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"SUCH STUFF AS 'TEXTS' ARE MADE ON" Digital Materialities and (Hyper)editing in *The Internet Shakespeare Edition* of *King Lear*

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Abstract – Against the background of increasingly pervasive digital technologies, much scholarly attention has been attracted, over the last few decades, by the impact of digital tools and resources in the field of Shakespearean textual studies, where several issues are still open to debate (Erne 2021; Estill 2019; Lavagnino 2014; Malone, Greatley-Hirsch 2021; Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016; Massai 2021). In the light of a radical rethinking of the 'materiality' of the text, this article more specifically addresses some of the affordances, as well as the possible dangers and prospects of digital scholarly editions of the playwright's works. Focusing on Michael Best's *Internet Shakespeare Edition* of *King Lear* (2001) as a remarkable case in point, the article illustrates how print-based views of textual transmission and editorial mediation are radically reconceptualized within an interactive environment (Driscoll, Pierazzo 2016) where readers are allowed to navigate across the diverse textual variants of the play, including old-spelling transcriptions of the early witnesses, and to access a huge amount of multimedia materials available at the click of the mouse (Best 2011). Considering the paradigm shift from 'editing' to 'archiving' (Desmet 2017; Galey 2014) and the more recent expansion of platforms hosting interoperable digital humanities projects (Jenstad *et al.* 2018; Malone, Greatley-Hirsch 2021), the article eventually illustrates how, in the wake of Best's pioneering model, a digital edition of *King Lear* could be further enhanced with dynamic links to other interoperable resources and tools. Their still partly unexplored hermeneutic potential invites reflection on how the affordances of the digital medium affect our engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's textual heritage.

Keywords: digital scholarly editions; multimedia archives; interactivity; interoperability; *King Lear*.

1. Introduction

"In or about December 2008, the character of literary scholarship changed, and after that you had to either do digital humanities or have an opinion about it" (2014, p. 14): in these terms John Lavagnino has outlined the crucial transformations brought about by the digital turn in literary studies. In

particular, in the field of Shakespearean studies, the advent of digital scholarly editions – to use a broad "umbrella term" (Pierazzo 2014b, p. 17) – has radically reconceptualized the practices of textual transmission and editorial mediation in ways that have attracted increasing academic attention. In 2006, the choice of dedicating an issue of the *Shakespeare Survey* to "Editing Shakespeare" for "the first time in fifty-four years" was itself proof, according to Edward Petcher, of a "concern that has been gaining in currency since at least as early as 1988, when Randall McLeod chose 'Crisis in Editing' as the theme for the annual Conference of Editorial Problems at the University of Toronto" (2006, p. 20). In this context, the last two decades have seen a particularly rich outpouring of studies on the new horizons opened up by Shakespeare digital editing (Best 2009; Carson 2006; Desmet 2017; Dawson 2008; Erne, Kidnie 2004; Estill 2019; Galey 2014; Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016; Gossett 2021; Malone, Greatley-Hirsch 2021; Massai 2021; Werstine 2008), whose far-reaching implications have not been fully explored.

"Is digital simply a new medium for 'old' methods or is it an entirely new methodology?" asks Elena Pierazzo, suggesting that "computer-assisted scholarly editing" is going far beyond the mere aim of "simplifying the traditional editorial work" (2014b, p. 21). More specifically, positing that "digital editions follow a digital paradigm, just as printed editions have been following a paradigm that was shaped by the technical limitations and cultural practices of typography and book printing", Patrick Sahle has identified the main innovation in the hypertextual logic inaugurated by the new medium, where "the pervasive linkage between different contents and parts promote a modularized structure and a module-oriented vision of scholarly editions" (2016, pp. 27, 29). But the critical debate in this field is far from unanimous and different perspectives have emerged in the analysis of the transition from print to digital editing. If it is unquestionable that "electronic editions are able to facilitate dynamic interaction with its contents by and between users" (Greatley-Hirsch 2011, p. 574), it has not gone unnoticed that "the digital medium introduces additional tasks to those involved in print, and complicates the task of producing and maintaining a critical edition. Digital editions are not for the faint of heart" (Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016, p. 107).

On the other hand, some scholars have claimed that the experience of consulting a critical apparatus by means of hypertextual links is neither simpler nor more rewarding for the reader (Lavagnino 2004). Furthermore, the long-established pillars of editorial control have appeared to be dangerously undermined by the advent of a new "Barthesian reader" who is allowed to navigate across the multiple hyperlinks branching from the text in a general "climate of distrust" of the editor (Dawson 2008, p. 161). Many questions are still open to debate. How does the cognitive load entailed by the

process of selecting links impinge on the readers' understanding of the playtexts? And what is the borderline between necessary editorial mediation and undesirable intrusiveness in digital environments?

Without claiming any exhaustiveness in the face of such complex issues, this article addresses some of these questions by focusing on specific cases in point in Shakespearean studies. It suggests that both the potentialities and pitfalls of digital editing may be better explored in the light of a broader research perspective, embracing the theoretical contribution of new media studies on the new 'materiality' of the text and new 'textual spaces'. Applied to the distinctive features of Shakespeare's playtexts, and to the particular problems they raise for the editor, this perspective lets us bring into sharper focus a complex scenario that has been labeled as the "crisis of editing" by some scholars, while also appearing to others as "a golden age of editorial theory" (Fraistat, Flanders 2013, pp. 1-2).

2. Rethinking the materiality of the text: the theoretical background

Seminal studies have long illustrated how the notions of the 'text' and 'textual space' are largely contingent upon specific technological circumstances (Bolter 1991; Eisenstein 1979; Landow 1992, 2003; McLuhan 1962, 1964; Ong 1982). Without overlooking the perils of technological determinism – bearing in mind that "technologies of representation are simultaneously material artefacts and social constructions" (Bolter, Grusin 1999, p. 77) and that texts are neither "simple, monotechnological phenomena" nor the result of "a uniform progression of technologies over time" (Treharne, Willan 2019, p. 8) – it is still undeniable that the advent of the digital medium has redefined both the material practices of writing and the idea of textuality associated to them. "Unlike the special fixity of text reproduced by means of book technology", as George Landow has put it, the "electronic text always has variation, for no one state of version is ever final; it can always be changed" (1992, pp. 58-59, 64). More importantly, the hypertext, which allows readers to select their own paths through a range of *branching* possibilities,[1] has appeared to undermine print-inflected views of linear textuality (Eisenstein 1979) with revolutionary cultural outcomes: it "dissolves the fundamental fixity that provides the foundation of our critical theory and practice" (Landow 1996, p. 33).

[1] The first definition of hypertext dates back to Ted Nelson's *Literary Machines*: "By hypertext I mean non-sequential writing, text that *branches* and allows choices to the reader, best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways" (1981, p. 0/2, my emphasis).

The beginning of the new millennium has seen a rising scholarly interest in the technological factors that, in association with other cultural dynamics,[2] have reshaped the concept of 'text' (Chartier 1995; Finkelstein, McCleery 2013) against the background of "a textual revolution comparable to the one initiated by the invention of moveable type printing in the fifteenth century" (Shillingsburg 2006, p. 4). Regardless of whether we are in the process of closing the "Gutenberg parenthesis" (Pettit 2012) or still in the "late age of print" (Bolter 1991), thus redefining and 'remediating' (Bolter, Grusin 1999) the cultural significance of the book form, digital culture has unquestionably brought about a sort of "secondary orality" (Ong 1982; Pettit 2012) by "rapidly undoing that idealization of stability underpinning the age of print, and returning us to a kind of textuality which may have more in common with the pre-print era" (Sawday, Rhodes 2000, pp. 11-12).

The repercussions of such a new 'materiality' of the text have acquired particular relevance in Shakespearean studies, especially in the light of a growing interest in the textual instability of the playwright's works that started emerging in the late twentieth century (De Grazia, Stallybrass 1993; Orgel 1981; Taylor, Warren 1983). To a large extent, the natural impermanence of the electronic form, free from the rigidity of the printed page, has appeared to offer a suitable instrument through which to retrieve and lay bare the plays' *unstable* textual condition (Murphy 2007; Werstine 2008), bearing traces of their embeddedness in oral and manuscript tradition, as well as of the still imperfect printing technologies of the early modern quarto and folio editions in which we have received them.[3]

More specifically, the hypertext's potential to embed multiple textual layers has provided new editorial opportunities to exhibit Shakespeare's *plural* textuality by allowing the reader to navigate across the diverse versions of a playtext. This has appeared to be in line with the late-twentieth-century paradigm shift from the New Bibliographers' pursuit of the most 'authoritative' text to what was then emerging as the new orthodoxy of 'unediting' (Marcus 1996; McLeod 1982) and to the purposes of new material philology (Cerquiglini 1989). In Leah Marcus' own words, whereas "the idea of textual instability was profoundly disquieting, students now tend to be awed and charmed by the discovery of textual difference", preferring "an array of different texts, rather than a single textual "authority" (1996, p. 27).

[2] George Landow himself has identified a 'convergence' between hypertextuality and the poststructuralist and deconstructionist episteme (1992 and 2003).

[3] Early modern printed books have been shown to be incompatible with the idea of a final, fixed version of the text, crystallized once and for all in the book form: "the text in flux, the text as process, was precisely what Renaissance printing practice preserved" (Orgel 1999, pp. 117-118). For further analysis of the capacity of the digital medium to offer more flexible visualizing solutions for lexical instability in Shakespeare, see Squeo (2019).

As more recent trends in Shakespearean studies testify (Best 2009; Marcus 2007; Shillingsburg 2006), the hypertextual form permits to lay bare textual ambiguities and inconsistencies as "a field of interpretive possibilities" rather than as "a problem to solve" (Galey 2014).

3. The promises and perils of the hypertextual form: The *Internet Shakespeare Edition* of *King Lear*

Nowhere is Shakespeare's unstable and plural textuality better epitomized than in his multiple-text plays, such as *Hamlet*, *Othello*, or *King Lear*. Their long editorial history bears witness to the diverse strategies adopted by scholars to address the thorny issues raised by the different textual versions in which these plays have come down to us. In the case of *King Lear*, as is well known, we have two main texts,[4] the one printed by Nicholas Okes in 1608, known as the First Quarto, approximately 3,100 lines long, and the version of the tragedy included in the First Folio (1623), about 200 lines shorter, each containing parts which are omitted in the other. Thoroughly examined by scholars (Blayney 1982; Taylor-Warren 1983; see also Holland 2002; Knowles 2020; Milne 2002; Stone 1980; Taylor *et al.* 2016; Weis 1993), the numerous differences between Q1 and F1 go far beyond our scope: apart from a series of cuts, they include variants involving single words or entire lines, speech assignments to different characters as well as important changes in punctuation and stage directions. For the specific purpose of our analysis, suffice it to mention here the much quoted example of a textual variation that occurs at the end of the tragedy, in the scene of Lear's death, one of the most memorable moments in the play:

> Lear
> And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life?
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never.
> Pray you, undo this button. Thank you sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips–
> Look there, look there.
> *He dies.*
>
> (*King Lear*, Folio, TLN 3277-84)[5]

[4] The Second Quarto (1619) is largely regarded as a reprint of Q1.

[5] All the quotations are from M. Best (ed.), *King Lear* (Modern, Extended Folio 1623 and Modern, Extended Quarto 1608): https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Lr_FMe/complete/. Through Line Numbers (TLNs) are used in the *ISE* to facilitate navigation between different versions of the same text.

In the king's famous seven-line speech in F1, while lamenting his daughter's death, Lear's last words "Do you see this? Look on her. Look, her lips–/look there" have been read as proof of his belief that Cordelia is coming back to life. These words are omitted in Lear's shorter speech in Q1 where, moreover, the king does not die immediately, but only after uttering the renowned line "Break heart, I prethee break", which is instead attributed to Kent in the Folio.

> Lear
> And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, life.
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life
> And thou no breath at all? Oh, thou wilt come no more.
> Never, never, never.
> Pray you, undo this button. Thank you sir.
> O, o, o, o.
>
> Edgar
> He faints. My lord, my lord!
>
> Lear
> Break heart, I prithee break.
> *[He dies]*
>
> (*King Lear*, Quarto, TLN 3277-87)

The sweeping implications of these textual differences have been explored at length by scholars. Commenting on Lear's death in F1, Drew Milne has remarked on "the swift oscillation between his [the king's] joy that Cordelia may still live, and his grief for her death" (2002, p. 62). Lukas Erne, in turn, has pointed out that "if he dies believing Cordelia to be alive, he also dies in ignorance of her true state, his ignorance forming a last ironic contrast with our own knowledge, a contrast that is of course important in the play as early as the first scene" (2008, p. 91). By contrast, as Rene Weis has noticed, "Q's text affords no such mixed comfort to the audience" (2010, p. 11).

The problem of establishing which version should be offered to the readers and how to enhance their awareness of play's textual multiplicity has long been a crucial scholarly concern, as Lukas Erne (2008), among others, has illustrated. After a deep-rooted editorial tradition that aimed at producing a conflated text as the closest possible approximation to the lost 'original', a new trend inaugurated by Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (1983) has triggered renewed interest in the tragedy's different texts since the last decades of the twentieth century, assuming that Shakespeare himself revised the play for theatrical reasons.[6] This view has inspired many different

[6] Brian Vickers's revisionist hypothesis in his divisive *The One King Lear* (2016) has been challenged by many scholars. See, for instance, Syme (2016).

attempts to approach *The History of King Lear* (1608) and *The Tragedy of King Lear* (1623) as distinct works. Thus, the *Oxford Complete Works* (1986), under the general editorship of Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, famously included both texts. In the early 1990s, the *New Cambridge Series* published them separately – the Folio version in 1992, the Quarto text in 1994 –, a choice which however seemed to establish a form of hierarchy between them, as Erne has noticed, since only the 1992 edition has a full scholarly apparatus with introduction, textual notes, and editorial comment, "while the *History* is confined to the more lightly edited series" (2008, p. 97).

In his extensive exploration of the play's editorial history, the scholar reports many remarkable efforts that were made in the same years to show the tragedy's textual complexity within the inevitable constraints of the printed page. Thus, mostly based on the two texts of the *Oxford Complete Works*, the Norton edition chose to print them in parallel in the 1990s, the *History* on the left and the *Tragedy* on the right side, along with a third conflated text. A similar solution was adopted in 1993 by Longman's *King Lear: A Parallel Text Edition*, edited by René Weis. Also the editions opting for one text testify to noteworthy attempts to signal the different textual provenance of specific parts. In the Folger edition, for instance, pointed brackets indicate lines which are only in Q1, and square brackets those which appear only in F1, whereas Arden 3 offers a conflated version with variant readings in small superscript letters. In 1989, Michael Warren's *The Complete King Lear 1608-1623*, with parallel texts of photographic facsimiles, provided one of the most inventive editorial solutions: besides aligning corresponding sections of the two versions, Warren also offered a separate edition of facsimiles that, as Lukas Erne has pointed out, testify to "the limits of what a print edition can do":

> [they] do not come in codex format but consist of unbound fascicles, loose pieces of paper, one per page, allowing readers to use the edition any way they like, by reading one text sequentially or by putting next to each other the corresponding passages of more than one text. (2008, p. 99)

Seen against this background, the advent of the digital medium has undeniably provided ground-breaking solutions for editorial practice that are unthinkable in print. Predictably, *King Lear*'s complex textual issues have offered a major exploration topic in this field. In the wake of *The Arden Shakespeare CD-ROM: Text and Sources from Shakespeare Studies*, edited by Jonathan Bate in 1997 – to mention one of the first ventures in fixed media formats[7] – the *Cambridge King Lear CD-ROM: Text and Performance Archive* (2000), edited by Christie Carson and Jacky Bratton, provided a

[7] For discussion of other early projects in interactive fixed media, see Carson (2006) and Malone and Greatley-Hirsch (2021).

'Finder Text' (a collation of Q1 and F1) with hyperlinks to images of the tragedy's several performances, alongside a rich apparatus of 'primary sources', 'editorial and critical material' and 'reference materials' (Carson 2006, p. 170).

More recently, much broader horizons have been opened up by the advent of the web-based "second-generation projects in digital editing" (Carson 2006, p. 168), a constantly growing production that does not fit into ready-made taxonomies (Greatley-Hirsch, Craig 2014) and responds to the needs of diverse readerships.[8] Interestingly, also forms of integration between print and digital media have been experimented with, as exemplified by the *New Oxford* and the third edition of *The Norton Shakespeare*, published between 2015 and 2017, which respond to different editorial purposes. Whilst the *New Oxford* digital version does not add new materials, but rather provides a digital transposition of the resources included in the printed section, with a view to enhancing the readers' access to them,[9] *Norton 3* offers additional resources that complement and expand those included in the printed volume,[10] counting variant versions of Shakespeare's texts, among other materials, a choice that is in line with the 'single-text editing' rationale underpinning the whole editorial project (Gossett 2021; Massai 2021).

Against such a constantly expanding scenario, the potentialities of born-digital editions are particularly exemplified by the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* (*ISE*), launched by Michael Best in 1996 and freely available on the

[8] The different features and purposes of extant digital editions of Shakespeare's works go far beyond the scope of these pages. Suffice it here to notice how, alongside web-based projects allowing free access to the public-domain Moby version of the playtexts – such as *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (MIT) begun by Jeremy Hylton in 1993, or the *Open Source Shakespeare* launched by Eric Johnson in 2003 – there are digital scholarly editions that provide fully annotated transcriptions of the playtexts' quarto or folio versions with a rich editorial apparatus. The scenario is manifold, ranging from with *The Internet Shakespeare Editions*, offering open-access peer-reviewed materials, to Gale's *The Shakespeare Collection*, only accessible by subscription, which contains the Arden Shakespeare in electronic form, scholarly introductions and references to several adaptations of the plays. *The Shakespeare Collection* on *Archives Unbound* has largely replaced Gale's previous *Shakespeare Collection* platform: https://libraries.indiana.edu/shakespeare-collection-archives-unbound.

[9] The volumes are meant for different readerships: *The Authorship Companion* and *Critical Reference Edition* are "For Scholars", whereas *The Modern Critical Edition* is meant "For Undergraduates, Lecturers, Actors, Play-lovers". The purchase of each of the printed volumes allows twelve months of free access to the online edition, which is meant "For All Users". The last two volumes, *The Complete Alternative Versions*: *Modern Critical Edition* (in modern spelling) and *The Complete Alternative Versions*: *Critical Reference Edition* (in original spelling) are forthcoming (Taylor *et al.* in press).

[10] Suzanne Gossett has remarked on the risk of making these online materials literally 'disappear': "Textual notes become even more invisible if banished to the ether, where a print reader must actively choose to encounter them, rather than being placed at the back of a volume" (2021, p. 216). The online section includes also links to the *YouTube Norton Shakespeare* channel that allows access to online video materials.

Web. Currently staticized by the University of Victoria while it is updated to join the platform *LEMDO* (*Linked Early Modern Drama Online*),[11] *ISE* offers a remarkable case study which allows us to shed light on the several issues at stake in Shakespeare digital editing. In the case of *King Lear* (2001), edited by Best himself, the 'modern', 'extended modern' and 'old-spelling transcription' of both Q1 (1608) and F1 (1623), as well as the 'old-spelling transcription' of Q2 (1619), are "arranged in layers with the modern spelling text, the surface text and the old spelling transcription and facsimiles a click away" (2008, pp. 222-223). Within this hypertextual space, the reader is thus free to jump to a specific line, using the Through Line Numbers field, or to open any of the textual versions of the tragedy from the beginning. Best himself illustrates the advantages of the hypertextual form that

> makes the display of variant editions more visually intuitive […] the screen can show through parallel windows or color-coded text a fully inclusive edition where variant passages can be seen together or separately, and where readers can manipulate the result to create their own preferred or conflated text. (2011, p. 572)

Furthermore, choosing "Show variants" or "Display variant inline" from the left hand tool-box, the selected textual variants – as they appear in a wider range of other editions – are displayed either underlined (Fig. 1), or side by side, in different colors (Fig. 2). In both cases, pop-up windows may be opened to reveal the variants' textual provenance. Lear's final speech may be thus visualized in the following display modes that can be changed at the click of the mouse:

[11] *ISE* (emeritus coordinating editor Michael Best) will join the platform *LEMDO* (coordinating editors Janelle Jenstad and Brett Greatley-Hirsch). For further details, see https://lemdo.uvic.ca/.

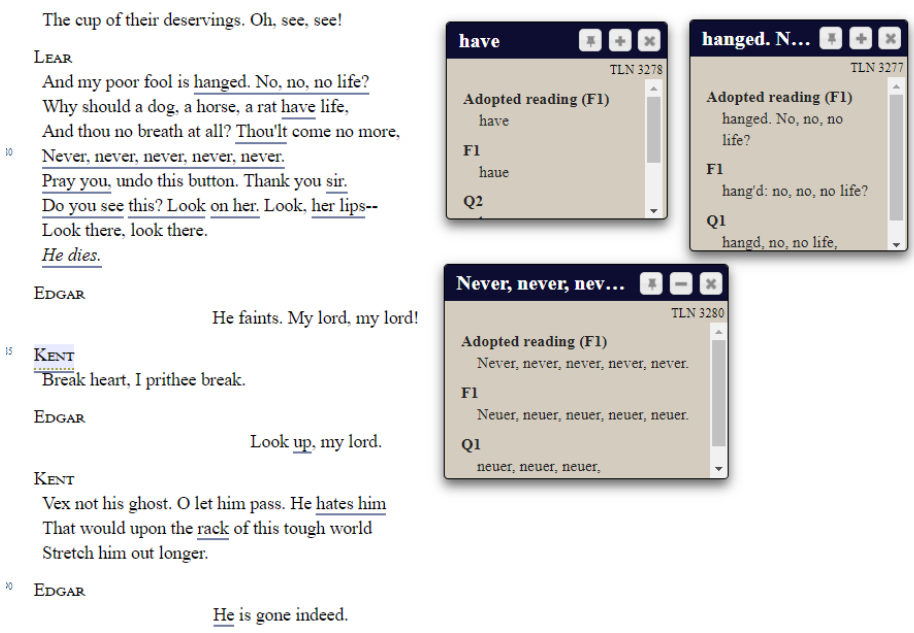

Figure 1
W. Shakespeare 2001, *King Lear* (Modern, Folio), Ed. Michael Best, in M. Best (emeritus coordinating editor), *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. Staticized by the University of Victoria 2018. Web. Accessed August 10, 2021. ise.uvic.ca
https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Lr_FM/scene/5.3/

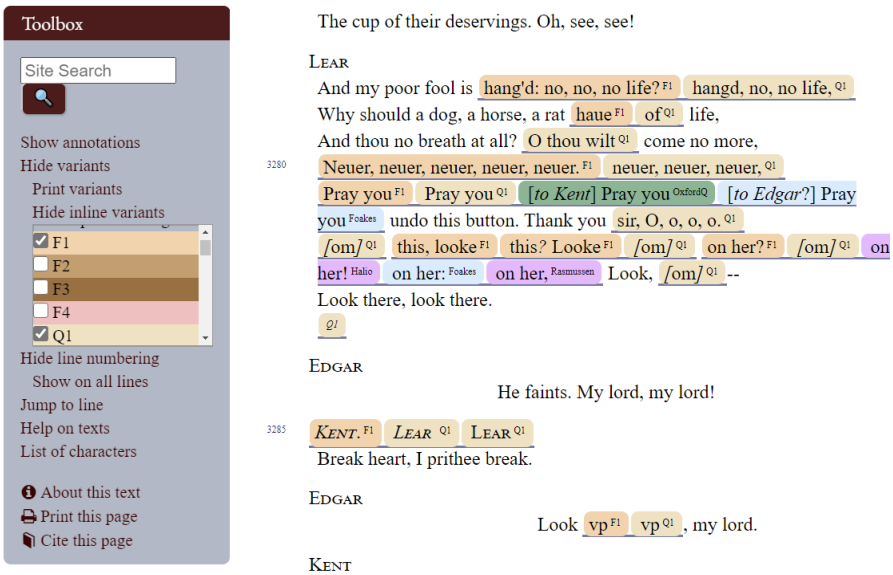

Figure 2
W. Shakespeare 2001, *King Lear* (Modern, Folio), Ed. Michael Best, in M. Best (emeritus coordinating editor), *Internet Shakespeare Editions*. Staticized by the University of Victoria 2018. Web. Accessed August 10, 2021. ise.uvic.ca
https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Lr_FM/scene/5.3/

The multi-layered space of Best's interactive edition encourages us to consider the play's textual versions as equivalent alternatives, thus undermining any hierarchical order between them, as the scholar points out: "my approach in editing *King Lear*, with the creation of two base and two extended texts, is effectively agnostic about the primacy of the two versions and makes no assumptions about the nature of the revision that created the differences between them" (2001, online). This approach largely responds to what Leah Marcus has categorized as the *unediting* purpose of exhibiting the plays' unstable textuality, "creat[ing] editions that stimulate readers to experience elements of 'undecidability' in their reading of Shakespeare" (2007, p. 142).

It is crucial to consider how such an editorial solution affects the hermeneutic potential of the scene. How does it add, for instance, to the reader's understanding of Lear's "swift oscillation" (Milne 2002, p. 62) between joy and grief? No doubt, as some scholars have argued, we also need to reflect on what kind of reader, or 'user' (Fazel, Geddes 2017) can mostly benefit from these 'textual performances'. In this sense, we should take into account also the risks of "amplifying the potential dangers of a radical indeterminacy" (Drakakis 2007, p. 232) within a context in which the line between editing and unediting, appropriate editorial support and unnecessary interference with the reader's textual experience, becomes increasingly difficult to draw. After all, Leah Marcus herself has admitted that an edition embracing all the textual potentialities of a play would be "so formless as to be unusable in practice for all but the most sophisticated readers" (2007, p. 142).

Nor are the solutions adopted to approach Shakespeare's textual multiplicity the sole thorny aspects that have drawn scholarly attention. Indeed, also the possibility to include theoretically unlimited levels of annotation and commentary – which the user may choose whether to show or hide with one click – has appeared to bring about both promises and potential challenges in digital scholarly editions. To a large extent, *ISE* epitomizes what Jerome McGann identified as the *hyperediting* model in "hypertexts [that] allow one to navigate through large masses of documents and to connect these documents, or parts of the documents, in complex ways" (2001, p. 57). In Best's *King Lear*, in particular, the main editorial apparatus is structured in three distinct levels responding to the readers' different interests and, accordingly requiring different forms of editorial mediation: "The first level is a simple gloss or explanatory phrase; the second is a full annotation to the level of an edition like the Arden; the third is reserved for full discussions of an important point, of the kind that might become an appendix in a print edition." (Best 2007, pp. 159-160). Additionally, the site hosts a selection of digital facsimiles (including two quartos and four folios, along with the editions by Rowe, Pope and Theobald), a wide range of extracts from the sources – comprising Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and*

Ireland, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and the anonymous *History of King Leir* – several documents from the literary, political, and social context, as well as performance materials related to *King Lear*'s film and stage adaptations.

A 'professional' reader interested in textual issues can thus currently choose to dwell on F1 and Q1 old-spelling transcriptions, and to explore the digital facsimiles of those editions, while a reader with different interests can opt for the modern version of the playtext provided as a "quick start", then following, for one, the links to the *Shakespeare in Performance* section, featuring images of several stage and film adaptations. Similarly, whereas the "Textual Introduction" offers an extensive scholarly examination of the play's textual problems and of the theoretical principles underlying its complex editorial history, the link to the more informative *Life & Times* website section provides a general outline of the social, historical, cultural and literary issues related to the tragedy.

Allowing access to such a huge variety of materials in interactive spaces that are clearly unimaginable on the printed page, Best's edition exemplifies what have appeared to be both the unquestionable advantages and the potential threats of the digital turn in editing. It has been argued that, whilst broadening the user's horizons by multiplying the reading paths, the hypertextual form is "far from being a universal panacea for all woes caused by printing technology", and attention has been drawn to the "new cognitive problems" raised by such flexible visualizations that "encourage a continuous switching between various points of views on the texts" (Apollon, Bélise 2014, p. 111). Undeniably, key issues should be taken into account when assessing what is gained and what is lost by allowing users to navigate across Shakespeare's textual variants and a wide range of supplementary information. Indeed, if it is beyond dispute that new generations of digital native students and scholars will increasingly expect innovative textual encounters with Shakespeare in the Web, one should not overlook the problem of establishing the amount of "information readers can reasonably be expected to absorb while simultaneously working their way through a play" (Erne, Kidnie 2004, p. 13). In this sense, too many links requiring decision-making processes while reading have proved to result in excessive cognitive load, often reducing textual comprehension (Madrid *et al.* 2009).

4. The archival turn: towards new hermeneutic horizons

To a large extent, the ongoing reconfiguration of editorial practice has appeared to go far beyond what an *edition* may be reasonably expected to do, as testified by a lively debate in which terminological discrepancies often bear traces of deeper theoretical divergences. If Peter Shillingsburg has introduced the broader notion of "knowledge site" (2006, p. 88) and Kenneth Price proposes the definition of "thematic research collection" (2009, online), it can be argued that a general reconceptualization of editing in terms of *archiving* has emerged in the last few years (Dillen 2019). Indeed, many individual projects are currently designed in line with the trend identified by the MLA Scholarly Editions Committee of a few years ago: "a key trend in scholarly editing itself is toward the creation of an edition as a single perspective on a much-larger-scale text archive" (Young 2015, online). Needless to say, such distinctions remain fluid within a background in which "some projects that started by calling themselves editions have later changed their name to archive" […] and "some projects that started by calling themselves archives have later changed their name to edition" (Sahle 2016, p. 34).

Overall, the archive paradigm has appeared to be in tune with Shakespeare's plural textuality (Massai 2004, p. 103) and to provide, as Alan Galey has pointed out in *The Shakespearean Archive*, "a useful set of metaphors for thinking about the transmission and preservation of literary texts like Shakespeare's" considering, above all, "the degree to which his unstable textual archive is made to bear the weight of cultural heritage in Western tradition" (2014, pp. 1, 3). The MIT *Shakespeare Electronic Archive* – where digital versions of the playtexts and of primary materials are dynamically interlinked – demonstrates, among other instances, how useful the archival logic can be for approaching Shakespeare drama.

Many other questions arise, however, which are still at the core of the debate. In some measure, the archival turn has appeared to entail a weakening of the editorial function. Assuming that "in the future, an electronic Shakespeare edition will be treated more as an archive for searching than as a way of reading the plays from beginning to end" (Best 2007, pp. 154-155), it has been argued that the editor runs the risk of being reduced to a mere "redactor, mediator, and online publisher" whose only function is "to facilitate wider public use" (Apollon, Bélise 2014, p. 112). On the other hand, however, it has not gone unnoticed that digital archives undeniably require new, and more complex editorial strategies in order to guide the readers across their intricate interactive spaces.

Of course, a distinction is necessary between what Christy Desmet defines "crowd-sourced websites" where "anyone, anywhere, can upload any clip that they can lay their hands on and that catches their fancy", and

"scholarly archives" that are carefully planned and shaped by scholars" (2017, online). If it is true that "to edit entails *making choices*" (Paul 2014, p. 183, my emphasis), it is beyond dispute that the Shakespearean scholarly archives that are proliferating on the Web vindicate that archives *are* "edited", as Alan Galey has put it (2016, online). Wide-ranging though an archive may aspire to be, it necessarily requires, to begin with, a selection of the virtually limitless available materials in order to offer an acceptable amount of information (Massai 2004, p. 102). Neither is the very notions of archive, as such, incompatible with the 'authoritative' position of an invisible *power* that governs it. As Derrida reminds us: the word archive derives from the Greek *arkheion*, the house of the archons, who "were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law […]. They do not only ensure the physical security of what is deposited and of the substrate. They are also accorded the hermeneutic right and competence. They have the power to interpret the archives" (1996, pp. 9-10).

But what is more important, and crucial to the theoretical perspective underpinning this article, is that the advent of new digital technologies significantly "reconfigures the agents and activities that define our textual culture" (Deegan, Sutherland 2009, p. 63). In this light, it cannot go unnoticed how the 'hyperediting' and 'archiving' models that are emerging in web-based environments inaugurate thoroughly new editorial strategies in line with a radical reshaping of print-inflected views of text, author, reader and, accordingly, of the editorial function.[12] As George Landow already claimed in the early 1990s, the "chains or trials of links" in new hypertextual spaces undeniably respond to the editor's criteria of relevance: they "might themselves constitute a new form of scholarly writing, and annotations in the form of such *guided tours* might conceivably become part of the future scholarly edition" (1992, p. 73). More recently, Michael Best has identified a new medium-specific form of 'multilinear' scholarly writing in hypertextual environments. In opposition to the traditional "linear argument leading to an overall thesis", where "all the traditional rhetorical devices to persuade will be used to claim that the argument is indeed conclusive" (2009, p. 36), Best has envisaged the birth of a "new generation of scholars, for whom the conventions of hypertextuality are instinctive", and who will be able to create a new "kind of criticism that uses the electronic medium to present alternatives rather than single lines of argument" (2009, p. 36).

[12] Furthermore, "[i]n addition to traditional textual critical skills, the publisher of a digital edition requires technical expertise in programming and software development, textual encoding, interface design, methods of digitizing analogue materials, and digital content management" (Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016, p. 107).

Today, the great affordances of the digital medium in this respect emerge particularly when considering the growing number of digital editions and archives whose links redirect users to external sources, to other "visuals, images, videos, blogs, and online web pages that host additional reading content (often replete with their own hyperlinks)" (Fazel, Geddes 2017, p. 2). This leads us to reflect on the still partly unexplored potential of interoperable digital projects and resources that are gaining increasing scholarly attention. "Broadly speaking", as Marina Buzzoni explains, interoperability is "the ability to share information in computing environments […] thus enhancing the possibility of interaction within the scientific community in time and extension" (2016, p. 60). Positing that "no project is an island […], as John Donne might have put it, were he alive today", Laura Estill and Andie Silva have remarked on "the importance of understanding digital resources as part of a larger, networked community" (2018, p. 141) within the more specific field of Shakespearean studies. Undeniably, a rising number of digital projects on early modern literature and culture are establishing connections with fully-searchable corpora, electronic databases, archives and bibliographies, thus substantiating the trend towards growing forms of interoperability in this area.[13]

In the light of these observations, it is worth bearing in mind that *ISE* itself is one of the outcomes of the same principles inspiring the *Renaissance Knowledge Base* (*RKB*), a huge computer-searchable library assembling primary and secondary sources related to the early modern period. Launched in the 1990s, *RKB* responded to the scholars' need to "navigate and explore [the] accumulated knowledge" in early modern studies:

> […] considerable related work was soon to follow, some by the principals of the RKB project and much by those beyond it, such as […] Michael Best (*Internet Shakespeare Editions*), Gregory Crane (*Perseus Digital Library*), Patricia Fumerton (*English Broadside Ballad Archive*), Ian Lancashire (*Lexicons of Early Modern English*), and Greg Waite (*Textbase of Early Tudor English*). (Siemens *et al.* 2011, online)

At present, the extant links between the *Internet Shakespeare Editions* and other projects, such as the *Queen's Men Editions*, are evidence of an important cross-referencing trend, which is most notably testified by design to include the two sibling websites within the broader frame of the above-mentioned platform

[13] The *Map of Early Modern London* (*MoEML*) directed by Janelle Jenstad, which "is comprised of seven distinct interoperable projects", provides a remarkable instance in this regard. See website for details: http://mapoflondon.uvic.ca

LEMDO.[14] Interestingly, while navigating across the sources of *King Lear*, the reader of Best's edition can currently access the anonymous *History of King Leir* in the *Queen's Men Editions* website. Under the general editorship of Helen Ostovich, it includes two parallel sections for the play, respectively edited by Andrew Griffin and Peter Cockett: the former offering an old-spelling version of the 1605 playtext and a modernized one; the latter allowing access to the production archives and videos of the 2006 *Shakespeare and the Queen's Men Project*. Thus, while reading the modern version of the playtext, the user can access a video for each of the thirty-two scenes by selecting the corresponding link (Fig. 3). This is in line with the 'performance as research' principles underpinning the overall project (Ostovich *et al.* 2009) which places, as the website points out, "the production and performance of plays at the center of the research endeavor as an important and dynamic complement to library research on surviving texts" (online).

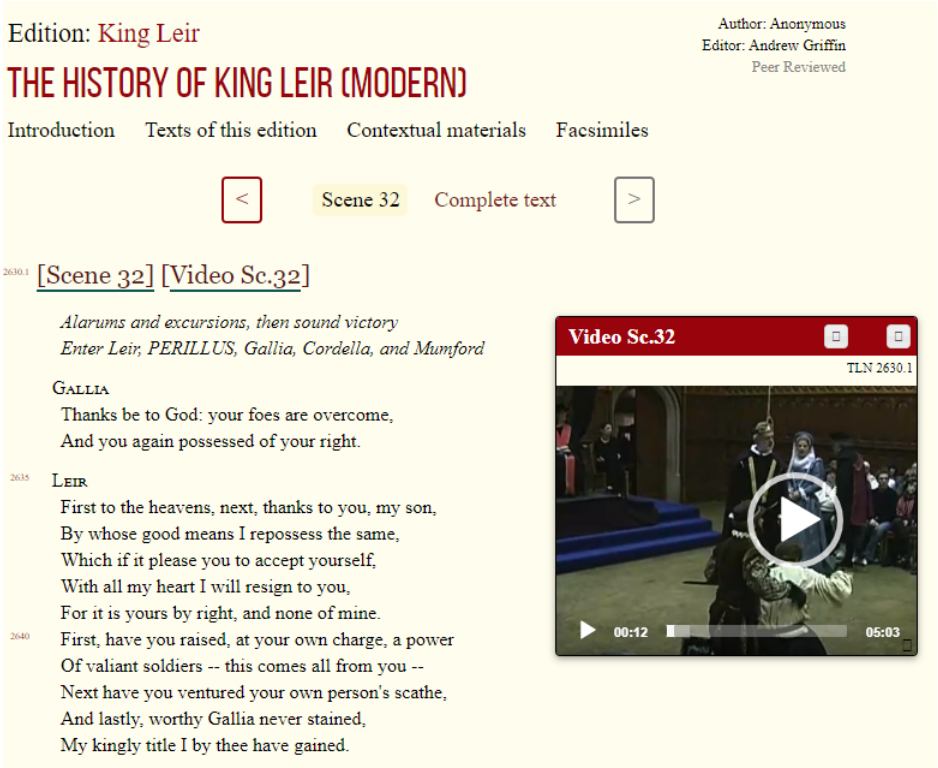

Figure 3
Anon., *King Leir* (Modern), in *Queen Men's Editions*. Gen. Eds. Helen Ostovich (text), Peter Cockett (performance), and Andrew Griffin (text). Staticized by the University of Victoria 2018. Web. Accessed August 10, 2021: http://qme.uvic.ca/edition/Leir/

[14] Like *ISE*, also *QME* is currently staticized by the University of Victoria while the website is updated to join the platform *LEMDO* (*Linked Early Modern Drama Online*). *Digital Renaissance Editions* (*DRE*) will also join *LEMDO*: https://lemdo.uvic.ca/

Begun as a "research-creation exercise in theatrical history" (Cockett 2009, p. 229), *QME* offers ground-breaking responses to the problems raised by the "profoundly complicated relationship that exists between script and performance", and provides a remarkable experiment in interdisciplinary approaches to early modern theatre: it "make[s] visible the productive tensions that emerge when textual editors come together with performance-oriented theatre scholars and practitioners to produce a digital edition" (Griffin 2014, p. 85).

It is tempting to imagine how dynamic links to other external digital resources and tools could enhance the affordances of a digital scholarly edition of Shakespeare's *King Lear* in the wake of Michael Best's pioneering model. New links directing the reader to Peter Donaldson's *Global Shakespeare Video and Performance Archive*, for instance, that currently includes various productions of the tragedy from different continents, could open up new perspectives on the performance of the text.[15] Similarly, a digital edition exploring the affordances of a ground-breaking visualization tool like *Simulated Environment for Theatre* (SET) would help users appreciate the relationship between the playtext and its potential on stage by means of a 3D "Stage view" where coloured avatar actors move on the screen, alongside the text, on scale models of early modern playhouses.[16] Thus, the crucial implications of the different textual versions of Lear's death illustrated above could be exemplified also by considering their staging potentialities.[17] This aspect acquires major relevance considering how "the digital edition is particularly well suited to the needs of the performance edition, and, indeed, resolves some of the longstanding challenges for editors wishing to edit for performance" (Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016, p. 108).

From a different perspective, with a view to offering insights into *King Lear*'s linguistic and poetic features – considering, for instance, how the semantic areas of madness, chaos, vision and blindness are woven into the play's complex linguistic texture – specific polysemic words in the playtext

[15] The "Global *King Lear* in Performance" section, in the "Study Modules" of Donaldson's archive, currently redirects the reader to the Folio version of the tragedy in the *ISE* website.

[16] Launched by a team of researchers in graphic design, theatre and digital humanities from several Universities across Canada, *SET* challenges the long-established "primary ontological integrity" of the text as the unique reference point for readers: its main focus is on "the process of moving from text to performance", and above all on the constant interaction between them. See Roberts-Smith *et al.* (2013), online.

[17] A remarkable model of a different solution in this respect is provided by *Richard Brome Online*, an online edition of the Caroline dramatist's texts, which "explore[s] their theatricality visually" by commissioning and recording performances of specific scenes: the short video clips included in the website, acted by members of the Royal Shakespeare Company, illustrate the staging potentialities of selected dramatic moments, "which are explored in workshop with professional actors and a director". See website: http://www.dhi.ac.uk/brome.

could be profitably hyperlinked to a corpus-based tool of analysis like *LEME* (*Lexicons of Early Modern English*), which displays the lexical mobility of single words in Early Modern English over a chosen time span.[18] And still broader horizons could be disclosed by offering the user direct access to digitally-assisted tools of 'quantitative' reading. The project of a digital edition of *King Lear* including also a collection of precompiled corpora with guided search options could lay bare aspects of the text that would be hard to perceive at the level of close reading. In this way, users could be guided to explore the occurrence of particular lists or clusters of words in the play by comparison with their occurrence in the entire corpus of Shakespeare's works, or in a reference corpus of early modern texts within specific domains of interest, thus experimenting with innovative ways of approaching the play that go far beyond traditional concordances and unquestionably open new reading perspectives.[19]

5. Conclusion

The virtually boundless possibilities of the digital medium have prompted Shakespearean scholars to imagine futuristic scenarios:

> Imagine a corpus of videos of stage and screen performances of Shakespeare. Imagine that the script/play-text of each of these videos has been transcribed and is fully searchable, such that a user searching for 'love' is able to quickly navigate between instances of the word across the entire corpus, and therefore able to quickly compare different film and stage interpretations. Imagine the inclusion of additional layers of metadata – bibliographical information, as well as details and observations on technical aspects of the performances, such as lighting, music and sound; set design and location; costuming; camera angle; special effects; etc. – all tied to the video in time-specific, fully searchable utterances. (Greatley-Hirsch *et al.* 2009, p. 7)

Whether, and to what extent, such results will be achieved is clearly hard to foresee. Admittedly, the convergence of diverse tools and digital resources is "not only possible – because of the flexibility of the medium – but is already happening" (Jenstad *et al*. 2018, p. 4) and this promises to bring us closer to the integration of the two typologies of digital projects identified by Ray

[18] For more in-depth analysis of the potential for convergence between *ISE* and *LEME*, see Jenstad *et al.* (2018, pp. 3-4).

[19] *Text Analysis Portal for Research* (PAoR archive: http://tapor.ca/home) is mentioned in the *ISE* "Making Links" section. For other instances in this respect, see the *DocuScope*-based "prosthetic reading" (Hope, Witmore 2004), or open-source tools for corpus-based analysis, such as *Voyant Tools* or *#Lancsbox* software. The affordances of a corpus linguistics/stylistics approach to Shakespeare are investigated at length in Maristella Gatto's article in this volume.

Siemens, namely the *hypertext edition*, facilitating "a reader's interaction with the apparatus (textual, critical, and otherwise) that traditionally accompanies scholarly editions", and the *dynamic texts*, offering "text-retrieval and analysis software" (1998, online). Nonetheless, as Brett Greatley-Hirsch and Janelle Jenstad themselves have aptly pointed out, it would be a mistake to underestimate the thorny issues that still need to be faced in the practice of digital editing: unquestionably, "the alluring promises of digital editions blind many would-be editors to the sober realities of the undertaking" (2016, p. 107). Indeed, digital projects and tools raise problems of websites maintenance, cost and technological obsolescence, among others, which have been only partially addressed[20] and deserve particular attention in the light of the growing interoperability of web-based resources.

No doubt, within an experimentation field that is still in its infancy, each editorial project seems to be defined by a somewhat intrinsic *prototype* condition that makes it hardly comparable to any other project: "while the print technology has developed standard editorial templates and formats, more or less constrained by the physical boundaries of pages and bindings, the digital medium is still experimenting with the available possibilities and is not limited by space" (Pierazzo 2014b, p. 39). But what is certainly emerging within this rapidly evolving scenario is a shift from a print-based notion of the 'edition' as an individual, final *product* to a web-based view of 'editing' as an ongoing collaborative *process.* Without disregarding that "collaboration is one of the most difficult aspects of the digital world" and that "there is little tradition for it in the humanities" (Shillingsburg 2017, p. 136), it is a matter of fact that "the digital edition is not hermetically sealed. It invites interaction, correction, and extension" (Greatley-Hirsch, Jenstad 2016, p. 111).

Considering that the capacity for continuous revision is one of the most remarkable features of digital projects, diverse models for dynamic interaction involving not only scholars but also expert readers/users have been explored with different purposes. As early as 2005, Paul Eggert introduced the notion of *work-site*, meant as a place where 'work' is constantly 'under construction' as the result of cooperative meaning-making processes: "[t]he work-site is text-construction site for the editor and expert reader; and it is the site of study of the work (of its finished textual versions and their annotation) for the first-time reader, as well as any position in between" (2005, p. 433). In the same years, Peter Shillingsburg proposed the concept of *knowledge site* as a collaborative digital environment:

[20] The *Shakespeare Quarto Archives* website, for instance, was withdrawn in April 2020 as "the technologies which it is built with have reached end-of-life": www.quartos.org. The SSHRC-funded *Endings Project* is currently creating guidelines, "policies and recommendations for digital scholarship practitioners" to build sustainable digital humanities projects with long-lasting resources (Carlin *et al.* 2016, online).

> […] a space and a shape for developing electronic editions that will serve not only as archives but as knowledge sites that would enable the kind of reading imagined. The space and shape I will try to describe is one where textual archives serve as a base for scholarly editions which serve in tandem with every other sort of literary scholarship to create knowledge sites of current and developing scholarship that can also serve as pedagogical tools in an environment where each user can choose an entry way, select a congenial set of enabling contextual materials, and emerge with a personalized interactive form of the work (serving the place of the well-marked and dog-eared book), always able to plug back in for more information or different perspectives. (2006: 88)

The more recent academic debate in this field has highlighted the radical reconceptualization of the role of the reader in digital environments as both *user* (Fazel, Geddes 2017) and *coworker* (Rasmussen 2016) and it has been shown how editorial practice may benefit from the contribution of content created collaboratively by web-communities.[21]

Regardless, however, of whether we are moving towards the integration of print and digital formats that "can in turn enhance usability and versatility of both paper and online editions" (Massai 2021, p. 256), or rather towards the further enhancement of born-digital editions and interoperable resources, also within collaborative spaces – which is hard to predict – it is the intrinsic flexibility of the new digital 'textual spaces' and their new 'materiality' that deserve particular attention. As this article has attempted to illustrate, it is this flexibility that lets us envisage promising directions for the development of Shakespearean editing. Stanley Wells has imagined a near future in which new editions will adjust to the diverse objectives of editors, those "who have in mind readers whose interest is mainly academic, who see the plays as primarily literary texts" and those who "conceive that their editions will be read by theatre-goers, and by students who are encouraged to think of the plays in theatrical terms, and may even be used by actors" (Wells 2016, p. 414). In the wake of these observations, it is tempting to imagine how, further improving the affordances of current digital models, the same editorial project could be designed to adapt to the different backgrounds, needs and interests of diverse readerships, offering various perspectives, levels of in-depth analysis and possibilities of 'active' engagement with the text.

[21] The *Social Edition of the Devonshire Manuscript* (*BL MS 17,492*) directed by Ray Siemens offers a remarkable instance in this respect. Published as a Wikibook in 2015, it "brings communities together to engage in conversation around a text formed and reformed through an ongoing, iterative, public editorial process." https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/The_Devonshire_Manuscript

Such a project would blur, or at least problematize, the rigid boundaries between the traditional categories we are familiar with: the *performance* edition, the "*reading* edition without any hint about a potentially complex tradition", the *critical* edition "with a critical apparatus and extensive commentary", and the "*documentary* edition (or editions) possibly accompanied by many facsimiles to allow inspection of the original documents by themselves" (Pierazzo 2014a, p. 8 my emphasis). And if it is true that "the changes in the way we work (the *heuristics* of editing)" always imply "also changes in the understanding of scholarly editing and of the texts we edit (the *hermeneutics* of editing)" (Driscoll, Pierazzo 2016, p. 3), the ongoing evolution promises to disclose new hermeneutic horizons in the study of early modern drama. By redefining both reading habits and editorial practices, as illustrated in these pages, the new 'materiality' of the digital medium affects our engagement with and understanding of Shakespeare's textual heritage.

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