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## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Brown, Susan, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds. Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present. Database

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**Brown, Susan, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds.**

**Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present. Database.**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Accessed 10 October 2020.  
[orlando.cambridge.org](http://orlando.cambridge.org).

Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present is an interdisciplinary database that brings together digital humanities, literary and gender studies, and women's history. The data archive is a requisite resource for early modern scholars of gender and literature, as well as those looking for sources between 612 CE and the present, because it makes accessible a wide variety of information in one convenient location. Published electronically on 20 June 2006, through Cambridge University Press, Orlando was conceived of by Patricia Clements, Isobel Grundy (both of the University of Alberta), and Susan Brown (University of Alberta and University of Guelph), who are responsible for the historical section of the project.

The title was inspired by Virginia Woolf's *Orlando, a Biography*. From Woolf, the project got the idea to use an oak tree as its emblem, a metaphor from the poem "The Oak Tree," composed by Woolf's protagonist Orlando. Orlando begins life in the country, young like the sapling oak tree, and lives many different lives through the centuries, branching off in varied ways, but deep down remaining the same Orlando. The tree is similar as it exists for centuries with many branches while history and time move alongside its sturdy trunk. The Orlando project team sees the oak tree as a metaphor for the history of women's writing in the British Isles: the growth of history from simple biographies, the tree-like structure akin to their text encoding, and the movement towards digital humanities and computational methods.<sup>1</sup> Though somewhat misleadingly titled as a history of "Women's Writing in the British Isles," Orlando is a massive electronic text base of collaboratively-authored biographical and critical material on a wide range of women writers, non-women writers, and writers outside of the British Isles.

Orlando covers a broad scope of writers from the early Middle Ages into the present and includes related material on literary, social, and historical events.

1. "Introduction: Literary History—With a Difference," Orlando, Cambridge University Press, accessed 10 October 2020, [orlando.cambridge.org/public/svDocumentation?formname=t&d\\_id=LITERARYHISTORYWITHADIFFERENCE](http://orlando.cambridge.org/public/svDocumentation?formname=t&d_id=LITERARYHISTORYWITHADIFFERENCE).

Each author entry in the Orlando textbase offers an extensive overview of the writer's achievements and detailed discussions and chronologies of their lives and writings. There are also individual timelines for each author entry, a related link section that leads to other entries, and a comprehensive bibliography of each author's works.

Orlando was built using Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML), a "metalanguage" used to mark text in documents so that they can be processed by computers. It includes 205 tags, 114 attributes, and 635 attribute values.<sup>2</sup> The project picked this particular encoding language because it was the international standard and soon to become the language used for preserving archival texts. Orlando's use of SGML and XML (Extensible Markup Language) creates a streamlined and simplified delivery of the tags encoded in the textbase, as well as the knowledge within, to the Internet. Orlando continues to follow the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) when it does not inhibit the unique tagset that Orlando has developed for including subject-specific value to the data entries<sup>3</sup>

Orlando's most innovative contribution to the world of digital humanities and gender and women's studies is the ease with which the database tags biographical, publication, and thematic information and connects it across all of the entries in the database. Orlando allows "Tag Searches," where entries have been tagged to feature key terms relating to specific individuals, events, or texts in literary history. Tag searches return information ranging from biographical details, literary production and reception, text features, and "core tag" information like dates and names. For example, searching Mary Wollstonecraft by name returns a page with an overview of her "life milestones," "writing highlights," and "life highlights." There are tabs at the top of the page that go into further detail about her life, works, and related links. Any other life tags (e.g., other individuals, locations, education) or chronology tags (e.g., dates, social climate, and writing climate) are searchable with the core tag Mary Wollstonecraft. Atypical searches like "intertextuality," text editions, text circulation, anthology number, and press type are also included in the tag search. For example, it is possible to search for the number of times, and in which texts, Jane Austen's *Emma* is referenced. The first page of sixty-four

2. "Introduction: Going Electric—Markup," Orlando, Cambridge University Press, accessed 10 October 2020, [orlando.cambridge.org/public/svDocumentation?formname=t&d\\_id=GOINGELECTRONIC](http://orlando.cambridge.org/public/svDocumentation?formname=t&d_id=GOINGELECTRONIC).

3. "Introduction: Going Electric—Markup," Orlando, Cambridge University Press, accessed 23 April 2021, [orlando.cambridge.org/public/svDocumentation?formname=t&d\\_id=MARKUP](http://orlando.cambridge.org/public/svDocumentation?formname=t&d_id=MARKUP).

returns includes Margaret Atwood's *Onyx and Crake*, Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains*, and Sheenagh Pugh's *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context*.<sup>4</sup> Orlando allows for further insight into literary and gender history and gives greater access to histories of print, books, and material culture that are not searchable in other mainstream databases.

The ability to quickly investigate such keywords and circles of authors by tracing connections among individual writers is valuable. Anyone with a background in digital humanities could explain the difficulty of compiling, referencing, and cross-referencing data in a way that allows users to easily navigate and digest information. Orlando not only offers users a massive amount of historical subject matter, but the way that the development team has traced and tagged every connection between each subject is a feat in and of itself. Orlando gives users the ability to learn about interpersonal connections, literary influences, connections between locations, events, occupations, genres, and other categories that link British women writers to each other in the time it takes to make a few keystrokes. Orlando's set up is amazingly helpful and streamlined.

However, there are a few drawbacks. Most of the information in many entries is drawn from only one or two major biographies. Orlando might also make wider use of the database to include links to archival sources and other documents that they have not developed themselves. With the level of computation that is invested in Orlando already, it would not require much more effort for the project to offer links to newspaper articles, letters, electronic editions of the author's works, or recent critical texts to provide more contextualization and a broader history of their entries. With its continued updates and success, there is no doubt that the textbase will evolve. Expansion is, in fact, already occurring; a new update with new author entries is expected in 2021.

Orlando is not an open-access database. Many scholars will likely need to rely on an institutional subscription to gain access. (Orlando also offers individual annual subscriptions.) As there are no prices quoted on the website, reaching out to Cambridge Academic Tech Support is required. For those captivated by the potential of the project, Cambridge University Press does

4. "Guided Tour: Guided Tour," Orlando, Cambridge University Press, accessed 23 April 2021, [orlando.cambridge.org.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/static/help/content/Orlando\\_Tour.pdf](http://orlando.cambridge.org.proxy.lib.fsu.edu/static/help/content/Orlando_Tour.pdf).

offer a free thirty-day trial of Orlando for libraries and institutions interested in subscribing, and they offer subscription quotes based on the size of enrollment.

The Orlando project is an exciting approach to women's history, literary history, and the history of the book wrapped up in an easy-to-navigate textbase. The textbase includes summaries of the authors' lives and writing, cultural and thematic topics for streamlined "tagged" exploration, and innovative processes for searching across disciplines and time periods. Importantly, Orlando allows researchers to encounter new patterns and new connections through the related information that appears after each search. Through its ability to encourage new thinking in both junior and senior researchers, Orlando deserves its place across university databases. As the need to access scholarly information digitally increases, Orlando proves that it is already ahead of the curve.

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**MacLean, Sally-Beth, principal investigator.**

**Early Modern London Theatres (EMLoT). Database.**

Toronto: University of Toronto, 2011. Accessed 5 October 2020.

[emlot.library.utoronto.ca](http://emlot.library.utoronto.ca).

## Background

Early Modern London Theatres carries the acronym EMLoT. The lowercase "o" helps to vocalize the consonants, and the sound of the acronym brings to mind the Arthurian castle and court, Camelot. Just as the existence of Camelot is dependent on textual records from a later period, EMLoT seeks to unravel the history of early modern London theatres through textual records that have been cited partially or transcribed at least once in a later period.

EMLoT is based on the Records of Early English Drama (REED, [reed.utoronto.ca](http://reed.utoronto.ca)) project. Most large digital humanities projects are teams of individuals led by one or more principal investigators; REED and EMLoT are no different. Sally-Beth MacLean, professor emerita, University of Toronto, is director of research and general editor of REED and principal investigator