

Editorial

Special Volume: Performance, Politics, and Culture in the Southwest of Britain, 1350-1642, Part 2

This issue of *Early Theatre* is the second of a two-part collection on performance, politics, and culture in the southwest of Britain that draws upon evidence compiled for the REED volumes containing the dramatic records of the southwest. By exploring the change, continuity, and variety of performance traditions in the West Country within the larger historical frame provided by recent research on the southwest, the collection offers new insights into the complex relationships among performance, politics, and culture in a region at times divided by religion and topography, while still united by road networks, river systems, and a shared sense that performance can shape and instantiate community identity.

The articles of *ET*6.1 especially addressed the political and religious forces that influenced performance traditions in the region. In *ET*6.2 the articles focus more on the unifying power of shared performance practice, on the logistical problems raised by language difference, rough terrain, and bad roads, and on the evidence that itinerant players toured the southwest despite these problems.

Sally-Beth MacLean briefly surveys the evidence of touring circuits in the West Country. Even as she charts the routes of touring companies travelling under noble patronage in the region, she graphs the peaks and troughs of itinerant playing in the early modern period, emphasizing the roles economics and religious reform played in the eventual decline of southwestern playing circuits. My own article complements MacLean's by surveying the performance landscape in Cornwall. It explores the answers to questions such as, What monetary incentives for performance lay east and west of the granite outcrops of the county? How did geology and weather affect travel? Which roads might have been used by travelling troupes? And what means can we employ to come closer

to understanding and mapping the early modern road networks of the county? Such a ground-up perspective also informs David N. Klausner's article on the records of south Wales. In an area where rugged terrain and poor roads isolated performers and performance traditions in the early modern period, language difference also contributed to the development of performance practice within Wales, where performances, secular and religious, professional and non-professional, occurred in both English and Welsh. Despite the distancing effect of language and topography, itinerant performers still found their way into the records of south Wales, most likely arriving on Welsh soil via the sea. The multiplicity of performance practices in south Wales that emerges from Klausner's study stands in contrast to the unifying effect of a cooperative spirit that Rosalind C. Hays sees as characteristic of dramatic practice in the area surrounding Sherborne, Dorset, and Yeovil, Somerset. Though the two towns' traditions developed along different lines – one influenced by secular exigencies, the other by religious concerns – they shared the sense that performance could help to define community while at the same time providing a source of monetary support.

To provide an overview of this special collection, Peter Fleming adds his 'Historian's Response' to the essays. Fleming's synthesis suggests ways in which *ET* 6 contributes to ongoing research in the fields of southwestern studies and medieval and early modern social and economic history, proposing avenues of future research.

Editorial Principles

Like *ET* 6.1 this issue contains numerous references to published REED volumes and unpublished documents in record offices. Given the editorial challenges posed by the articles' notes, I would like to reiterate the editorial principles employed in both issues to assist readers in their efforts to find the source materials for themselves.

First, when possible, authors have cited published REED collections. In cases when the cited collections have been edited by multiple individuals, each of whom has acknowledged responsibility for specific sections of the collection (such as the *Somerset including Bath* and *Dorset/Cornwall* volumes), I have chosen to cite these collections as single works with multiple editors rather than citing respective sections and their editors separately as *Early Theatre* has done in the past. This practice should aid readers who attempt to find REED collections via a library catalog or index search.

Unpublished documents are cited by their updated shelf marks where appropriate; this is especially applicable to the Dorset Record Office documents.

Likewise, Public Record Office documents have received updated shelf marks (cited as NA, PRO), to acknowledge that the PRO joined the Historical Manuscripts Commission as part of the National Archives in April 2003. To clarify which records reside at the Dorset Record Office and which at the Devon Record Office (both of which appear as 'DRO' in their respective REED collections), I have chosen to use 'DoRO' and 'DeRO' throughout *Early Thetare* 6. My thanks go to Abigail Young at REED for checking unpublished document transcriptions; any errors that appear in transcriptions below are my fault, not hers.

Finally, to reduce the number of endnotes, I have, when possible, grouped multiple citations into one note. To identify a citation that corresponds to a specific section of text, readers should look for the first note following that section. In these cases, I have used a semi-colon to separate the consecutive sources cited.

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