



The Shakespearean International Yearbook

THE SHAKESPEAREAN INTERNATIONAL YEARBOOK

**DISABILITY PERFORMANCE AND GLOBAL
SHAKESPEARE**

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Bruce R. Smith's and Mary Hartman's chapters move away from the technology of interface to ask readers to consider the body—voice for Smith and various forms of embodiment for Hartman—in terms of interface theory. Hartman's essay in particular speaks powerfully to Mathieu Chapman's essay, discussed elsewhere in this review, as she reminds us that the ownership generated by the embodied performance of Shakespeare's "words, as we express them for others to hear, challenges us to challenge them" (350.)

For all the slenderness of Stephen Wittek and David McInnis' much briefer volume for the Cambridge Elements, *Shakespeare and Virtual Reality*, the editors and contributors engage in rigorous and inventive ways with the emerging medium—or media, as more than one writer emphasizes the spectrum of immersive technologies that we group under the term "virtual reality." The essays presented are acutely attuned to being written in media res; as Wittek notes, the project "shows what the object of discussion looked like before it grew into maturity" (72).

McInnis' and Wittek's own contributions reflect their common experience with relatively sophisticated uses of virtual reality as a pedagogical tool. Wittek's study examined the effect of adding a virtual reality component to students' exposure to Shakespeare. While a control group read *Hamlet* and engaged with filmed versions of the play, a second group had an added virtual reality intervention. McInnis' essay covers two applications of VR to post-secondary education, examining both an in-class demonstration of three interpretations of the final scene of *The Taming of the Shrew* in 360° filming, and a hackathon in which prospective students were invited to use social media to respond to a VR staging of the assassination scene in *Julius Caesar*.

These essays question what virtual reality can do for Shakespeare, but the opening chapter, by Jennifer Roberts-Smith, astutely flips the question on its head, emphasizing what Shakespeare can do for virtual reality. In Roberts-Smith's formulation, "VR is no more likely to have a medium-specific power to manifest or teach 'Shakespeare' more faithfully or more effectively—to clarify or expand 'Shakespeare' as a conceptual field—than any other new medium before it" (4).

Working with slightly more traditional media and interfaces, Alexa Alice Joubin and Peter S. Donaldson have developed an online course with a full performance video, introductory materials, and a range of assignments based on Wu Hsing-Kuo's 2001 adaptation *Lear Is Here*, also anthologized in Joubin's *Sinophone* collection (see above). With remarkable efficiency, the module provides enough essential context about Wu and the theatrical traditions on which he draws to forestall the "temptation for a person who is not familiar with Chinese theater to think of the production as typical or representative of Chinese theater in general or of Chinese adaptations of Shakespeare in particular" ("Introduction").

The site also provides its visitors with two to three other stagings of *Lear* for comparison. Ong Keng Sen's 1997 Singapore production and David Tse's 2006 bilingual UK/China production are available to all viewers, while Michael Elliott's film starring Laurence Olivier is only available to those who have access to MIT Libraries' subscription to *Drama Online*. As the Olivier film is widely available and the most likely to be familiar to an audience actively seeking out engagements with Shakespeare from outside the Anglosphere, this lack of access is hardly a great problem.

The exercises themselves are thoughtful prompts for short answer questions and a longer essay, but will certainly benefit from careful framing by a classroom instructor, especially for students who are less familiar with analyzing performance decisions rather than play scripts. Instructors at any level seeking additional resources to prepare students for analyzing video rather than text may find it useful to pair *Lear Is Here*, or future MIT modules, with Joubin's *Screening Shakespeare*, an online open-access textbook published by the Digital Humanities Institute at George Washington University. Although the textbook is concerned with topics from film and video production (e.g. camera angle and movement) that go beyond the context of filmed theater performances such as *Lear Is Here*, students can also learn about lighting, blocking, costume, and other elements common to both stage and screen.

Choosing which essays to discuss in detail from Diane Henderson and Kyle Sebastian Vitale's *Shakespeare and Digital Pedagogy: Case Studies and Strategies* has proven difficult. Each chapter in the collection provides "an overview of its project, a description of its creation and component parts, an exploration of intended and resulting student learning, and useable objects and takeaways for application" (2), making this book a tremendous practical resource for teachers at many levels.

The Digital Scribes project, created by Cyrus Mulready, engages with pedagogical research about the crucial importance of note-taking in lectures and seminars as an academic skill. Mulready's goal in the project was to mitigate the challenges of introducing majors and non-majors alike, in a large lecture setting, to the "significant challenges" of Shakespeare's language. In this project, groups of students were assigned as the note-takers for a given day's lesson, and then used simple online collaboration tools such as Google Docs to "collaborate in a wiki or shared document" and "post their notes to a central place where they can be shared" (14). Having taught in academic skills centers, I was excited to see this kind of attention paid to the nuts-and-bolts of in-class learning. Mulready's chapter provides concrete, actionable steps for instructors trying to demystify Shakespeare for classes of mixed levels.

Kathryn Vomero Santos' contribution outlines how instructors can leverage "digital technologies to move beyond such unproductive notions

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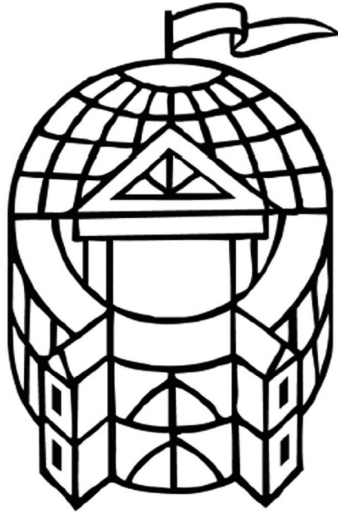
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