a theme suitable to the idea of performance which comes from the study of theatre. There are two possible options: in one, the player navigates the choices and ends their procrastination through the act of dreaming, and successfully performs their research. The same box applies for all three streams, suggesting that it does not matter how the player finds the solution, but that they are fated to discover it regardless. If the player fails, however, then they end up in the box called “death” in which they cycle the despair of procrastination and fail to ignite a spark of thought or genius. There is a certain degree of chance resulting in this ending, but hopefully the player will feel motivated to return to the beginning and change the script of their experience of the game – just as the player does by being inserted into the plays or their context in the plot of the game.

The player is designed to be gender-neutral, and the user can impress their own identity somewhat on the player and their reactions. *Titus Andronicus* plays with the ideas of gender, allowing the author to switch between the contours of the gender binary and thus exist as a queer, genderless figure. This connects to the idea of gender as performance, and seeks to deconstruct the small performances which we are constantly putting on for our audiences. Indeed, the player is constantly aware of their audience and how they are being perceived, and the user is, in a way, also a form of metafictional audience for the player. Are choice and identity illusions in these forms of games?

Perhaps my answer is that the real choice comes from the user's interpretations and negotiations of the conflicts between audience and performer, and performance as the cure to procrastination. In this context, is there a true separation between reality and the dream?