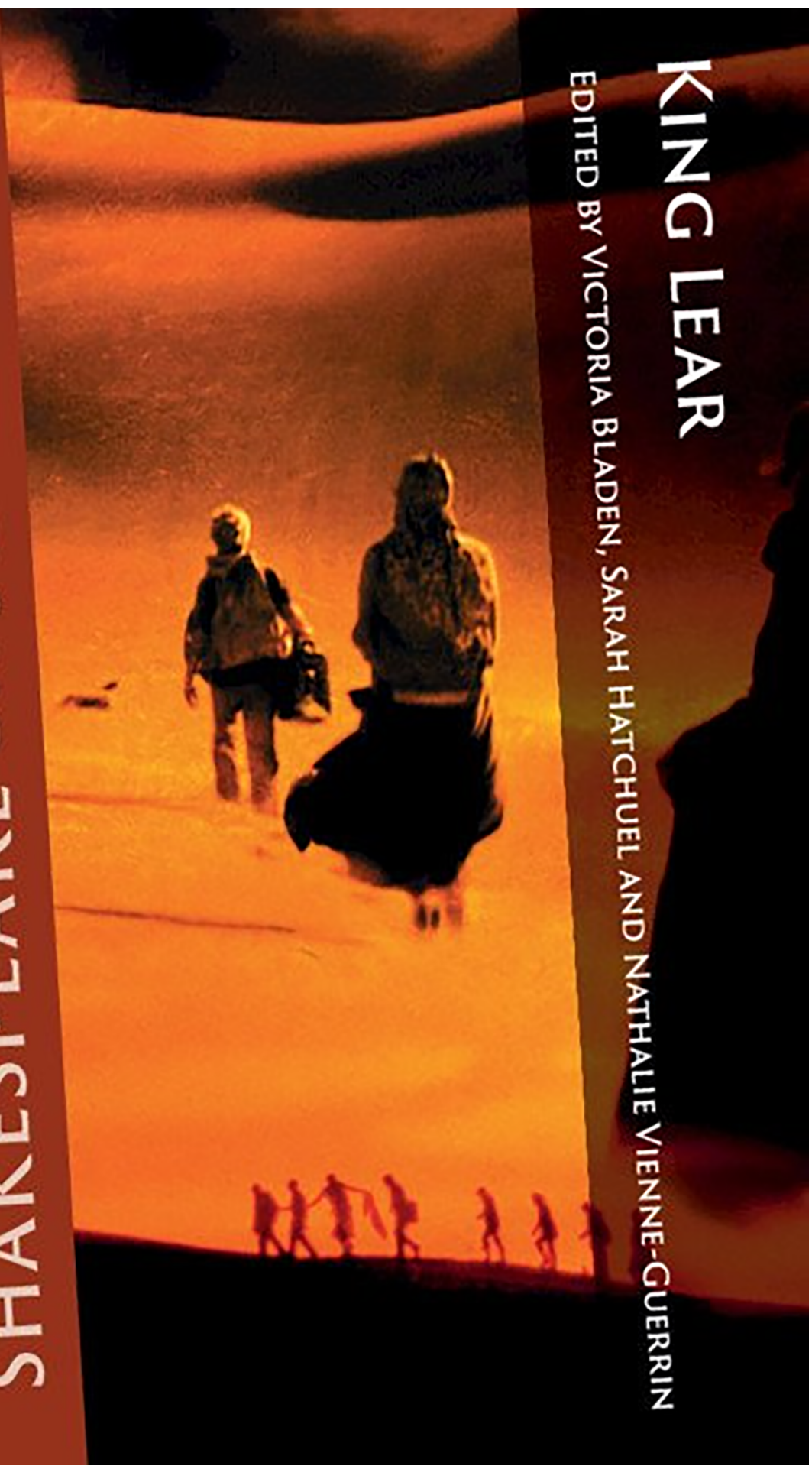


KING LEAR

EDITED BY VICTORIA BLADEN, SARAH HATCHUEL AND NATHALIE VIENNE-GUERRIN

SHAKESPEARE ON SCREEN



***King Lear* on the small screen and its pedagogical implications**

Alexa Alice Joubin

CUP Online Resources

Shakespeare on Screen: King Lear

Victoria Bladen, Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (eds.),
Cambridge University Press, 2019.
www.cambridge.org

Uploaded: Summer 2019

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Reference:

Alexa Alice Joubin, '*King Lear* on the small screen and its pedagogical implications', CUP Online Resources, in Victoria Bladen, Sarah Hatchuel and Nathalie Vienne-Guerrin (eds.), *Shakespeare on Screen: King Lear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Available at: <http://www.cambridge.org>

***King Lear* on the small screen and its pedagogical implications¹**

Alexa Alice Joubin

The chapters in this collection have demonstrated that ‘Learnness’ emerges at the intersection of the themes of love, madness, gender dynamics, folly and aging in appropriations of *King Lear*. It is now time to turn to the small screen in the pedagogical context and how students might engage with ‘Learnness’ in a networked culture.

Digital tools help us make necessary links between different modes of literary representation and between different iterations of the human experience. As Valerie Fazel and Louise Geddes make clear in *The Shakespeare User*, the rise of digital culture turns readers into users of the Shakespearean canon and motifs, foregrounding ‘user participation as ... the central tenet of [the] organizational structure’ of Web 2.0.² The user-centric culture supplants the reader-centric experience that dominated the previous centuries, which in turn replaced the oral culture of Shakespeare’s age.³ In our current time, as several scholars have pointed out, there is a widening gap between performance studies and literary analysis.⁴ Diana Taylor theorizes that the ‘repertoire’ of performance

¹ I wish to thank Janelle Jenstad for inviting me to present an early version of this article at the conference on ‘Making Links: Texts, Contexts, and Performance in Digital Editions of Early Modern Drama’ at University of Victoria, Canada; Paul Werstine for the opportunity to present on the 2018 MLA panel on ‘Four Hundred Years of *King Lear*’; and Ray Siemens for his invaluable feedback during our panel at the Renaissance Society of America meeting in New Orleans. I am also grateful to undergraduate and graduate students at Middlebury College, MIT, and George Washington University for their inspiration as ‘digital natives’.

² V. M. Fazel and L. Geddes, ‘Introduction’, *The Shakespeare User: Critical and Creative Appropriations in a Networked Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2017), 3.

³ The idea of students as users of digital culture has caught on in recent years. See C. Carson and P. Kirwan, ‘Conclusion: Digital Dreaming’, in C. Carson and P. Kirwan (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Digital World: Redefining Scholarship and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 244.

⁴ J. Roach, ‘Performance: The Blunders of Orpheus’, *PMLA* 125.4 (October 2010), 1080; R. Weimann, ‘Performance in Shakespeare’s Theatre: Ministerial and/or Magisterial?’, *The Shakespearean International*

(the repeatable behaviors in performance) challenges the privileged archive of written records of culture.⁵ The gap is often articulated in terms of emancipation, notes Daniel L. Keegan. Performance is believed to be emancipated from text-centric readings ('literary overwrittenness'), while literature is uncoupled with performance-oriented understanding of art.⁶

While it is now commonplace to integrate Shakespeare on the big screen into the curriculum, Shakespeare on the small screen has yet to be fully treated as an artifact that, in Christy Desmet's words, operates with 'an individuated integrity while also engaging in shifting relationships' with other media such as the codex book and digitized facsimile of an early modern text with marginalia.⁷ Examples of Shakespeare on the big screen include cinematic films, documentary films, made-for-television films, livecast productions, publicly screened short films such as *The Complete Walk* at London Globe during 23–24 April, 2016, and other forms of communal viewing experience that do not, by way of its infrastructure, encourage or permit direct audience interaction with the performance.

Yearbook 10 (Special Section, the Achievement of Robert Weimann), ed. David Schalkwyk, Graham Bradshaw, Tom Bishop (Surrey: Ashgate, 2008), 4.

⁵ D. Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003), 20.

⁶ D. L. Keegan, 'Indigested in the Scenes: *Hamlet's* Dramatic Theory and Ours', *PMLA* 133.1 (January 2018), 84.

⁷ C. Desmet, 'Alien Shakespeares 2.0.', *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare* 2017. <https://journals.openedition.org/shakespeare/3877>.



Figure 1: One of *The Complete Walk* screenings in London, 2016

When interactions occur, they are rather limited in nature. In contrast, examples of Shakespeare on the small screen include curated, digitized videos of Shakespearean performances, the often Quixotic, parodic, ad hoc YouTube videos (which are inherently unstable and ephemeral), films on DVD for personal use, mobile phones, tablets, hand-held devices, apps and other forms of archival and pedagogical experience that actively encourage and even obligate user curation and interaction with the cultural records. Of course the personal use could include family viewings or viewings among friends, which is communal, but the users have more control than when they are experiencing a performance on the big screen.

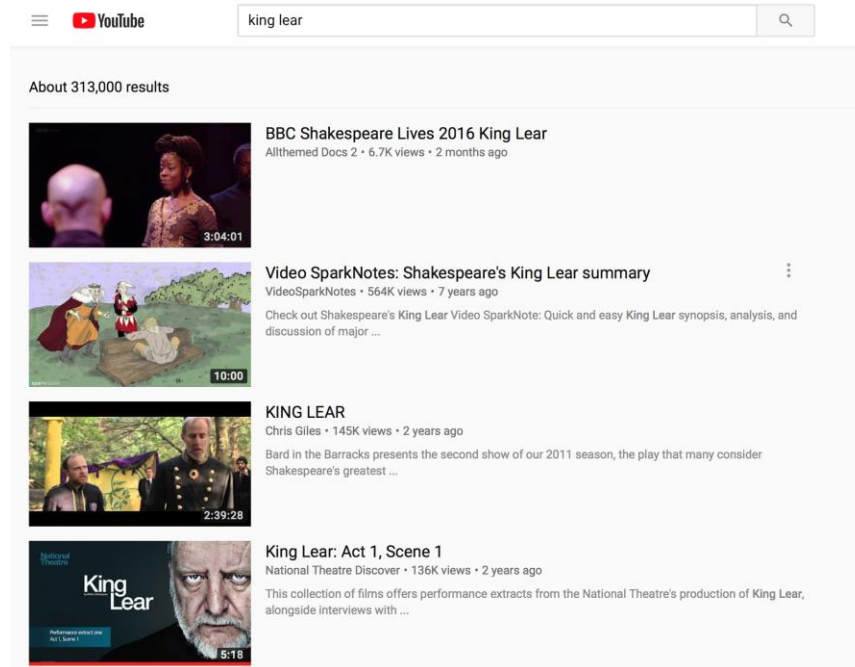


Figure 2: A search for King Lear alone (and not any other character or relevant key words) in the United States produced more than 313,000 results on YouTube. Many of these links are ephemeral.

Shakespeare on the small screen can reveal and combine both the workings of the technologies of representation and the literary foundation of performance behaviors. In a pedagogical context, small-screen Shakespeare – dynamically co-constituted through the repertoire of common knowledge, with users' hands as scribes and editors – can destabilize and expand the repertoire. In W. B. Worthen's words, the 'technologies of performance' put play-texts and performances – whether text-based or not – to work in an interactive environment.⁸ The duality of text and performance is no longer a 'problem' to be diagnosed, but rather an opportunity to be explored.

⁸ W. B. Worthen, *Drama: Between Poetry and Performance* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), xvi, 34.

However, the disciplinary alienation between different modes of representation needs not dictate pedagogical practices. For example, engaging with performance and literature on the small screen can broaden the 'repertoire' of performance to include not only the physicality of performance, orality and gestures, but also the re-inscription of writing exercises into performance through cross-referencing visual culture and through curatorial activities. In practice, this redistributes the power of collecting, re-arranging and archiving cultural records away from a Derridean centralized authority to the hands of users.⁹ Despite the challenge of maintaining net neutrality and equal access, generally speaking, in a de-centralized model of networked culture, the users have more direct engagement with, if not control over, narratives and multi-modal representations of events. As a play with a complex editorial and performance history, *King Lear* provides fertile ground for exploration of these issues.

When a work survives and appears in more than one form, we have both a vexing problem of interpretation and a rich opportunity for the study of cultural variants. As a play that begins with an aging monarch staging a fantastical, paradoxical last act as a king, Shakespeare's *King Lear* lures us toward a final act of interpretation to nail down the nature of the sufferings and yet fails to provide any sense of closure.

As Gary Taylor and Michael Warren point out in *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear*, the division of the narrative parallels the division of the kingdom. *King Lear* is a notoriously unwieldy play to edit because of textual variants. Michael Best is leading an important project to produce a new digital edition that provides linked pathways through the tragedy and that allows toggle views of contrasting versions

⁹ J. Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. E. Prenowitz (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1995), 3.

(Internet Shakespeare Editions). *King Lear* has been reproduced in versions that are difficult to reconcile even in its early reception history, including the 1608 Quarto, which is believed to be a representation of the performance at Whitehall (1606), and the 1623 First Folio, which is likely edited by Shakespeare's fellow actors to serve readers.

Performance texts soon joined the mix. In his version with a happy ending, Nahum Tate eliminated the Fool and made other significant changes. His version dominated the English stage between 1681 and 1838. Subsequently, other versions, textual or performative, took their turn to guide the imagination of an entire generation of artists and audiences in various regions of the world and across different performance genres. Examples include Peter Brook's RSC stage version in 1962 and existentialist film version in 1971 (starring Paul Scofield) and Akira Kurosawa's 1985 samurai film *Ran*. Engaging with these performances in digital re-playable media encourages students to move away from looking for closure in the tragedy to activating the narrative variants.

There are two challenges to teaching *King Lear* and Shakespeare in performance in general. I would like to examine potential solutions provided by a video-centric platform that focuses on performance video as a common object of study. While there is much discussion of mediated representations of Shakespeare in the mediascape (such as YouTube) and while there is an increasing number of apps with supplementary video content, video-centric teaching platforms have remained marginal to pedagogical and critical inquiries.

The vexing history of reproducing *Lear* is the first challenge to teaching the play. Variations and different performance texts can seem abstract or irrelevant to students, while in fact these versions and variants are central to our understanding of the play. For

example, is the opening division of the kingdom scene a psychological game, a contest of expressions of love, a political act or a classic case of a delusional ailing old father? One answer to this pedagogical challenge is to turn many versions into common objects of study and to make links among them. The challenging editorial and reception histories of *King Lear* around the world make it a good starting point for building digital teaching tools that make links. Linking digital performance records enables students to navigate and participate in the making of the ‘good and ill ... of [the] mingled yarn’ of the play’s histories and future, as Brett Hirsch and Hugh Craig suggest in their special section of the 2013 *Shakespearean International Yearbook*.¹⁰ More specifically, linking textual variants to videotaped performances allows for active learning through more dynamic commentary and close reading of performed meanings.

The second challenge is how to teach against the popularized universalist notion of the tragic elements in the play. Teaching *Lear* entails teaching each culture’s and generation’s reaction to the challenging ethical burden within and beyond the play’s actions. The play’s history of reception is informed by a particular ethical burden to explain Lear’s problems away or legitimize the characters’ suffering and the tragic pathos of the play. Are Lear’s ‘evil daughters’ implicated as a source of the tragedy of *King Lear* that has been said to be coded masculine? Does Cordelia’s hanging enhance the tragic pathos surrounding her journey, or does it help to highlight the senseless male suffering? How does *Lear* speak to cultures far removed politically and historically from early modern England, and make certain themes of contemporary cultural life more legible, such as the generational gap, filial piety, and loyalty and duty?

¹⁰ B. Hirsch, H. Craig, A. Huang, T. Bishop (eds.), *Shakespearean International Yearbook* 13 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 1.

One way to address this challenge is to teach the play and performances in comparative contexts, rather than privileging one textual or performative iteration of *Lear* over another. Several online learning modules were launched in recent years as part of the *MIT Global Shakespeares* open-access digital performance video archive, including *Global King Lear in Performance* (<https://studyshax.mit.edu/kinglear>) and *Lear Is Here: A Learning Module* (<http://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/modules/module/lear-is-here>). The former, designed for classroom use and accessible only to registered students (for copyright protection), features thirteen full films and numerous video clips that have been pre-arranged in clusters of pivotal scenes (such as the blinding of Gloucester). The feature of clustered, curated clips from a large number of performances is pedagogically useful. While it is only feasible to teach in-depth by assigning one or two films of *Lear* in a given class, students can expand their horizon by close-reading competing performative interpretations of a few pivotal scenes.

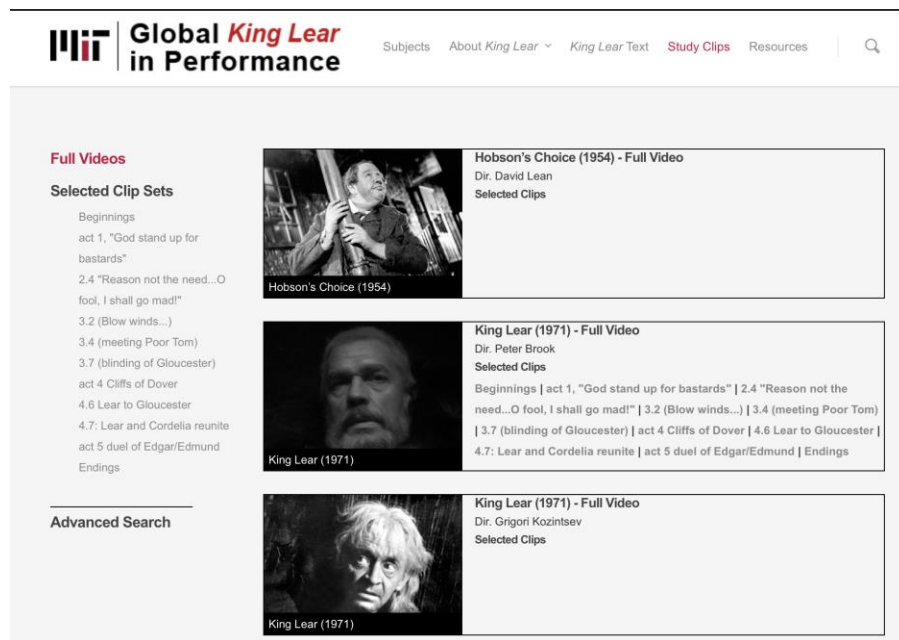


Figure 3: Full videos on Global *King Lear* in Performance

The latter, an open-access website, offers more detailed lesson plans, exercises and explication specifically around one adaptation, a solo performance entitled *Lear Is Here*. The full performance video has been divided up into video chapters to facilitate learning.

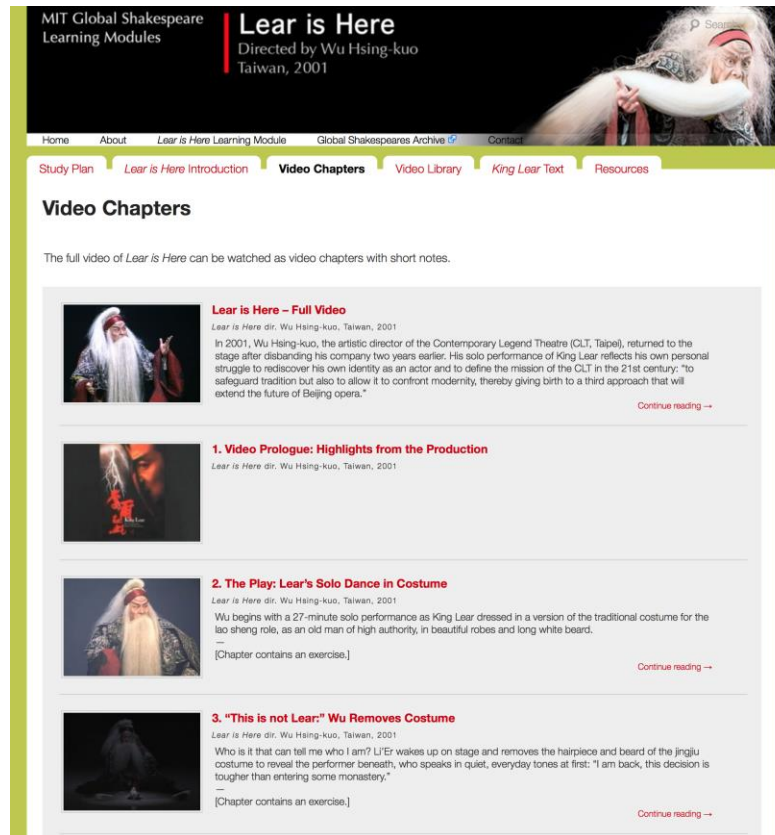


Figure 4: The performance is divided into chapters on *Lear Is Here: A Learning Module*

Some assignments ask students to curate their own video clip collections and articulate their rationale. Students can use the tools on the digital platform to make short virtual clips which they can then integrate into their analysis and commentary. They would state their reason for making particular clips and for their particular collection of clips. Unlike other

Shakespeares on the small screen that are ephemeral, both *Global King Lear* and *Lear Is Here: A Learning Module* have permalinks and offer vetted, curated contents on platforms that invite direct user engagement. As the co-founder of *Global Shakespeares* and co-author of the learning module on *Lear*, I am conscious of the necessity of critical self-distancing. For the purpose of this chapter, I would like to show how the digital medium – specifically a video-centric platform – can help us understand the tragedy in the study and teaching of *King Lear*, rather than to analyze the digital project itself.

The ‘pivotal scenes’ feature in *Global King Lear in Performance* promotes arbitrary as well as curated pathways through the *Lear* narrative as well as among films from different eras and cultures, especially performances that do not tend to be discussed side by side, such as Peter Brook’s 1971 existentialist film and Wu Hsing-kuo’s Buddhist-inflected solo performance (2007), and Grigori Kozintsev’s and Akira Kurosawa’s contrasting tragic visions in their films in 1971 and 1985 respectively. When new pathways open up, so do new interpretive possibilities.

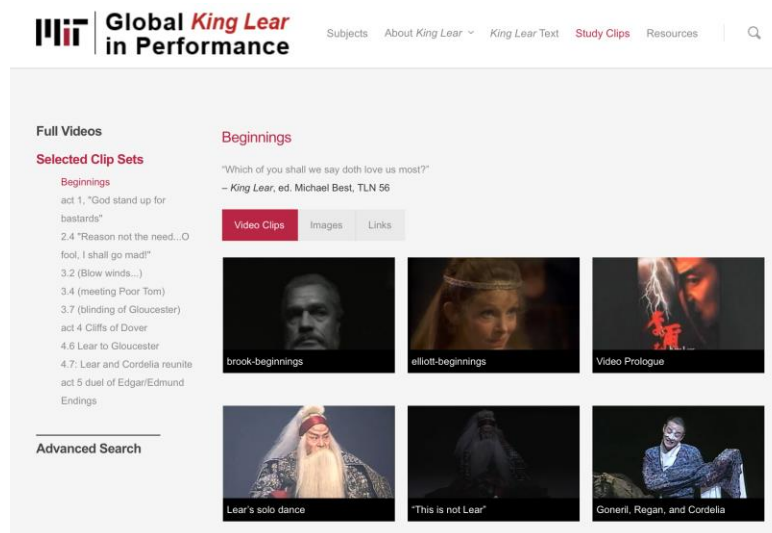


Figure 5: Pivotal scenes and collections of video clips. Global *King Lear* in Performance.

Obviously, the part cannot stand in for the whole. Viewing a clip on Cordelia's silent protest from Brook's film and a clip of Lear's reaction from Kozintsev's film may give partial or false impressions of the aesthetics and overall agendas of these directors. Bruce Smith, for example, reflects upon his own relationship to networked digital artifacts, being self-conscious of what is lost and gained. He confides that, on his computer screen, he sees 'a fragment of experience, part of a larger, more elusive whole, and I remain conscious of what has been lost as well as what has been made so readily available'.¹¹ However, what we gain in a pedagogical setting is the opportunity to learn from a diverse range of performances and not submit ourselves to the tyranny of the few canonized interpretations.

Juxtaposing the clips of the division-of-the-kingdom scene, for example, allows us to reexamine students' perceived ethical burden to explain Lear's problems away. The scene in Peter Brook's 1971 film is dominated by close-ups of Lear and other characters, framing Paul Scofield's Lear as a solemn statue.

¹¹ B. Smith, 'Getting Back to the Library, Getting Back to the Body', C. Carson and P. Kirwan (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Digital World: Redefining Scholarship and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 30.

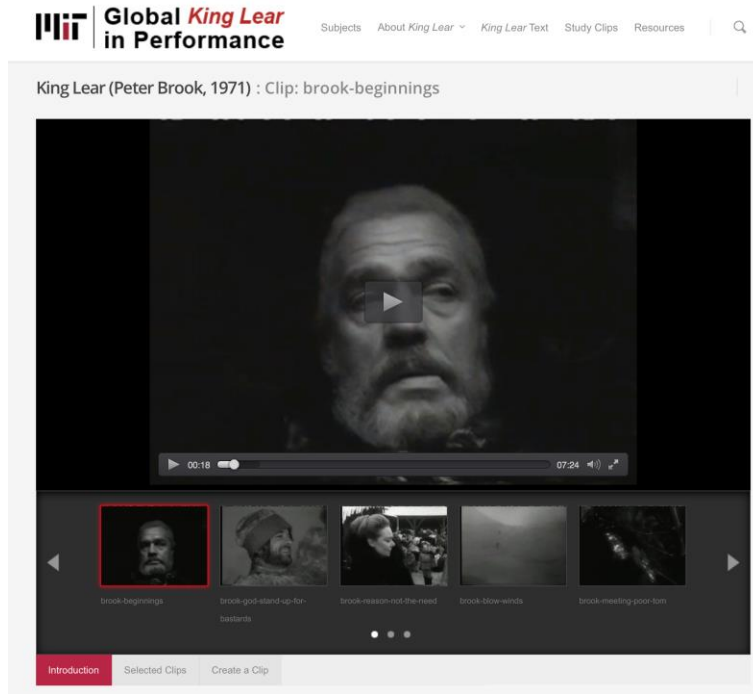


Figure 6: The platform is optimized for close reading video clips as 'texts'. Global *King Lear* in Performance.

In contrast to Laurence Olivier's Lear in Elliott's 1983 film, who laughs off Cordelia's initial response, Scofield's Lear speaks methodically and remains stern throughout the scene, which ends with him calmly banishing Cordelia. Cordelia's aside is cut, thereby diminishing the weight of a potentially revelatory moment as well as Cordelia's self-discovery. To close-read this scene, or any scene, students are able to create their own clips with annotations and permalinks for sharing.

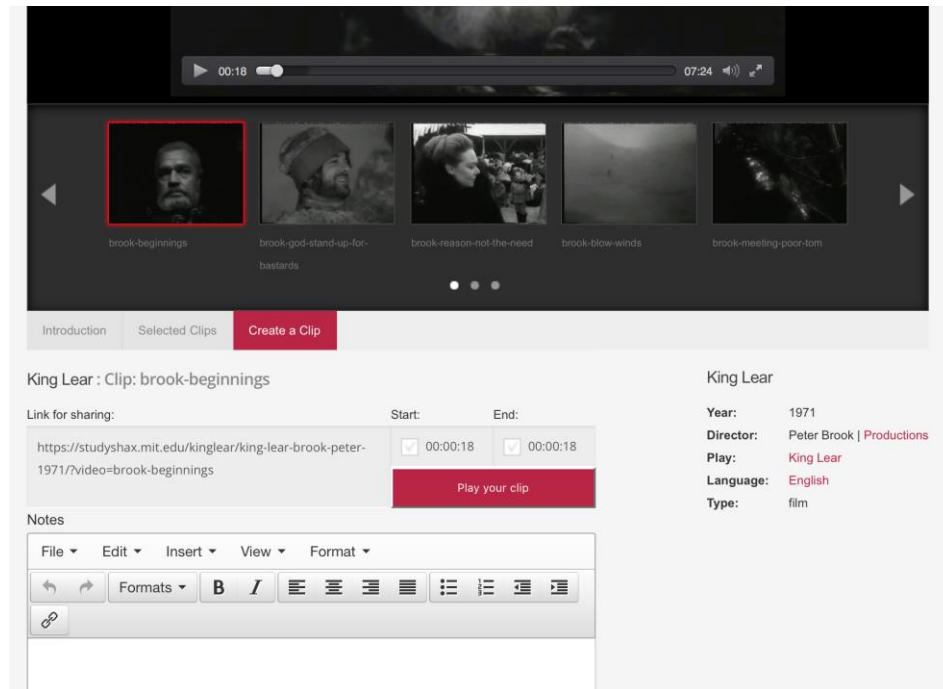


Figure 7: Making a clip for commentary in Global *King Lear* in Performance

Placed side by side with Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985) and other versions that contain elements of merriment, this scene in Brook's film sets a much more sinister and nihilistic tone for the entire narrative. Drawing on one single line by Goneril ('When he returns from hunting/ I will not speak with him', 1.3.8–9), Kurosawa presents a lavish, extended opening scene of boar hunting. It has become a critical commonplace to read Lear's journey as that of an unaccommodated animal: the wild boar is a metaphor for Hidetora's (Lear) degeneration from the hunter to the hunted. However, the film's Buddhist framework hints at Hidetora's reincarnation in the form of a boar after death. The line between humanity and the natural world is more porous and permeable in Shinto Buddhism. One of the key lines in Shakespeare's *King Lear* is the aging monarch's rhetorical question 'Who is it that can tell me who I am?', to which the Fool answers 'Lear's shadow' (1.4.189–90). In *Ran*, which

places its characters firmly among the animals and frequently in epic natural landscape, Hidetora frequently asks where he is rather than who he is. Scofield's *Lear* does suffer from an identity crisis (who is Lear if he is no longer king?) that is more typical of most *Lears*, but he is at the same time firmly planted in his solitude and tragic immobility. External, sartorial signs of regality are largely absent in Scofield's *Lear*. In contrast to Trevor Nunn's and Elliott's films, this scene in Brook's film does not treat the division of the kingdom ceremonially.

An effective way to describe the effect of engaging with Shakespeare on small screens through *Global King Lear in Performance* is the notion of 'digital ghosting', the idea that different versions of the narrative haunt a user's experience with the story. As Danielle Rosvally theorizes, when users are able to pause an encounter with an iteration of a Shakespearean theme (typically gathering 'more information before resuming [the encounter]'), or even to mesh the versions or place them side by side in our case, multiple 'activation points for knowledge economies' become more easily accessible. This articulates the benefit of digital ghosting and studying *King Lear* on the small screen.¹² Judith Buchanan's comment – in the context of her analysis of Peter Brook's 1971 film – captures the essence of ghosting and encountering multiple competing interpretations on the small screen:

¹² Danielle Rosvally, "The Haunted Network: Shakespeare's Digital Ghost." *The Shakespeare User: Critical and Creative Appropriations in a Networked Culture*, ed. V. M. Fazel and L. Geddes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 151.

[*King Lear*] had been defamiliarised by being recast in a language that could neither roll automatically off the tongue through years of intimate acquaintance nor provoke too much learned reverence.¹³

Nowhere is the struggle to lay ethical claims upon the characters or the tragedy more evident than in Wu Hsing-kuo's Buddhist interpretation in his solo Beijing opera *Lear is Here* (2001), which is the focus of *MIT Global Shakespeares'* first learning module (<http://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/modules>). The self-contained learning and teaching module is the first in a series of media-rich online introductions to major international productions of Shakespeare's plays. The module has been optimized for use as a unit in undergraduate and graduate courses in Shakespeare and theatre. The module contains a full video of the production with English subtitles and a full English translation of the new play text, curated video 'chapters' with a basic introduction to each segment, study questions, and interactive exercises in which students define and annotate virtual clips from the productions and write multimedia essays using the clips and notes they have made.

Let me first introduce Wu's version of *King Lear*. I will then discuss how the MIT learning module makes links between this landmark production and a number of cruxes in Shakespeare's *Lear*. I will conclude with a brief examination of the features that distinguish digital video from analogue media.

As part of the development of the pedagogical wing of the MIT Global Shakespeares open access digital video archive, we chose to focus on *King Lear* and Wu's solo Beijing

¹³ J. Buchanan, *Shakespeare on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 71.

opera adaptation for our first learning module. The self-problematizing nature of *King Lear* is conducive to teaching about not imposing meanings on others. Within the realm of global Shakespeare, from Jean-Luc Godard's metacinematic film *King Lear* (1987) to Wu Hsing-kuo's Buddhist-inflected *Li'er zaici* (*Lear Is Here*, 2007), discourses of the making and unmaking of the self that echo religious formulations have played a key role in remixing Shakespeare's play as contemporary performance. How has the theatricalization of religion been used in cross-cultural readings of Shakespeare that are flirting with postmodernism?

Wu's *Lear* is an example of the autobiographical approach to self-knowledge and the use of Shakespearean text as a source of spiritual wisdom. Written, composed, directed and performed by Wu himself at Ariane Mnouchkine's workshop at Odeon Theatre in Paris and later for his own Contemporary Legend Theatre in Taipei, the production inserts Wu's own life story into Lear's narrative. Playing ten characters from Shakespeare's tragedy, Wu extrapolates the themes of domestic conflict, construction of selves and others, and notions of duty to family and duty to the state. He mingles these themes with his autobiography.

One of the most powerful scenes is 'Lear in the Storm'. At center stage stands a dispirited King Lear, who has just taken off his Beijing opera headdress and armor costume in full view of a packed audience. Following his powerful presentation of the scene of the mad Lear in the storm and on-stage costume change, the actor – now dressed as if he were backstage – interrogates himself and the eyeless headdress in a somber moment while touching his own eyes, evoking Gloucester's blinding and the Lacanian gaze in a play about sight and truth. 'Who am I?' he asks. 'Doth any here know me? This is not Lear./ Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? Where are his eyes?' (1.4.185–86). Here, the performer is self-conscious of the ways in which his own eyes become Lear's eyes. These two pairs of eyes

represent the necessary split many performers experience on stage, a process of making null the performer's self-identity so that he or she becomes the part being performed. This enriches our understanding of acting in intercultural contexts.

While Peter Brook's 1962 RSC production and subsequent 1971 film of *King Lear* engages with the theme of ecocriticism through an apocalyptic *mise-en-scène*, Wu's *Lear Is Here* offers an autobiographical, Brechtian approach to the tension between humanism and the post-human. In the 'Lear in the storm' scene, Wu presents nature as part of theatrical ecocriticism. *Lear* is frequently interpreted as a nihilistic tragedy, but Wu, coming from a non-Western tradition, brings the human performer into the otherwise apocalyptic landscape to bear on not only the play's ecocritical discourse but also the question of redemption. By the final scene of Wu's adaptation, Wu has played ten characters all by himself. In the final scene, the subdued Wu dressed as a Buddhist monk reflects on the ephemeral life and the mutability of the world:

Lonely and quiet, I look coldly at the moon

That rises, sets, waxes and wanes.

Wu recites the old adage repeatedly as he is being raised above the stage and into a transcendental realm. He concludes that there is nothing in life that is permanent except change.

Framed by anthropocentrism, *King Lear* is a tragedy about the relationship between human habitats and a nature that does not accommodate humans. Engaging with the *Lear* narrative in a comparative context allows students to put all of these questions in perspective. Lear attempts to command nature when he curses Regan and Goneril. The

storm is both a routine part of climate patterns and a manifestation of Lear's internal turmoil. The staging of such apocalyptic spectacle gives Wu's personal narrative an ecocritical purpose, which, in Steve Mentz's words, juxtaposes 'the desire of the self to maintain its identity against the natural world's stubborn exteriority'.¹⁴ The adaptation demonstrates that all systems of order – natural or man-made – are inherently unstable.

This learning module supports both the text-centric model and the new model in which image, audio or video collections are the starting place for an exploration across media.¹⁵ Students were asked to watch and do a close reading of this particular 'video chapter', and create their own video clips to illustrate their own interpretations. Students play the role of a curator with films and video clips by critiquing them, circulating their film essays and commenting on one another's video collections and essays. Once they make their first video clip, they are hooked. The assignments and video chapters allow students to slow down and re-think what they think they know about a passage by defamiliarizing *King Lear*. When students experience a speech such as 'Who am I?' in radically new performance styles or in a foreign language, they can approach it without prejudice or learned reverence.

¹⁴ S. Mentz, 'Strange Weather in *King Lear*', *Shakespeare* 6.2 (2010), 141.

¹⁵ P. Donaldson, 'The Shakespeare Electronic Archive: Tools for On-Line Learning and Scholarship', in M. E. Devlin, R. Larson and J. Myerson (eds.), *The Internet and the University: Forum 2003* (Boulder: Educause, 2004), 61–92

MIT Global Shakespeare Learning Modules

Lear is Here

Directed by Wu Hsing-kuo
Taiwan, 2001

Home About **Lear is Here Learning Module** Global Shakespeares Archive Contact

Study Plan **Lear is Here Introduction** Video Chapters Video Library **King Lear Text** Resources

Read the **Entire play** in one page, or by Act and Scene on the right.

Act 1, Scene 1

SCENE I. King Lear's palace.

Enter KENT, GLOUCESTER, and EDMUND

KENT
I thought the king had more affected the Duke of Albany than Cornwall.

GLOUCESTER
It did always seem so to us: but now, in the division of the kingdom, it appears not which of the dukes he values most; for equalities are so weighed, that curiosity in neither can make choice of either's moiety.

KENT
Is not this your son, my lord?

GLOUCESTER
His breeding, sir, hath been at my charge: I have so often blushed to acknowledge him, that now I am brazed to it.

KENT
I cannot conceive you.

GLOUCESTER
Sir, this young fellow's mother could; whereupon she grew round-wombed, and had, indeed, sir, a son for her cradle ere she had a husband for her bed. Do you smell a fault?

KENT
I cannot wish the fault undone, the issue of it being so proper.

Act 1, Scene 1:
[King Lear's palace.](#)

Act 1, Scene 2:
[The Earl of Gloucester's castle.](#)

Act 1, Scene 3:
[The Duke of Albany's palace.](#)

Act 1, Scene 4:
[A hall in the same.](#)

Act 1, Scene 5:
[Court before the same.](#)

Act 2, Scene 1:
[GLOUCESTER's castle.](#)

Act 2, Scene 2:
[Before Gloucester's castle.](#)

Act 2, Scene 3:
[A wood.](#)

Act 2, Scene 4:
[Before GLOUCESTER's castle. KENT in the stocks.](#)

Act 3, Scene 1:
[A heath.](#)

Act 3, Scene 2:
[Another part of the heath. Storm still.](#)

Act 3, Scene 3:
[Gloucester's castle.](#)

Act 3, Scene 4:
[The heath. Before a howl.](#)

Figure 8: Accessible play-text linked to various moments in the performance in *Lear Is*

Here: A Learning Module.

MIT Global Shakespeare Learning Modules

Lear is Here

Directed by Wu Hsing-kuo
Taiwan, 2001

Home About **Lear is Here Learning Module** Global Shakespeares Archive Contact

Study Plan **Lear is Here Introduction** Video Chapters Video Library **King Lear Text** Resources

Study Plan for *Lear is Here*

1. Read the [Lear is Here Introduction](#).
2. Browse the [Resources and Information](#) page.
3. Watch the production of *Lear is Here* in the form of [video chapters](#), each of which has additional notes for that section. The chapter notes will be especially helpful when the action is complex or when it is difficult to tell which role Wu is playing at a given moment.
(The [full production](#) is also available along with some background information.)
4. Complete **two of the short assignments** found at the end of some chapters.
List of chapters with exercises:
 - Chapter 2: The Play: Lear's Solo Dance in Costume
 - Chapter 3: "This is not Lear:" Wu Removes Costume
 - Chapter 4: Fool, Kent and Lear
 - Chapter 5: Goneril, Regan and Cordelia (contains two exercises)
 - Chapter 8: The Cliffs of Dover
5. Complete **Essay Assignment**

Note: The introduction, resources and notes to the production are intended to provide information about what happens in *Lear is Here*. In completing your assignments, **please concentrate on how it happens**. Theatrical meaning is created moment to moment, and the exercises ask you to track those changes by identifying short sequences within the performance video.

Log in

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Figure 9: The learning module begins with a study plan and a list of short assignments.

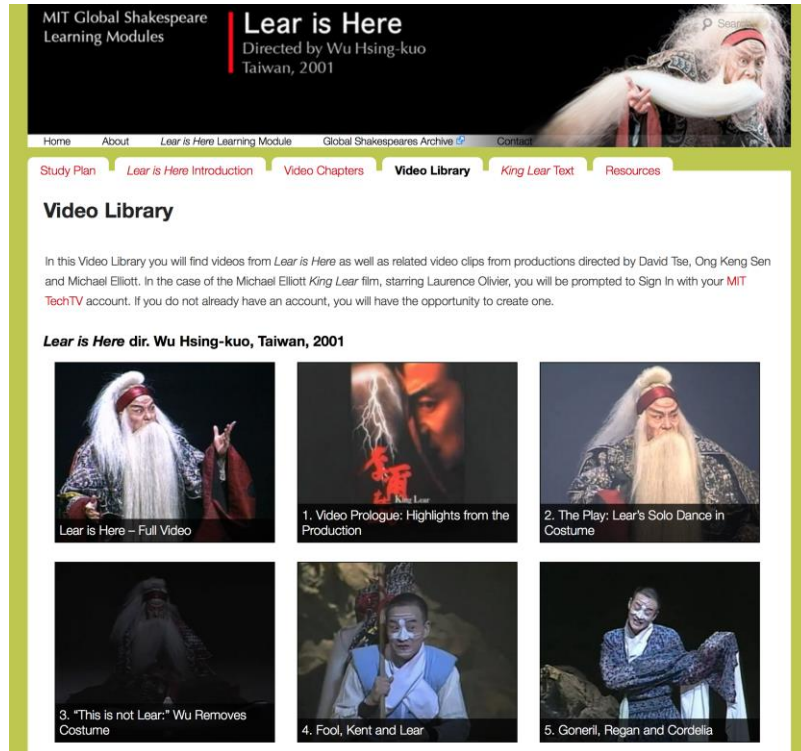


Figure 10: The video library of *Lear Is Here: A Learning Module* contains videos from the performance as well as video clips from relevant productions and films, including Michael Elliott's film.

For example, in one of the assignments, we ask students to select, annotate and post short clips on a range of topics relevant to *Lear is Here*. They create two to three clips that demonstrate how they trace a theme in detail through commentary. Then, they create more sub-clips out of one of the longer clips to show how a central aspect of the theme or topic develops or changes in a brief span of time. Using these clips and commentary, they then write a multimedia essay incorporating these clips into a coherent account of *Lear*. In *Lear Is Here*, Wu plays all the characters and never really exits the stage completely. He changes

costumes and transforms himself into various characters seamlessly on stage. One of the assignments that works well with the online learning module asks students to close read one instance of Wu's transformation in this one-man show:

Even when he hides behind a part of the set and the lights go down, he often signals the advent of a new character vocally from his hiding place, and never leaves us in the dark for long. ... Moving from one role to another is also part of the autobiographical story he wants to tell about [the many roles he has played in his life and on stage]. Please choose one moment of transformation from one character to another, and two sub-clips from that moment to tell your story of how Wu changes from character to character, focusing not only on the two different roles, but on the transition itself.

With this video-centric teaching tool, we create an environment for students as 'Shakespeare users' to respond to recordings, the scripts of adaptations and the archive's video database. As Alvin Lim notes, the 'site-specificity' of the archive gives site-specific reenactment of live performances.¹⁶ Through the exercises of textualization of performance videos, students learn to close read performative details, aspects of staging and visual presentation, music and script and adaptation strategy to construct an argument.

The biggest payoff of teaching *Lear* through video analysis is a more productive engagement with performative variants. Distinct from analogue media, such as photography and film, digital video – as a non-linear, non-sequential medium – can support

¹⁶ A. E. H. Lim, 'Thinking Virtually in a Distracted Globe: Archiving Shakespeare in Asia', in T. Sant (ed.), *Documenting Performance: The Context and Processes of Digital Curation and Archiving* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 201.

instant access to any sequence in a performance, as well as the means to re-order and annotate sequences and to bring them into meaningful conjunction with other videos, texts and image collections.

As stable, accessible, citable video texts, they can become common objects for close study in the classroom and citation in scholarship, and they can become a part of the cultural experience of new, globally distributed and potentially unlimited audiences both now and in the future. Further, wider knowledge of contemporary refashionings of Shakespeare in performance are not only valuable in themselves, but can lead us back to Shakespeare's plays with new insight and new paths for interpretation.

In text-centric models, other media are present but are expansions of the text. In these models, excerpts of texts are cited to draw the attention of readers as evidence to support an argument. The citation can be discussed and referred to as many times as needed in multiple contexts. With well-developed scholarly apparatus and tools such as Google Books, one can easily cite digital and codex books as sources. In the domain of performance studies, digital video will be a common object that can be circulated and interpreted by scholars, teachers and students. These replayable clips can become moving image footnotes. Just like texts, a video clip has to be viewed in the context of other films, productions, and performance video of the same play, the same scene or the same director. The field of Shakespeare studies has come a long way in the three decades since J. L. Styan's *The Shakespeare Revolution*, which imagined a 'new role for stage-centered criticism' that uncovers the original 'Shakespeare experience'.¹⁷ The access to performance on multiple

¹⁷ J. L. Styan, *The Shakespeare Revolution: Criticism and Performance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 5; J. C. Bulman, 'Introduction: Shakespeare and Performance Theory', in J. C. Bulman (ed.), *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1996), 1.

levels – rehearsal, production, reception – is the first step to engage with the ‘multiple material existences’ of a single play.¹⁸ Indeed the spectator and performance have recently been recognized as integral components in interpretations of Shakespeare. For example, the second edition of *Oxford Shakespeare* usefully highlights the performative and collaborative aspects of select texts by re-thinking stage directions in the context of early theater practice. The *New Oxford Shakespeare* incorporates copious notes in each scene on instances of performances. As Barbara Hodgdon has argued, plays are open sites where textual obligation meets ‘performative option’.

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¹⁸ J. C. Bulman, ‘Introduction: Shakespeare and Performance Theory’, in J. C. Bulman (ed.), *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1996), 2.

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