
Annotating Electronic Texts of Shakespeare

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There are many texts of Shakespeare's plays online, but most are entirely without notes of any kind, which makes them only minimally useful to the general reader or beginning student of Shakespeare. There is a need for reliable and fully annotated electronic texts.

Currently there are only a handful of annotated Shakespeare texts online, and they all indicate the presence of a note by making a word or phrase in the text into a hyperlink. Some of these annotated texts are misleading because the links often point to inappropriate entries in a glossary. This problem could be solved by more careful work on the part of the editor, but a larger problem is that making words into hyperlinks is not the best way of annotating Shakespeare.

Notes should be unobtrusive; they should not tease a reader into looking at a note that he/she doesn't need. Notes should also be efficient; they should provide needed information at a glance, without the necessity of losing one's place in the text.

Print texts of Shakespeare exhibit various devices to make the notes unobtrusive, but at the sacrifice of efficiency. Bevington's *Complete Works of Shakespeare* avoids footnote numbers and markers; the presence of a footnote is indicated by the presence of a line number. *The Riverside Shakespeare* goes even farther; line numbers are given in intervals of five, but the reader has to look to the bottom of the page to see if there are any notes. The Folger Shakespeare editions put all notes on a facing page, with their line numbers, but without any indication in the text of the presence of a note. All of these make for slow going; it's up to the reader find the line number that's associated with the note, and it often takes several shifts of focus from text to notes and back again to make the correct connection. *The Norton Shakespeare*, in a compromise effort, puts notes of one to three words in the right-hand margin and flags the annotated word with superscript circle; longer notes are put at the bottom of the page and flagged by a footnote number.

Making words into hyperlinks is both obtrusive and inefficient. Hyperlinks are extremely obtrusive; the different-colored highlighting insists that the reader must be missing something if he/she doesn't click. And making repeated clicks to get information is very inefficient.

The scheme which I will demonstrate is not perfect, but is less obtrusive and more efficient than any other, either print or electronic. Most notes are presented in a column five pixels to the right of the column of text. Each of these notes is preceded by bolded word or phrase which indicates the subject of the note. Longer notes are indicated by a right-arrow which is a hyperlink; the hyperlink opens a smaller window, sized to the length of the note, and positioned to the right of the column of text. This formatting allows the reader to find most of the information he/she needs at a glance, and the pop-up windows allow for an unlimited amount of information, including images, without forcing the reader to lose his/her place in the text.

The technique that produces this formatting depends the use of the HTML table and JavaScript.

Each line of text is contained within the center cell of a three-cell table row. Within the left-hand cell of each fifth table row is an act, scene, and line number, so the reader always knows where he/she is, without having to scroll or look to another part of the page. The last cell of each table row provides the space for the notes. Tagging the data cells of each table row as nowrap keeps everything lined up, while at the same time allowing the reader to zoom in for more readability.

For longer notes, the use of JavaScript to open the windows means that each window can be a different size, according to need, and can be positioned in such a way that it does not obscure the column of text.

I am already applying these techniques to an online edition of *Julius Caesar*. To see my work so far, go to this address: http://www.clicknotes.com/Julius_Caesar.