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VIRAL SHAKESPEARE

Performance in the Time of Pandemic

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ABSTRACT: This Element offers a first-person phenomenological history of watching productions of Shakespeare during the pandemic year of 2020. The first section of the Element explores how Shakespeare ‘went viral’ during the first lockdown of 2020 and considers how the archival recordings of Shakespeare productions made freely available by theatres across Europe and North America impacted modes of spectatorship and viewing practices, with a particular focus on the effect of binge watching *Hamlet* in lockdown. The Element’s second section documents two made-for-digital productions of Shakespeare by Oxford-based Creation Theatre and Northern Irish Big Telly, two companies that became leaders in digital theatre during the pandemic. It investigates how their productions of *The Tempest* and *Macbeth* modelled new platform-specific ways of engaging with audiences and creating communities of viewing at a time when, in the United Kingdom, government policies were excluding most non-building-based theatre companies and freelancers from pandemic relief packages.

This Element also has a video abstract: www.cambridge.org/aebischer

KEYWORDS: broadcast, digital, pandemic, performance, shakespeare

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