

Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



Shakespeare Quartos Archive. Image Collection

Matteo Pangallo

Volume 42, Number 3, Summer 2019

Situating Conciliarism in Early Modern Spanish Thought
Situier conciliarisme dans la pensée espagnole de la première
modernité

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1066364ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066364ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Pangallo, M. (2019). Review of [Shakespeare Quartos Archive. Image Collection]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 42(3), 170–173. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1066364ar>

© All Rights Reserved Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies / Société canadienne d'études de la Renaissance; Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society; Toronto Renaissance and Reformation Colloquium; Victoria University Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2019

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

necessities. These reviews highlight the range of existing digital Shakespeare texts from “feature-lite” (*MIT Shakespeare*, reviewed by Rosvally) to a “dizzying array” of features (*Internet Shakespeare Editions*, reviewed by Kolkovich).

As editors, scholars, and students learn to use and navigate online Shakespeare editions, these editions will certainly change and new editions will appear. And, indeed, technological advances, such as the rise of mobile computing, also facilitate and in some cases necessitate change. The projects reviewed here have, in some cases, already undergone rebuilds, which signals the importance of evaluating and re-evaluating digital projects as they evolve and as the online landscape also changes.⁶ Just as multiple reviews of monographs and critical editions benefit the scholarly community, multiple reviews of digital editions at different stages in their life-cycles can help scholars assess existing resources. *Early Modern Digital Review* will continue to offer a space for the important work of evaluating digital projects related to Shakespeare—and beyond.

Ennis, Stephen C., Neil Fraistat, Richard Kuhta, and Richard Ovenden, project dirs.

Shakespeare Quartos Archive. Image Collection.

Oxford: Bodleian Library of the University of Oxford / Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library / College Park, MD: Maryland Institute of Technology in the Humanities of the University of Maryland, 2009. Accessed 12 February 2019.

quartos.org.

When, ten years ago, the *Shakespeare Quartos Archive* (SQA) was launched, its creators described it as an extension of the 2004 *Shakespeare in Quarto* website hosted by the British Library (BL, bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare). The BL’s older site allows users to view, side-by-side, a page from two unique copies out of 107 copies of all twenty-one Shakespeare plays printed in quarto before 1642. In its design and interface, the BL’s site is cumbersome and awkward, though

6. For additional examples of reviews of online Shakespeare texts, see, for instance, Mahler (note 2, above); Murphy (note 3, above); and Michael Ulyot, “The Raw and the Cooked: A Review of The New Oxford Shakespeare,” *Spenser Review* 48.2.18 (Spring–Summer 2018): english.cam.ac.uk/spenseronline/review/item/48.2.18-1.

the quality of its images far surpasses the bitonal scans of the plays available on *Early English Books Online* (eebo.chadwyck.com).

To describe SQA as an “extension” of the BL’s site is to sell it short. In truth, SQA represents the promise of the best of what digital resources might offer for the study and teaching of Shakespeare’s plays in print. In its final form, SQA aims to provide access to at least one copy of every edition of a Shakespeare play printed in quarto before 1642. The archive hosts high-resolution images of the entire book (cover to cover and edge to edge, as scholars interested in provenance or marginalia will be pleased to learn), in several viewable or downloadable formats (XML, HTML, or JPG), along with TEI transcriptions for full-text searches.

The tools provided by SQA go far beyond the old side-by-side images of the BL site or simple full-text searches: not only are they more elegantly and efficiently designed, they are far more varied and will appeal to a greater range of potential users. The site’s tools include, for example, the ability to mark and tag images with annotations that can be kept private or shared in a kind of social network of textual study. Users can also create “exhibits” of images, or, to the delight of actors, cue scripts. The teaching applications for these tools are clear: students and instructors can collaborate to explore the printed page of the play, exchange and comment upon one another’s discoveries, and produce end-product projects, entirely within the SQA ecosystem.

For textual critics and those interested in bibliographic study of the plays, the BL’s old side-by-side methodology has been augmented with an ingenious overlay tool that allows users to set a semi-transparent page of text over the same page in a different copy of the same edition, resulting in a kind of virtual version of the Hinman Collator (with less eye-strain, thankfully, because users have the ability to modulate the opacity level). Indeed, making available on a single, free (Creative Commons-licensed) site multiple copies of a single edition of a play will help advance what is surely one of the most important functions of such digital repositories: democratizing and expanding scholarship so that researchers at all institutions, including those that lack sufficient resources, can gain access to the primary materials of our discipline. As the ease with which scholars (and students) can gain such access increases, it will become all the more important for our undergraduate and graduate programs alike to reinvigorate the teaching of bibliography, book history, and textual criticism.

Beyond its user features, *SQA* also represents the best of digital humanities projects in its inception. Of necessity, building *SQA*'s image set and array of tools required international collaboration between scholars, editors, librarians, archivists, digital humanists, actors, and educators from the Bodleian Library, the Folger Library, the University of Maryland's Institute for Technology in the Humanities, the British Library, Edinburgh University Library, the Huntington Library, the National Library of Scotland, the Shakespeare Institute, and a number of other institutions, including the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Globe Theatre.

While *SQA* thus appears to be positioned to be one of the most substantively transformative digital resources in the study and teaching of Shakespeare in print, some problems loom over the project. Some of these are technical; for example, the full-text search functionality of the transcriptions is limited to precise spellings. Not all of the controls within the archive's frames view are intuitive, nor is it always easy to move about the frames. Other problems, however, are more substantial. The exclusive focus on quartos omits the eighteen plays that were only printed in the 1623 folio and *Pericles*, which first appeared in the 1664 folio. The decision to restrict the resource by imposing the arbitrary parameters of book format risks obscuring for users the fact that many of the quarto plays are substantively different in the folio, and rather undercuts the true potential of a digital "archive" of an author's work in print. Indeed, the most useful tool of all for expanding the discipline and correcting for the canonical dominance of Shakespeare on our understanding of early modern theatre and play printing would be a resource that challenges the dominance of the single author as the primary organizing principle for digital archives and incorporates the work of other playwrights as well. Such a resource—certainly costly, and certainly beyond the *SQA*'s remit—would allow for the comparison of plays in print across the boundary of authorship and so would be a more accurate way of understanding early modern play printing. The boundary of authorship, after all, though historically venerated by scholars, does not reflect the collaborative nature of play-making and play-printing in the period.

Perhaps the most significant problem facing *SQA*, however, is neither technical nor related to its organizing principle. The site's initial funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities came to an end in December 2009 and the project apparently came to an end before it could be completed.

The last entry in the site's record of "Known Issues" states that its makers are "working to resolve this problem [some corrupted images] by the end of the week (11/20/09)." Throughout the site, terms like "pilot" and "prototype" make it clear that the design and tools available now should not be considered the final product, but there is also no evidence that the product is still under development or, indeed, will ever move beyond this perpetual "pilot" stage. The site is visually attractive, but having been built a decade ago, it is not integrative with new technologies, such as smartphones, and dead links litter some pages. Its most advanced "Browser Requirements" call for using Firefox version 3.5 or Internet Explorer 8: at present, the latest version of Explorer is 11 and the latest of Firefox is 69. Even the "reCaptcha" tool on the site's "Contact" page has expired.

In its present form, SQA offers images and transcriptions of thirty-two of the five early quartos of *Hamlet*. Unfortunately, this "present form" is the form SQA last took in 2009, before it was evidently frozen in cyber-time. If the project's statement of objectives is ever fulfilled, it will be one of the most important and useful digital resources for teaching and studying the Shakespearean printed play. But until that time, visitors to the SQA site will likely feel as if they are standing alongside Leontes as Paulina, in *The Winter's Tale* (a folio play, of course, which the SQA would not include even if it were completed), laments before the seeming-statue of Hermione:

As she lived peerless,
So her dead likeness, I do well believe,
Excels whatever yet you looked upon
Or hand of man hath done. Therefore I keep it
Lonely, apart. But here it is. Prepare
To see the life as lively mocked as ever
Still sleep mocked death. Behold, and say 'tis well. (5.3.14–20)

MATTEO PANGALLO

Virginia Commonwealth University