Renaissance and Reformation
Renaissance et Réforme

Cave, Richard, gen. ed., Michael Leslie, Eleanor Lowe, Lucy Munro, Marion O'Connor, Helen Ostovich, Julie Sanders, Elizabeth Schafer, Matthew Steggle, eds. Richard Brome Online. Edition

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Citer ce compte rendu

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Richard Brome Online. **Edition.**
Royal Holloway, University of London and Humanities Research Institute, University of Sheffield, 2010. Accessed 23 May 2019.
dhi.ac.uk/brome.

Richard Brome Online is a digital scholarly edition of all sixteen surviving plays by the Caroline dramatist Richard Brome (ca. 1590–1652). These include fifteen solely-authored works, alongside *The Late Lancashire Witches*, a collaboration with Thomas Heywood. Funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council, the project's "User Guide" emphasizes its desire to serve "literary scholars, theatre historians, theatregoers and above all theatre practitioners, actors and directors."

The resource succeeds in its primary task of making the plays themselves freely and readably available, in the first fully-annotated edition of Brome's drama, and the first of any kind since the fifteen solo plays were reprinted in 1873. To have built a sustainable digital resource around these particular works, by a Renaissance playwright with no direct connection to Shakespeare, is no mean feat. Shortly after the website's launch in 2010, Brett Hirsch noted that there were "no electronic critical editions of non-Shakespearean Renaissance drama available."[1] Writing in 2019, Laura Estill confirms that, almost a decade on, the situation has not improved: "it still stands alone in the landscape of digital humanities projects as the only non-Shakespearean author-based online edition."[2]

The project emphasizes its transparent approach to the editorial process by presenting each play in both a modern-spelling edition with accompanying critical annotation and a facsimile transcription of its earliest quarto or octavo edition. The modern-spelling versions are suitable for use by students or in performance, while the facsimile versions provide a gateway for textual

1. Brett Hirsch, "The Kingdom Has Been Digitized: Electronic Editions of Renaissance Drama and the Long Shadows of Shakespeare and Print," *Literature Compass* 8 (9) (2011): 568–91, doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2011.00830.x.

2. Laura Estill, "Digital Humanities' Shakespeare Problem," *Humanities* 8 (1) (2019): 45, doi.org/10.3390/h8010045.

scholarship short of accessing the original printed artifacts. These versions can be viewed either in isolation or side-by-side. Usefully, clicking on the speaker's name prefixing any line in either of the side-by-side versions makes both texts align at the relevant speech. (This feature was not functional when tested in Safari for iPad, where panels are not separately scrollable, but did work for this user in both Microsoft Edge and Firefox browsers on PC, and in Chrome on an Android smartphone.)

As described in the project's "User Guide," the transcriptions were derived through the relatively economical method of making OCR scans of the 1873 Pearson edition, with the editors then proofing and correcting these against the original print editions. These were consulted in both digital form (as represented in ProQuest's Early English Books Online) and surviving physical copies. The result is a set of clean, usable texts, enhanced but not obscured through the addition during the preparatory stage of the Text Encoding Initiative's basic SGML mark-up. This mark-up is all but invisible in the HTML rendering, but accessible using browsers' built-in developer tools. The inclusion of a single, directly-downloadable archive of the SGML files for all of the plays would be a welcome convenience for digital humanities practitioners interested in exploring these plays in alternative ways, but is not currently available.

Under the general editorship of Richard Cave, nine editors have each taken responsibility for the texts of one, two, or three plays. The editors also provide scholarly annotation and prelude each play with two introductory essays: a critical introduction exploring key themes and contexts, and a textual introduction. While clearly working toward a shared edition, the editors still appear to have been granted a good deal of independence. The positive effect of this is that it prevents annotation from becoming rote or seeming mechanical. However, it also results in some features that unsettle the project's overall continuity, such as a series of textual introductions that do not have a uniform structure. While Helen Ostovich's textual introduction to *The Late Lancashire Witches*, for example, is neatly divided into sections on Collaborative Authorship, Print History, Dating, Printer's Errors, and Stage History, Cave offers an extremely detailed but more free-flowing "Textual Essay" to accompany his edition of *The Antipodes*. Most of the textual introductions include a census of surviving copies, but these can appear at the beginning (as in Lucy Munro's Introduction to *The Queen and Concubine*), middle (Cave on *The Antipodes*), or end (Eleanor Lowe's edition of *A Jovial Crew*).

The critical annotations will be extremely valuable to novice and experienced readers alike. However, their presentation within the digital edition is not quite as user-friendly as it might be. The "User Guide" lists four kinds of annotation: commentaries, glosses, notes, and textual notes. Readers, however, may struggle to distinguish between these. Commentaries, notes, and textual notes are all encoded identically as "notes" elements, which render indistinguishably as asterisks in HTML. Glosses are encoded separately as "gloss" elements, and render as dagger symbols. However, it is left to readers to intuit this system as no key to these symbols is provided in the "User Guide." The requirement for users to manually open and close each pop-up note is also slightly laborious, particularly when reading lines with multiple notes, where the overlapping appearance of a second note prevents the closure of the first.

A potentially very useful decision has been made to gather together all of the glosses from across the sixteen plays into a single, centralized "Glossary," accessible from the basic navigation bar that appears at the top of every page on the site. The resulting word list, arranged alphabetically across twenty-six pages, forms an extensive repository of the plays' language and the editors' scholarship. It could be improved, however, by making it possible for users accessing the "Glossary" directly to see the defined terms in their original contexts. This could be achieved either by including traditional act/scene/line references for each entry, or (ideally) by using location information already encoded in the data—and already used in the creation of Java popup note panes in the play texts themselves—to generate direct hyperlinks to these. In addition, this would alleviate an unhelpful aspect of the apparently automated—or at least editorially overlooked—way in which the glossary has been constructed, through simple accumulation. Where words are glossed in several places or in several plays, this results in duplicate entries appearing next to each other. There are, for example, six separate entries for "abuse," and six more for "abused," along with one each for "abuser" and "abusing." Some of these reference specific *Oxford English Dictionary* definitions; others do not. Several repeat each other almost verbatim. Others mention specific characters in the scene for which they were drawn up, but remove them from their original context, with no information identifying which scene it is, or even which play. Either direct links or traditional references to the specific moment of use for each glossed occurrence would be particularly helpful for clarifying such instances.

The project's key innovation, separating it from traditional print editions, is to embrace the power of digital multimedia by including over 600 MP4 videos exploring "enacted sequences" from each play. These were recorded during workshops featuring professional actors, working script-in-hand, and can be accessed either by a dedicated video gallery or by hyperlinks embedded in the notes accompanying the modern text and in the scholarly essays. The number of videos per play varies widely, from as many as eighty-seven each for *The New Academy* and *The Demoiselle* to only six for *The English Moor*.

The individual videos provide a useful resource for teachers of early modern drama seeking to enliven lectures and seminars, particularly given the rarity of Brome in current repertory. However, the archive as a whole has a potentially much wider utility. Students and practitioners need have no particular interest in Brome to find value in studying multiple videos demonstrating varying approaches to single moments, such as the ten devoted to parts of Letoy's attempted seduction of Diana in *The Antipodes*, 5.2 ("AN_5_5" to "AN_5_14"). Featuring two different actor pairings, these present a wide range of dramatic choices, including gender-switched casting, tonal shifts, invitations to audience complicity, and the use of different proximities between characters. Scenes in many of the other plays are similarly rehearsed, discovering opportunities for prop use and stage business, the effect of directing lines at different characters on-stage, and the use of accents.

As with the "Glossary," the decision to accumulate all of the videos within a dedicated "Gallery," accessible through the basic navigation bar, makes a lot of sense in principle. In practice, however, it doesn't quite anticipate the needs of users making use of this direct access route, rather than discovering the videos in context when reading the play text. While all videos identify the play, act, and scene from which they are taken, a lack of line number identifiers makes it difficult for users to find the lines being explored, short of pausing the video after hearing the first few words, and searching in-page. The inclusion of brief descriptions for each clip is, nevertheless, useful.

On a technical note, on all browsers on which it was tested for this review, the use of multiple panels to present the video alongside the modern play text left an unused grey area in the bottom right corner. This is a forgivable, cosmetic issue for a resource of this age, which does not affect usability.

Also demonstrating freedom from the cost pressures of print production is the inclusion of a database of all known performances of each of the plays,

complete with location, date, and cast details, along with any other relevant information. For example, while it is possible to imagine a print Appendix listing the one or two recorded Caroline performances of *The Demoiselle* and *The English Moor*, it is doubtful whether any modern publisher would consider putting into print a record of just under 150 individual performances or runs of *A Jovial Crew*, complete with often repetitious cast lists. Yet here an interested reader can browse the play's complete theatrical history, from its initial staging in March 1641/2 and its post-Restoration revival, through its many and frequent appearances onstage at Drury Lane and then Covent Garden throughout the eighteenth century, to its less frequent stagings in recent decades. Commendably, the database treats equally Max Stafford-Clarke's RSC productions of 1992–93 and Kim Durban's production at the University of Ballarat, Australia, in 2013. The latter also provides evidence of the capacity for this online database to continue to be updated even after its 2010 launch/ publication, and it is to be hoped that this will be the case, not least since that would indicate ongoing interest in producing the plays themselves.

The inclusion of a bibliography covering the plays and critical material is of real value to all users, and particularly to students. As with the database of "Stage Histories," the potential for this to be a dynamic resource (comparable to the *Marlowe Bibliography Online*)[3] is something that can really help to distinguish digital from print editions, and would therefore be desirable.

From a technical perspective, the greatest disappointment with this site is its search functionality. A search bar is embedded at the top of every page, enabling users to generate enquiries at any point in their engagement with the site. Useful options include the ability to narrow searches to individual plays, to play-texts, or to critical essays, and within plays to just speeches, just stage directions, or just notes and glosses. The ability to search just the source texts or just the modern versions (or both) is also helpful. However, once a results list is generated, it is frustrating to be presented with results with no sense of context (e.g., act, scene, speaker) beyond the title of the play and the version in which the result occurs. Adding to this inconvenience is the unfortunate way in which clicking on an individual link takes users not to the exact hit but instead simply to the beginning of the play, in spite of the fact that each link contains the necessary metadata to direct precisely to the site of its actual

3. marlowesocietyofamerica.org/mbo.

occurrence. Optimistically, the existence of this information already does at least present a cost-effective opportunity to improve this situation in a possible future iteration of the site.

Notwithstanding the suggestions for improvement noted above, this is an admirable resource that combines excellent traditional scholarship with a genuinely exciting use of electronic media. Its continuing functionality suggests a fairly robust initial design, and it is to be hoped both that its own existence and use will continue and expand, and that other comparable resources devoted to less-well-known early modern authors will build on this model in future.

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Adams, Robyn, ed. and technical director.
***The Diplomatic Correspondence of Thomas Bodley, 1585–1597*. Database.**
Centre for Editing Lives and Letters. London: University College London, 2011. Version 5. Accessed 20 May 2019.
livesandletters.ac.uk/bodley/bodley.html.

Before retiring to found the well-known library that bears his name, Thomas Bodley (1545–1613) was appointed by Queen Elizabeth as a representative of the Council of State and, in that capacity, went on several missions to the United Provinces of the Netherlands, as well as to various locations in Germany, Denmark, and France, where he conducted negotiations in relation to the Protestant revolts and to the mercantile issues deriving from those political conflicts. The difficulties of these negotiations increasingly cast doubts on the efficacy of his actions, and this in turn led to increasing reciprocal dissatisfaction, so that he did not get further employment at the end of his missions and subsequently retired from political life.

The database of his diplomatic correspondence, previously unedited and unpublished, is now available. Produced by the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters in cooperation with the Bodleian Library, and licensed as open source under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License, the collection is a significant contribution not only to several fields of study—religious, social, cultural, linguistic, geographical, military, and political