

Renaissance and Reformation

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Open Source Shakespeare. Edition

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as many users as desired from that institution's location); but for institutions on a limited budget, the authors offer applications for a "Robin Hood Ticket" for schools to "Pay What You Can." Individuals do not have this option, but can pay £1 or \$1.25USD for 24 hours of access. For many individuals, a daily or monthly pass will likely be plenty.

This site aims to be an exhaustive resource for every word in Shakespeare's plays, as demonstrated by the Glossary that claims to include all words in Shakespeare that "no longer exist in Modern English, have changed their meaning since Shakespeare's day, or have an encyclopedic or specialized sense that would make them unfamiliar to many modern readers." Combining a Glossary with the other features of the site—the "Circles" feature, the ability to see all lines for an individual character, the "Topics" and "Themes" features that explain mythological or historical concepts—suggests the greatest strength of the site: it collates multiple resources in one place. For students and practitioners, this is what could make it invaluable, but it also might be attempting to do too much. Looking up a word in the Glossary, for example, provides a brief definition and one Shakespearean example. A scholar could very well prefer the additional information and contextualization available through the *OED*.

To sum up, *Shakespeare's Words* is a site that is undeniably useful as a teaching resource for secondary and post-secondary instructors who are introducing students to Shakespeare; more advanced researchers will likely prefer to collate their own grouping of digital sources.

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Johnson, Eric, creator.

Open Source Shakespeare. Edition.

Fairfax, VA: George Mason University, 2003. Accessed 8 May 2019.
opensesourceshakespeare.org/.

Rachel Aanstad is the director of the Rose City Shakespeare Company (imagineshakespeare.wordpress.com). Laura Estill interviewed her for this review of Open Source Shakespeare. The interview was transcribed by otter.ai and edited for length and clarity.

LE: Thank you for being able and willing to meet and talk about *Open Source Shakespeare*.

RA: I'm thrilled to get to review *Open Source Shakespeare* because I'm so reliant on it. One of the most immediate and useful things about the site is that I can send the link to the actors, even before they've come to audition, so that they can familiarize themselves with the play without having to buy anything. They can look up all the lines for a specific part. So, if there's a particular part that they want to audition for, then they can just look up all the monologues from that part, and be prepared for their audition.

LE: Do you ever worry that you're sending actors an edition that doesn't have notes?

RA: No, they're actors. When you're doing Shakespeare and speaking it on stage, you're not doing it to pass a test, you're doing it to speak the speech and you want to know what the meaning is. Anybody who's really interested in Shakespeare knows where to find notes. What they want is the text itself, sometimes without any notes at all, so that they can get a feeling of the text for themselves, without somebody else's opinion. Now, not every actor that I get is experienced with Shakespeare, in fact, many of them aren't. But they all have places that they go to for interpretation. *Open Source Shakespeare* offers a text, no fuss, no muss, not a lot of clutter on the page. You just look at the lines and then you can go somewhere else if you want more information.

In terms of preparing actors, it's more important that they understand the meter. So I like to send them to watch the *Playing Shakespeare* videos that the Royal Shakespeare Company released. You get to see Patrick Stewart, thirty years younger and looking just the same. That's another good resource for people. [LE note: these videos are available by searching on YouTube.]

LE: I'm glad to hear about how you send *Open Source Shakespeare* to actors before the rehearsals start or even before they do their auditions, so they know what to expect from the roles that they're auditioning for. Do you use these digital texts when they're actually learning the play, too?

RA: Yes, I use the digital text for that too. I try to be really consistent. Originally, when I did my first Shakespeare production, I thought, “oh, everybody can just go get their own *Midsummer Night’s Dream* text” and it was a disaster because the spellings are different, even whole passages are different. And although I knew that on an intellectual level, you really need to be on the same page, you need to be *literally* on the same page when you’re rehearsing. With Shakespeare it’s especially important for me to be able to go, “okay, everybody turn to page 31.” So what I do is download a copy, put it into Word, and then do some slight reformatting to make it easier for the actors to read. I very rarely cut anything. But when I did *Romeo and Juliet* [Rose City Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet: Blood and Honour, an Orcish Love Story*, 2018], there are parts of *Romeo and Juliet* that nobody ever sees because they don’t make a whole lot of sense. I think a lot of directors cut too much. Some people cut the scene with Paris and Romeo dueling at the end, but I think that’s very important. I don’t cut anything like that.

I also dual cast or condense multiple roles into one character. And I like to do all that in our copy of the script before the actors get it. I do a little processing to the text from *Open Source Shakespeare*, and then I print it out and give it to the actors.

LE: So you use *Open Source Shakespeare* from the very beginning of rehearsal through to off book.

RA: Oh, absolutely. And the other nice thing is that if an actor forgets their script, which happens, they can pretty much just open up *Open Source Shakespeare* on their phone and be fine. It already has line numbers. It’s beautifully organized. It’s based on the Moby edition, which is common because it’s public domain. I only use public domain texts. That’s why *Open Source Shakespeare* is called “open source.” [LE note: *Open Source Shakespeare* has an essay on this topic called “How Moby Shakespeare Took Over the Internet”: opensourceshakespeare.org/info/moby_shakespeare.php.]

LE: Famously, early versions of plays can be quite different. *King Lear* is known for being different in the quarto version and the folio version, with entire scenes changed. If you were doing a play like *Lear*, would you go to *Open Source*

Shakespeare first, and would you assess the different versions to find which one speaks to you most?

RA: I do a full dramaturgy on a play before I do anything. I read all those critiques. I read all those notes. I spend probably six months researching a play before I produce it, and even then it's often not until I really get into rehearsal that the play comes alive for me and I see even more areas that I want to delve into more deeply. Sometimes we'll be working on a scene and I'll think "this feels clumsy or shoehorned in somehow." And often that means that there is a situation where there are different versions, and the editors have tried to do the best they could. So, yes, I definitely look at other scripts to be able to make good choices in that situation.

LE: Do you ever use any of the other tools on the site beyond the full text plays?

RA: Yes, especially when I'm really trying to understand the nuances of a scene. You get this sort of spidey sense where you know that a word is doing double or triple or quadruple duty. Then I like to look that word up in the concordance [opensource-shakespeare.org/concordance/] to see where it's used in all the other plays, because then I know it's carrying all that meaning with it. Oftentimes, it's foreshadowing something that happens later in the play; other times, there's a joke. It's important to remember, for instance, that Bottom isn't just the name of the weaver, it also means lower strata of society.

My actors also love the functionality of the site where you can display only one character's speeches with cue lines. They can just print them out or can have it on their phone. So when they're waiting for the bus, they can be learning lines.

LE: Do you remember how you stumbled across *Open Source Shakespeare*?

RA: I just typed "Shakespeare" into Google when I was in grad school. One of the selling points of this site is the portability. Who wants to carry around an unabridged Shakespeare in their backpack? No one.

LE: If you could change something about the site, what would you change?

RA: If you want to print a play out, there's a button you click for the print version and you can copy and paste or print directly from there. But there's some sort of formatting in there, where if I copy and paste a full play into a Word document and try to eliminate a heading, sometimes it will delete the entire scene. I ran into trouble with *Romeo and Juliet*, where I accidentally deleted an entire scene. So that's my only difficulty with it: I would love to be able to copy and paste a little more easily. But other than that, it's fantastic and I'm grateful.

LE: Do you have any final thoughts on the site in general or on using digital texts for rehearsal and performance?

RA: I think that *Open Source Shakespeare* has contributed strongly to keeping Shakespeare in performance, because anybody can have it. If it's not online, it doesn't exist. Shakespeare is online in a pretty big way.

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MIT Shakespeare. Edition.

Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1993. Accessed 17 April 2019.

shakespeare.mit.edu.

It is difficult to think of something more ubiquitous in Shakespeare studies than *MIT Shakespeare* (shakespeare.mit.edu).¹ Self-touted as “the Web’s first edition of the Complete Works of William Shakespeare,” the site has been in continued existence since 1993. At its core, *MIT Shakespeare* is a plain-text, stripped-down web edition of Shakespeare’s canon including the plays (grouped by “Comedy,” “Tragedy,” and “History”) as well as most of the poems commonly attributed to Shakespeare (minus *The Passionate Pilgrim* and *Phoenix and the Turtle*).

1. Jeremy Hylton, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, 1993, shakespeare.mit.edu.