# Renaissance and Reformation
# Renaissance et Réforme

# MIT Shakespeare. Edition

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### Citer ce compte rendu

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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**Hylton, Jeremy, creator.**
***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.

The site is generally feature-lite and seeks to present a sleek digital edition of Shakespeare's work rather than any of the customary bells and whistles. Clicking on the title of each play from the *MIT* homepage will bring the user to a table of contents listing each act and scene of the play in question with a link to display the full text of that act/scene. Alternately, users can opt to display the entirety of a play on one page.

And that's, truly, about it. The site lacks glosses or textual notes of any kind, and simply presents a clean, fresh interface with nothing but the text. No fuss, no muss. There's beauty in this simplicity, and something to be said for a web edition that presents Shakespeare without being bogged down by grossly over-stated features. It's worth noting that the site hasn't undergone major revision since its inception. For the early nineties, this site was revolutionary: open access Shakespeare, readily found, used, and reused. In 2019, this isn't terribly special (a multitude of other websites—mentioned below—do essentially the same thing but with more features and more credulity), but *MIT Shakespeare* needs to be considered in the context of its history rather than as a contemporary tool of unique purpose or value.

Perhaps the most useful thing about *MIT*'s presentation is the ease it allows in copying and pasting Shakespeare's text into another interface (say, Microsoft Word). This facilitates easy editing and cutting of the text, a necessity for theatre practitioners. As the basis for an acting edition, *MIT Shakespeare* works beautifully precisely because of its plain-text nature. *MIT*'s main competition for this purpose is *Folger Digital Text*s (folgerdigitaltexts.org, also reviewed in this special issue), which allows users to freely view and download full scripts in a variety of forms (including .doc with line numbers, .doc without line numbers, XML, TEI, HTML, PDF, and TXT). The draw to *Folger* over *MIT* is that the *Folger* texts are all peer-reviewed and edited by top scholars in the field, while the *MIT Shakespeare* hasn't undergone such scrutiny; it's really just a simple interface presenting simple editions created by a data scientist as a project in 90s open access.

The text of *MIT Shakespeare* is taken from the Moby Shakespeare, about which an in-depth history has been written by Eric Johnson of *Open Source Shakespeare*.[2] The Moby is largely considered to be an electronic edition of the

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2. Eric M. Johnson, "Open Source Shakespeare: An Experiment in Literary Technology," *Open Source Shakespeare*, 2003, opensourceshakespeare.org/info/paper_toc.php.

Globe Shakespeare, and both are public domain which means that the Moby is an extremely popular basis for any open source project involving Shakespeare's works. *MIT Shakespeare*'s act and scene divisions are, accordingly, from the Moby (and ultimately the Globe). Because the Moby uses standardized and modernized spellings, it is easy reading; but because of these concessions it doesn't make the best basis for scholarly inquiry. However, that doesn't seem to be the point of *MIT Shakespeare*. It's clearly not meant to be a scholarly edition. It's meant to be free Shakespeare for the masses, something that any and all can access, use, enjoy, and freely share.

Because of all this, the scholarly community (and especially those sensitive to textual issues) generally takes issue with the *MIT Shakespeare* and its notorious textual errors.[3] A few small items might be chalked up to "typos"; for instance, in act 1, scene 5 of *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio generally describes Viola as "a codling when 'tis almost an apple."[4] In the *MIT Shakespeare*, Malvolio instead describes her as "a cooling when 'tis almost an apple."[5] Another such error from the edition can be spotted in *Much Ado About Nothing*, act 2, scene 1 in which Benedick, complaining about Beatrice, proclaims: "I would not marry her, though she were endowed with all that Adam bad [*sic*] left him before he transgressed."[6] Scholars have noted that these small errors ought to be fixed, and target the *MIT* edition as being riddled with them. The same scholars will suggest other internet editions: the University of Victoria's *Internet Shakespeare Editions* is a popular go-to (ise.uvic.ca); another, the ever-useful *Open Source Shakespeare* (*OSS*; opensourceshakespeare.org), both reviewed in this issue. While both of these alternatives are more feature-heavy than *MIT*, it ought to be noted that *OSS* also uses the Moby as its basis. Thus, the troubles that scholars seem so quick to point out in *MIT* while in the same breath recommending *OSS* as a useful alternative are identical in both texts.

3. Several of these were discussed in a 16 September 2019 post in the closed Facebook group "Shakespeare Friends"; www.facebook.com/groups/174255305946944/.

4. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, University of Victoria, *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (blog), accessed 20 April 2019, internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/TN_M/complete/.

5. William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night, MIT Shakespeare* (blog), 1993, shakespeare.mit.edu/twelfth_night/full.html.

6. William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing, MIT Shakespeare* (blog), 1993, http://shakespeare.mit.edu/much_ado/full.html.

Because of its standardized spellings, the *MIT Shakespeare* makes an excellent canvas for searching Shakespeare's texts. While it doesn't have the concordance features of *Open Source Shakespeare*, *MIT*'s standardization allows a user to ctrl+f/cmd+f and quickly find a word or phrase. It must be mentioned that this is a highlight of the *MIT Shakespeare*: ease of access, and ease of navigation are truly its strengths. *MIT Shakespeare* lowers the bar of entry to internet editions, allowing novices of both the technological and Shakespearean ilk to get what they need from Shakespeare's texts.

Returning to the premise with which I opened this discussion, *MIT*'s ubiquity is thanks to its fantastic SEO (search engine optimization) properties. Google search the title of any of Shakespeare's plays and the words "full text" and the first hit is *MIT Shakespeare*. While other digital editions provide texts that have undergone the scrutiny of peer review as well as the rigours of heavy editing, *MIT* remains the layperson's flagship digital text. *OSS*, *ISE*, or *Folger Digital Text*s certainly provide more of what a user might need in the classroom, but none of these resources was available in 1993 when *MIT Shakespeare* first appeared. In that regard, the *MIT Shakespeare* is a resource that has simply outlived its time; it once provided an extremely valuable open access service, but now there are other, more prestigious sites that simply do it better.

The bottom line for *MIT Shakespeare* is that this no-frills edition provides access. It doesn't provide scholarly commentary, glossing, or even intact original spellings, but it does provide the basics. *MIT*'s strengths are its weaknesses, but in a world where a proclivity of features often bogs down websites, there is something to be admired in a workhorse that provides just what's necessary with nothing extra on top.

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