
Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme



MacLean, Sally-Beth, principal investigator. Early Modern London Theatres (EMLoT). Database

Dibyajyoti Ghosh

Volume 44, Number 1, Winter 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081150ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37060>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Ghosh, D. (2021). Review of [MacLean, Sally-Beth, principal investigator. Early Modern London Theatres (EMLoT). Database]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(1), 188–194. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37060>

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.

BAYLEE STAUFENBIEL

Florida State University

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37059>

MacLean, Sally-Beth, principal investigator.

Early Modern London Theatres (EMLoT). Database.

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

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) 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

and director of EMLoT, with about twenty other people on the project team according to their website. EMLoT is an international collaborative research project brought to fruition by scholars and funding in Canada and the UK. It is a great example of multinational research where the work and the funding are shared among countries to produce a large entity that may have been beyond the capacities of a single funding body or a single institution to sustain across several years.

REED was established in 1976 and originally published print volumes in its first three decades. (It is wonderful how generations of scholars at the University of Toronto have sustained a research project for more than forty years.) EMLoT is just one of the research projects that borrow from REED. There is no launch date mentioned on its site; however, MacLean's profile on her university's website (cdtps.utoronto.ca/people/directories/all-faculty/sally-beth-maclean) mentions that EMLoT began in 2011.

It is important to distinguish EMLoT from other REED-based resources. There is REED Online¹ (ereed.library.utoronto.ca, launched in March 2017) and REED Patrons and Performances² (reed.library.utoronto.ca, launched in 2003). In addition, there is the Durham University-based REED North-East (community.dur.ac.uk/reed.ne). The similar URLs of these REED-inspired resources may be confusing to the first-time user. EMLoT is listed as one of the online resources in the *parent* REED website (reed.utoronto.ca) and so its link from REED is properly maintained.

Shakespearean London Theatres (shalt.dmu.ac.uk, acronym ShaLT) is an early modern digital resource created at De Montfort University, Leicester that also ought to be distinguished from EMLoT. Whereas ShaLT presents a list of performance venues of early modern English plays and other associated institutions with information and images about those venues, EMLoT presents textual records and their subsequent citations or transcriptions.

EMLoT itself has led to the creation of useful resources, such as “How to Track a Bear in Southwark” (trackabear.library.utoronto.ca) which is listed in the main menu of EMLoT and helps to illustrate how EMLoT can facilitate focused research—as discussed later in this review.

1. See review by Jesús Tronch Pérez in *Early Modern Digital Review* 2:1 (2019), emdr.itercommunity.org/index.php/emdr/article/view/59.

2. See review by Michael Poston and Stacey Redick in *Early Modern Digital Review* 3:3 (2020), emdr.itercommunity.org/index.php/emdr/article/view/123.

Interface

The home page lists the partners involved and provides a brief description of the project. The website is based on textual records; none of the pages has data-heavy graphics, which means that pages don't take a long time to load. Nor do the pages have any elements that would pose a problem on smaller devices such as mobile phones.

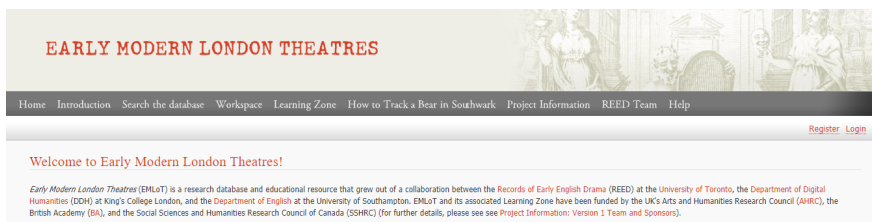


Figure 1. Header of EMLoT home page.

All pages have a horizontal menu bar at the top and a footer at the bottom. The footer has two links: a contact form and the crucial help page. The horizontal menu bar is divided into two strata: the lower invites users to “Register” (which is unfortunately dysfunctional) and to “Login” in order to use the workspace; the upper gives nine options, namely, “Home,” “Introduction,” “Search the Database,” “Workspace,” “Learning Zone,” “How to Track a Bear in Southwark,” “Project Information,” “REED team,” and “Help.” The “Workspace” requires user registration; therefore, since this reviewer was unable to register, the “Workspace” feature was not tested.

Having the “Help” button at both the top and bottom ensures that it is difficult for a first-time user to miss. The “Help” and “Introduction” pages must be read together in order to learn how to navigate the resource. The “Project Information” and the “REED Team” pages lead to names of scholars involved with the project and the names of the funders. The “Help” page also has a site map, which is always useful; however, the map would have been more noticeable had it been in the footer across all pages, as you find in most websites, rather than being embedded in the “Help” page.

Content

The “Introduction” and “Help” pages point out key terms that EMLoT uses. To access the main content of this website, you need to go to the “Search the Database” page. There, you can either perform a keyword search or browse all data. At the heart of EMLoT is what the site describes as an “Event,” or a record in the database. There are 1,894 events in EMLoT at the time of this review, which was undertaken with EMLoT database version 3, released in April 2020.

These events are recorded in 776 primary sources, which can be arranged in three ways: author, title, and date. Arranging them chronologically reveals that apart from the undated ones—the thirty-four sources between 1642 and 1700—and three others that have a date later than 1700, all the other primary sources have a date between 1500 and 1642. The site, as the home page mentions, is about “pre-1642 documents related to professional performance in purpose-built theatres and other permanent structures in the London area.” The material is supposed to be pre-1642. Therefore, this anomaly of having post-1642 sources is explained by the fact that the thirty-four primary sources dated between 1642 and 1700 may have been published between those years but were written pre-1642, as events associated with such sources make clear. For example, one of these anomalous sources is Richard Bromé’s *The City Wit*. It was first published posthumously in 1653 but was written prior to 1642, i.e., before the playhouses closed.

These events, as recorded in the primary sources, are then cited in 217 secondary sources. The secondary sources have the same arrangement options as the primary. Other than the undated sources, the rest are from post-1660 till 2008; they may be manuscripts or articles or books.

The keyword search page lists several heads through which the data may be filtered: “Events,” “Venues,” “Troupes,” “People,” “Primary Sources,” and “Secondary Sources.” Take “Venues,” for example. There are fifty venues in total; forty-eight are specific venues. One refers to an amphitheatre that was planned but never built, though the idea was mentioned in primary and secondary sources and is thus in EMLoT. The remaining single entity in this list of venues is titled “playhouse.” It is used as a generic term to link several transcription records. “Transcription Records” is a data element in EMLoT which can be seen in the database search results and can be listed comprehensively through the “Browse” page under “Search the Database.” There are 3,191 transcription

records in EMLoT. Transcription records are computer data, as opposed to textual data, and have significance only as a label or a marker within EMLoT. The most important information available to users through the transcription records is the page numbers of the primary and secondary sources at either ends of the citation or transcription process which EMLoT is designed to record.

The keyword search page also allows filtering data through “Troupes.” There are fifty-one troupes in EMLoT. Forty-eight are specific acting companies or troupes. Three labels—apprentices, strangers, and troupes—are not used in EMLoT as generic labels such as “playhouse” is for “Venues.” Rather, they refer to specific events. The sole entry for “apprentices” serves as a good illustration of the wealth of material available in EMLoT. Let us look at the entry. The brief summary or abstract of the entry states:

Sir Henry Wotton writes to Sir Edmund Bacon of a recent disturbance at the Whitefriars playhouse. Sixteen apprentices illegally performed a play entitled “The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl” at the Whitefriars last Sunday to an audience of their mistresses. Toward the end of the play, the sheriffs broke into the playhouse and arrested six or seven of the culprits. (emlot.library.utoronto.ca/db/record/event/12/)

This is a pertinent example of EMLoT highlighting a performance by apprentices, which is not frequently recorded in early modern archives.

There are 2,156 entities tagged as “People.” Clicking on all will not lead to the full apparatus of primary and secondary sources, events, and transcriptions. Some will just list the name: for example, John Allen (emlot.library.utoronto.ca/db/record/person/2471). This may seem puzzling to the user (as it did to this reviewer).

The “Browse” menu under “Search the Database” is useful for serendipitous finding. The novice user can click on the various links and find out how the website operates. The “Browse” menu also allows for extra searching and filtering mechanisms in contrast to the “Keyword Search” option, and the “Browse” menu allows for searching through a range of tags that EMLoT uses. These tags are visible in the search results, but the “Browse” page allows the user to view all the tags in one go.

The tags are sub-divisions of “Events,” “People,” “Troupes,” “Venues,” “Citation,” and “Document Description.” “Event Type” has tags such as

“Bear-baiting” (twenty-four entries), “Beargarden business” (eighty-seven) and “Beargarden context” (ninety), “Playwright business” (five), and “Playwright context” (sixty-three). The entries are not mutually exclusive. Events may have multiple tags. “Business” and “context” are two labels appended to several tags. There is a subtle distinction between what EMLoT terms as “business” and what it terms as “context.” All businesses could also be placed under context, but not vice-versa. “Event Date,” “Person Surname,” and “Person Date” are routine tags. An interesting tag is “Person Event Role,” which mentions the roles of people mentioned in the “Events” or records. An example of data under this tag is “camel handler” (emlot.library.utoronto.ca/db/record/event/7486), which links to a record demonstrating the presence of such persons in early modern London theatre.

The richness of the documentation exercise in EMLoT may be demonstrated through its large number of tags for each “Event.” The “Browse” page under “Search the Database” has a filter at the bottom right; events in EMLoT can be filtered using these tags which are categorized under “Event & Person,” “Troupe & Venue,” “Citation” and “Document: Description.” Not every event has a tag for each of the sub-categories under these main heads; however, they represent the possible tags that entries may or may not have in EMLoT. One bug in EMLoT is the “Forgeries” tag. There is an error in grouping with this tag, and it displays irrelevant data.

Case studies

EMLoT incorporates some case studies to show how the website can be put to use. There are two places where it does this: the “Learning Zone,” and “How to Track a Bear in Southwark.” The “Learning Zone” has six sets of cases where “Events” in EMLoT bring forward interesting studies. One is a set of conflicting testimonies between an actor and a widow for breach of a marriage contract, though they eventually get married to each other. The “Learning Zone” also has some suggested activities that users can perform, and EMLoT can thus become a teaching tool. This is especially useful for early modern digital humanities students.

“How to Track a Bear in Southwark” is another case study in how EMLoT can be used. First, go to the “Browse Exhibits” page with its three pathways: “Directions to the Bear Garden,” “A Day at the Bear Garden,” and “Imagining

the Bear Garden.” Each one reveals a host of events and primary and secondary sources. These events and transcriptions are also sourced from EMLoT; the three pathways are ways of linking together documents from EMLoT based on certain themes. One problem with “How to Track a Bear in Southwark,” however, is that some of the links have not been updated to reflect that EMLoT is now hosted by the University of Toronto and no longer by King’s College, London. Getting some of the links to work requires the user to modify relevant sections of the URL.

Conclusion

EMLoT is an expression of how rich a citation database can be when entities are associated with primary and secondary sources, and when searches using those entities are enabled. EMLoT facilitates the connection of primary sources with each other, primary sources with secondary sources, and secondary sources with each other. The case studies reveal how the linking of documents enables new kinds of scholarship using digital tools. For instance, the user may apply the “Event Type” filter to access a set of eighty-seven records dealing with “beargarden business.” Easy access allows for greater discovery of material. The “A Day at the Bear Garden” pathway in “How to Track a Bear in Southwark” uses some of these resources to create a focused digital case study or exhibition to highlight the beargarden businesses of the time. EMLoT is a very useful citation-linking tool. Not only will it help scholars of early modern London performances; its basic structure is likely to prove a vanguard for digital projects dealing with different cultural materials that aim to link documents together through chosen similarities.

DIBYAJYOTI GHOSH

University of Calcutta

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37060>