Early Modern London Theatres

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Over the past 35 years, the Toronto-based Records of Early English Drama (REED) project has revolutionized the study of drama and other performing arts in the British Isles before 1642. By systematically going through the surviving archives county by county, REED editors have uncovered a wealth of new documentary records, demonstrating that early dramatic activity outside of London was much more extensive than previously believed. The primary means of publishing all this material has been through printed volumes, 23 of which have appeared as of 2011, but REED has not ignored the digital age. Most of the published volumes are available online through the Internet Archive [2], and since 2003 the *Patrons and Performances* *Web Site* [3] has allowed users to search REED's database of performance records by patron, location, venue, and numerous other parameters, and to use interactive maps to trace where performances occurred.

Early Modern London Theatres (EMLoT) [4] is REED's latest online project, developed in collaboration with the Department of Digital Humanities [5] at King's College London and the Department of English [6] at the University of Southampton. It is a valuable project, but very different from the *Patrons and Performances Web Site* in several ways. For one thing, as the title indicates, it is focused on London rather than the provinces. Specifically, a note on the home page says that the site only includes records pertaining to eight custom-built pre-1642 playhouses located north of the Thames: the Red Lion, the Theatre, the Curtain, the Fortune, the Red Bull, the Boar's Head, the Phoenix/Cockpit, and Salisbury Court. (I will call these the 'core eight'.) The same note explains that 'the next version of the database will incorporate the Bankside theatres in the historic county of Surrey', presumably including the Rose, the Swan, the first and second Globes, and the Hope (plus possibly the Newington Butts playhouse, which was in Surrey but not on the Bankside).

At first glance, it is not entirely clear what distinction is being made here. The site appears to include quite a few documents having to do with the Bankside playhouses; a Faceted search (for details of which see below) indicates that there are 38 primary documents having to do with the Rose, 10 for the Swan, 21 for the first Globe, 18 for the second Globe, and seven for the Hope. The same type of search also shows numerous documents having to do with other indoor playhouses north of the Thames (Paul's, the first and second

Blackfriars, and the Whitefriars), as well as the four London inns where plays were performed in the late 16th century (the Bell Savage, Bull, Bell, and Cross Keys) and various court venues such as Hampton Court and Whitehall. A bit more digging reveals that the documents returned by these searches deal with multiple playhouses, always including at least one of the core eight. Thus a record involving, say, the Rose is only included if it happens to occur in a document that also refers to the Theatre, the Curtain, or one of the other core eight. For example, the Privy Council's 29 October 1587 letter ordering the Surrey justices to suppress plays being performed in Southwark on the Sabbath, a record that can only allude to the Rose, is included because the same document (TNA: PRO PC2/14, a volume of Privy Council minutes) also includes a similar letter to the justices of Middlesex, where the Theatre and the Curtain were located. On the other hand, the 10 January 1587 contract between Philip Henslowe and John Cholmeley for the building of the Rose (Dulwich College MS 16) is not included because it does not refer to any of the Middlesex playhouses.(1)

This brings us to the second major way in which *EMLoT* differs from the *Patrons and Performances Web Site*: the fact that it is mainly concerned with primary documents and their transmission in the scholarly literature, rather than with events per se. As the introduction says, *EMLoT* makes no attempt to record everything that happened in the early modern London theatre; rather, the site's core function is 'to show how information produced at the time of the early London theatres was transmitted in later years'. To do this, it includes seven types of entries: primary sources, event records, secondary sources, transcription records, people records, troupe records, and venue records.

A *primary source*, in this context, is a pre-1642 document (either handwritten or printed) that refers or alludes to at least one of the core eight playhouses, and which was quoted or transcribed by somebody after 1642; for example, Edmund Howes's 1631 continuation of John Stow's *Annals* (STC 23340). An *event record* is a specific playhouse reference appearing in a primary source; for example, Howes's description of the 1617 apprentice riot at the Cockpit/Phoenix playhouse (record ID 7328 [7] in *EMLoT*, 'Apprentices riot at the Cockpit: Edmund Howes'). A given primary source may include multiple event records, each of which includes an abstract of the reference, the date of the event, and any people, troupes, and venues alluded to in the reference.

A *secondary source* is a post-1642 book or article that quotes or transcribes at least one event record; for example, John Payne Collier's *History of English Dramatic Poetry* (1831). A *transcription record* records a specific instance in which a secondary source quotes or transcribes an event record; for example, Collier's citation, on page 330 of *History of English Dramatic Poetry*, of Howes's description of the 1617 Cockpit riot (*EMLoT* transcription record 8622 [8]). A given secondary source may include multiple transcription records, each of which shows the location of the transcription within the secondary source, the location of the transcribed matter in the primary source, and notes about the nature of the transcription (e.g. whether spelling was modernized).

Supplementing the four types above are people, troupe, and venue records. There is a *people record* for every person who is mentioned in an event record, and for any author or editor of a primary or secondary source. Each such record lists all secondary sources that the person wrote or edited (for post-1642 people, such as E. K. Chambers), or all event records with which the person is associated (for pre-1642 people, such as Edward Alleyn); for the latter group, *EMLoT* shows how the person's name is spelled in each event record, and/or the role they played in that event (author, payee, deponent, etc.). There is a *troupe record* for each acting company, listing all the event records where that company is mentioned or alluded to, the years when it was active, and a link to the patron's page on the REED *Patrons and Performances Web Site*. Finally, there is a *venue record* for each acting venue mentioned in *EMLoT*, including not just the core eight playhouses, but (as noted above) other venues alluded to in primary sources that mention the core eight. Each such record shows the venue's location, its years of active use, and links to all the event records that mention it.

In its current iteration, *EMLoT* includes 449 primary sources encompassing 965 event records, 112 secondary sources encompassing 1464 transcription records, plus 1268 people records, 52 troupe records, and 45 venue records. All of these are linked in various ways. For example, the page for a given primary

source includes links to all the event records found in that source, all the secondary sources that transcribe any of those records, and the relevant transcription records linking the two groups. In our example above, the page for Howes's 1631 continuation of Stow links to four playhouse references in that work (the 1617 Cockpit riot, the formation of the Queen's Men, the burning of the Fortune, and a summary of London's theatres), along with six secondary sources (including Collier's *History*) and 11 transcription records (including Collier's citation of the Cockpit riot). Similarly, a given event record links to all the secondary sources that transcribed it, and to the relevant transcription records; the page for a given secondary source links to all the event records it transcribes, and to the relevant primary sources and transcription records; and a given transcription record links to the relevant event record, primary source, and secondary source, and to pages for any people and venues mentioned in the record. Thus one can take a secondary source, such as E. K. Chambers's *The Elizabethan Stage*, and find all the instances where it transcribes pre-1642 references to any of the core eight playhouses (there are 185 such transcription records, by my unofficial count); one can also look at the event records for any of the references that Chambers transcribed, and see which other secondary sources have transcribed the same references. It's worth emphasizing that *EMLoT* does not include transcriptions of primary sources, except in the Learning Zone tutorial described below; rather, it includes abstracts (in event records) and points the user (via transcription records) to published works that do include transcriptions. That means that *EMLoT* is best used by those with access to an academic library, though this is not absolutely necessary.

Users of *EMLoT* can search this web of data in many different ways, via the 'Search the database' tab at the top of the page. A keyword search allows one to search primary sources, secondary sources, people, events, troupes, and venues for any name, word or string. Some such searches are straightforward, while others are less so. For example, searching secondary sources for 'chambers' returns nine works written or edited by E. K. Chambers, including seven articles in various Malone Society volumes, *The Elizabethan Stage*, and *William Shakespeare: A Study of the Facts and Problems*. Searching primary sources for 'cockpit' returns 28 records, including 17 printed plays performed at the Cockpit (aka 'the private house in Drury Lane'), or performed elsewhere by a company that normally played at the Cockpit; a forged ballad about the 1617 riot by John Payne Collier (yes, *EMLoT* includes forgeries, though this appears to be the only one currently in the database); the office book of Sir Henry Herbert (yes, *EMLoT* includes non-extant primary sources, as long as they were transcribed by somebody after 1642); Howes's 1631 continuation of Stow, from our example above; the letters of Sir Henry Wotton (in one of which he mentions the Cockpit); Thomas Carew's 1630 commendatory poem for William Davenant's *The Just Italian* (in which he insults the players of the Red Bull and Cockpit as 'untuned kennel'); John Heminges and Henry Condell's address 'To the great variety of readers' in the 1623 Shakespeare First Folio (in which they mention that audience members sit on the stage at the Blackfriars and the Cockpit); and five documents in the National Archives, including those containing the Privy Council's response to the 1617 riot (TNA: PRO, PC2/28) and the letters that Edward Sherburne and John Chamberlain wrote to Dudley Carleton about the riot (TNA: PRO, SP14/90). Searching people records for 'james burbage' returns 38 records, apparently including every person who was named in any event record alongside James Burbage, plus Burbage himself.

A Faceted search may be an easier way for newcomers to explore the site; at least, it was for me. Clicking on 'Faceted search' displays columns for each of the seven types of *EMLoT* records: transcription records; primary sources; secondary sources; people; events; troupes; and venues. One can browse all the records of any given type by clicking that column header and then clicking on 'all results', or one can narrow the search by using the 'facets' on the left side of the page. These are a total of 26 facets divided into four groups: *Document Description*, including such things as document type, production auspices, primary source date, and secondary source date; *Citation*, including such things as author name, publisher, and repository; *Event & Person*, including such things as event type, event date, person surname, and person event role; and *Troupe & Venue*, including such things as troupe name, venue name, and venue locale. Clicking on any of these facets shows all the values that facet may have in *EMLoT*, thus giving the user a good idea of what is available; clicking on any of these values brings up all the records with that value. It is possible to screen for multiple facets at once, for example, all event records involving the Red Bull in 1624; the screens in place at any given time are conveniently displayed under 'Selected Terms' at the top of the page, and the user can

remove any of these screens with a click, or remove all the screens at once and start over. At least, this is how it's supposed to work; I've found that if I do a Faceted search, click on an invidiual record to view it, then click the back button on my browser, 'Selected terms' no longer shows any screens, even though the screens I used for my Faceted search are still in effect; thus, it's necessary to remember what those screens were, or else click 'Remove all' and start over. When using Faceted search, it's important to remember that it's only possible to search one of the seven record types at once, with transcription record being the default; to do a Faceted search of event records, primary or secondary sources, or any to the others, one must click so that the appropriate column at the top is highlighted. Even after reading the introduction and help sections of the site, it took me a while to figure this out.

Once you get the hang of these search tools, which may take some playing around and experimenting, they are very helpful for finding relevant information in *EMLoT*. After registering and signing in to the site (a simple process that only requires an e-mail address), you can then save and organize this information using further tools. Signed-in users can save records in either of two ways: from a page of search results, by checking the boxes found to the left of each record, then clicking 'Add selected items to workspace' at the top; or from an individual record page, by clicking the same link in the upper right. In either case, a query box tells you that the selected items have been added to your Workspace, and asks if you want to go there now. Clicking 'OK' brings up your Workspace, which can also be accessed at any time by clicking the 'Workspace' tab at the top of the page. The Workspace consists of two parts: 'My saved items' includes all the records you have saved, organized by record type (transcription record, primary source, secondary source, etc.), and 'My collections' allows you to organize these records into custom collections. Once you have created at least one collection, you can edit it by adding or changing a title or description, or by adding notes to individual records in the collection. It's also possible to 'publish' a collection so that it's visible to anyone with a web browser at a specified URL.

As this description should indicate, *EMLoT* contains a lot of information about early modern London playhouses, and tools for searching and organizing this information. There is a danger that all this information might become overwhelming for users, so *EMLoT* also includes a Learning Zone that is designed to show some of the ways in which theatre historians and/or students might use the site. The first part of the Learning Zone consists of an online tutorial using *EMLoT* records to illustrate how information about the Cockpit riot of 4 March 1617 has been transmitted over time. This tutorial includes three timelines showing how various primary sources (pre-1642) referenced or alluded to the riot, ranging from the Privy Council letter of the following day (5 March) to Edmund Howes's 1631 description from our earlier example. Three other timelines then show how various secondary sources (post-1642) have used these primary sources in describing the riot. Double-clicking on any of the primary sources in these timelines brings up an illustration and transcription of the original document, and a link to its event record in *EMLoT*; double-clicking on any of the secondary sources brings up a transcription of the relevant section of that source. The tutorial even includes illustrations and transcriptions of three pre-1642 records that allude to the riot, but which are not included in *EMLoT* because they have never (until now) been transcribed by any secondary source. It's important to note that these illustrations and transcriptions have been made specifically for this tutorial, and are not present for any other records in *EMLoT*; for these other records, as noted above, users will have to look up the references themselves, using transcription records and event records.

In addition to the tutorial, the Learning Zone also includes a page of 'Other learning activities' designed for use by classrooms or by independent learners. There are six suggested topics for classroom study, ranging from a 1611 lawsuit involving the player John Newton to a range of anti-theatrical polemics from the 1570s to the 1640s; each of these includes links to the relevant event records in *EMLoT*, and suggestions for how they might be explored in the classroom. The activities for independent learning are much more open-ended, for example: 'Drawing on examples from the *Early Modern London Theatres* database, assess and compare the methodological value of any three types of original document for the writing of theatre history'. The last part of the Learning Zone is a page of links to, and brief descriptions of, ten websites that might be useful for historians of the early modern London theatre, starting with the REED *Patrons and Performances Web Site*.

(Full disclosure: my 'Biographical Index of English Drama Before 1660 [9]' is on this list, though I had nothing to do with the making of *EMLoT*.)

As the creators readily admit, *EMLoT* is still a work in progress, and it is in that spirit that I offer a few constructive criticisms. Some fairly important events in the histories of the core eight playhouses, events well-known to theatre historians, are difficult to find in *EMLoT* because they are known only from being cited in later lawsuits. For example, while exploring the database I decided to look at an event and see what *EMLoT* has to say about it, much as the Learning Zone tutorial described above does for the 1617 Cockpit riot. I chose the lease that James Burbage signed on 13 April 1576 for the property in Holywell on which he and John Brayne built the Theatre. At first I was unable to find this lease in *EMLoT*, even though it is abstracted and/or quoted in such major secondary sources as *The Elizabethan Stage* and Wickham, Berry, and Ingram's *English Professional Theatre, 1530–1660*. The reason for this, it turns out, is that we only know about this lease from the lengthy summaries and descriptions found in the lawsuits that resulted when the Chamberlain's Men dismantled the Theatre in December 1598 and took its timbers to Southwark to build the Globe. I ended up going to Herb Berry's detailed description, on page 333 of *English Professional Theatre, 1530–1660*, of the five legal documents (all from 1599–1601) that summarize or describe the lease; from there, I was eventually able to find the relevant event records ('King's bench, Allen vs Street: the summary [10]', 'Requests, Burbage vs Allen: Cuthbert Burbage states his case [11]', 'Requests, Burbage vs Allen: Giles Allen replies [12]', and 'King's bench, Allen vs Burbage: the summary [13]'), and the related transcription records for the transcriptions of these documents by Berry and by Charles William Wallace in *The First London Theatre: Materials for a History* (1913).(2)

This situation is far from unique; in fact, most of the details we know about the complex history of the Theatre come from legal documents written years after the fact, and the situation is similar with the Boar's Head, although there the documents were mostly written only two to four years after the events they described. These documents are all in *EMLoT* as event records, but as the above examples show, the titles of these event records tend not to give the user a very good idea of what is in the documents, in contrast to the event records involving the Cockpit riot. In this case, I had to click on the records and read the abstracts (some of them quite long and involved) to make sure I was dealing with the right documents. This situation ultimately results from the decision to treat each lawsuit as a primary source, and each separate document within that lawsuit (bill, answer, depositions, interrogatories, etc.) as a single event record, no matter how complex it is, or how many earlier theatrical events (such as the Theatre lease) it may describe. There is no inherent reason why this must be so. For example, it would have been possible to treat each document within a lawsuit (bill, answer, deposition, etc.) as a separate primary source, and to have event records for specific theatrical references or descriptions within that document. Thus, Giles Allen's answer in the 1600 suit Burbage vs. Allen ('Requests, Burbage vs. Allen: Giles Allen replies' above) would be treated the same as Howes's 1631 continuation of Stow from our earlier example, and Allen's detailed recitation of the 1576 Theatre lease would be an event record with its own title, analogous to Howes's description of the 1617 riot ('Apprentices riot at the Cockpit: Edmund Howes'). Alternately, each lawsuit as a whole could still be treated as a primary source, and each document as an event record, but there could be further event records for relevant theatrical references within those documents.

Such quibbling aside, it should be clear from this review that *EMLoT* can be a valuable resource for theatre historians who learn how to use it and understand what it is trying to do. It is not always the most intuitive site in the world to use; as noted above, I had to play around with it quite a bit to figure out all its capabilities and limitations, even after reading the introduction and help page. That's partly a result of the amount and scope of information there, and partly because it took a while to fully understand the site's focus on documents. Now that I'm familiar with *EMLoT*'s ins and outs, it will undoubtedly be one of the first places I look the next time I'm researching one of the core eight playhouses.

Notes

1. This standard is applied rather loosely in many cases. For example, payments to playwrights in

Henslowe's Diary are included if they date from after the Admiral's Men moved to the Fortune in 1600, even though the records themselves make no mention of the Fortune, and in some cases the payments are explicitly for court performances. In general, it appears that any performance record is included if the company in question normally played at one of the core eight playhouses, even if the performance was at court or elsewhere.Back to (1)

2. There are only four event records because the first one ('King's bench, Allen vs Street: the summary') includes the first two summaries described by Berry. The abstracts in these event records sometimes differ from the descriptions given by Berry. For example, the abstract for *EMLoT* event record 278 (for the King's Bench lawsuit Allen vs. Street, TNA: PRO, KB27/1362/m.587) says that '[t]he bill is in Latin, but quotes verbatim and in full, James Burbage's original lease on the Theatre', but Berry (p. 333) describes this as 'a summary [of the lease] in Latin, used by Allen in 1599'.Back to (2)

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Links
[1] http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/7759
[2] http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=records%20of%20early%20english%20drama%20AND%20collection%3
[3] http://eir.library.utoronto.ca/reed/
[4] http://www.emlot.kcl.ac.uk/
[5] http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/ddh/index.aspx
[6] http://www.southampton.ac.uk/english/
[7] http://www.EMLoT.kcl.ac.uk/db/record/event/7328/
[8] http://www.EMLoT.kcl.ac.uk/db/record/EMLoT-record/8622/
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[12] http://www.EMLoT.kcl.ac.uk/db/record/event/134/
[13] http://www.EMLoT.kcl.ac.uk/db/record/event/275/