

# Shakespeare Seminar

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Shakespeare and the City:  
The Negotiation of Urban Spaces  
in Shakespeare's Plays

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**“AND HERE IN LONDON, WHERE I OFT HAVE BEENE”:  
CONTRASTING REPRESENTATIONS OF THE EARLY MODERN  
CAPITAL AT THE GLOBE AND THE BLACKFRIARS, 1599-1609**

BY

SARAH DUSTAGHEER

In Francis Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, a man introduces himself and his Lady with a romantic yarn:

I am an Errant Knight that followed Armes  
With speare and shield and in my tender yeares  
I stricken was with Cupids fiery shaft,  
And fell in love with this my Lady deer,  
And stole her from her friends in Turnbull Street. (G2<sup>v</sup>)

For Londoners, watching this play’s first performance in 1607 at the Blackfriars theatre, the topographic reference of the final line ironically undercuts the starry-eyed romance of the knight’s tale. The humour of this speech relies on their knowledge of Turnbull Street as a notorious haunt for prostitutes.<sup>1</sup> By evoking this meaningful urban locale, Beaumont comically pierces the image of a tender young knight struck by Cupid’s “fiery shaft.” Even the staccato monosyllables of “Turnbull Street” jar with the steady rhythm of his previous lines. The audience realise that this is not a knight and a lady but a local London prostitute and her customer. Beaumont’s deliberately crafted reference to Turnbull Street is a spatial punch line, which forces the audience to reassess their initial judgement of the knight. Punch lines and references which rely on the audience’s specific knowledge of their city are few and far between in Shakespeare’s work at the Globe; he rarely generates what we might term ‘London laughter.’ In this essay, I want to examine the representations of London and contrast performances by the Children of the Queen’s Revels at the Blackfriars theatre with performances by the Lord Chamberlain’s / King’s Men at the Globe between 1599 and 1609, identifying and analysing why two different portrayals of the city were seen at these two playhouses during this time.<sup>2</sup>

*The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is one of twenty-four extant new plays written for the repertory of the Children of the Queen’s Revels and performed at the indoor playhouse, the Blackfriars, between 1600 and 1608. Five of these are set exclusively in

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<sup>1</sup> The street was ‘famous’ for ‘illicit sex’ (cf. Gowing 145).

<sup>2</sup> The rest of the repertory includes: *Cynthia’s Revels* (1600), *Poetaster* (1601), *May Day* (1601), *Sir Giles Goosecap* (1602), *The Gentleman Usher* (1602), *The Malcontent* (1604), *Law Tricks* (1604), *Bussy D’Ambois* (1604), *The Fawn* (1604), *Philotas* (1604), *The Widow’s Tears* (1605), *Monsieur D’Olive* (1605), *Sophonisba* (1606), *The Isle of Gulls* (1606), *Cupid’s Revenge* (1607), *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608), *The Coxcomb* (1608) and *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron* (1608). The content and dating of the repertory has been constructed using Harbage, Smith, and Munro.

London: *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604), *Eastward Ho!* (1605-6), *The Fleer* (1606), *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) and *Your Five Gallants* (1607).<sup>3</sup> These plays are dense with references to real London locations and characters associated with city life which had specific meanings for urban audiences. Spatial theorist Michel de Certeau suggests that the naming of place is “an articulation of a second, poetic geography on top of the geography of the literal” (105). At the Blackfriars, playwrights mapped the “poetic geography” through which early modern Londoners negotiated their rapidly developing environment. My opening example from *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* has its counterpart in Act 4, scene 1 of *Eastward Ho!*, when Chapman, Jonson and Marston transcribe the poetic geography of locations along the River Thames. Sir Petronel and a gang of dubious characters decide to sail to Virginia with hopes of untold wealth and riches. Their ship is wrecked during a storm and each character lands in a specific London location pertinent to their particular sin. Adulterous Winnie, for instance, lands at St Katherine’s dock, a place associated with prostitution and fallen women; and the penniless leader of the get-rich-quick scheme, Sir Petronel, lands at the Isle of Dogs, an area which was a “refuge for debtors” (Grantley 111). Evidently, the playwrights take real locations that cover the length of the river and use cultural meanings to create a symbolic map of the characters’ transgressions.

Playwrights at the Blackfriars were not unusual in their response to early modern London. Scholarship on the portrayal of the city in playhouses of this time demonstrates that plays which mapped and engaged with the specific details of the urban locale were prevalent (cf. Bly, Dillon, and Howard). Jean Howard, for example, argues that the theatre “was important in shaping how people of the period conceptualized or made sense of this fast-changing urban milieu” (2). Similarly, Darryl Grantley points out that this drama “offered the audiences imaginative ownership of the terrain on which the theatrical narratives were being played out, but in the process would have also affected and helped shape their perceptions of their actual habitat” (7). However, when we turn to consider the representation of London at the Globe at this time, there is a curious absence of any urban mapping. Here Shakespeare and several other playwrights writing for the Globe creatively responded to the city in a different way from playwrights at the Blackfriars.

Of the twenty-six extant plays performed at the Globe between 1599 and 1609, only Jonson’s *Every Man Out of His Humour* and an anonymous play entitled *The London*

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<sup>3</sup> This essay derives from a wider research project which investigates the relationship between theatre space and performance at the Globe and Blackfriars between 1599 and 1613. In 1609, the King’s Men, began performing at both these very different theatres. Before this time, the King’s Men solely used the Globe, an amphitheatre on the Southbank, which they built in 1599, while a company of boy actors called the Children of the Queen’s Revels performed in the Blackfriars, an indoor hall situated near the heart of the City of London, from 1600 to 1608. By comparing the repertoires of these two companies and their use of theatre space between 1599 and 1609 – the adult actors outdoors and the boy actors playing indoors – I aim to identify the opportunities and difficulties facing the King’s Men in 1609 when they began performing at both the Globe and Blackfriars. For a discussion of the King’s Men’s representation of urban space at the Blackfriars after 1609 see Dustagheer.

*Prodigal* (occasionally attributed to Shakespeare) are set exclusively in London.<sup>4</sup> Grantley notes that this second play “goes so far as to include the city’s name in its title [but] makes little of its geography beyond a few references” (139). *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, *The Fair Maid of Bristol* and *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, three other plays from the Globe repertory, are partially set in London. Nevertheless, as with *The London Prodigal*, these plays have significantly fewer depictions of specific city places than is normal for the repertory of the Blackfriars. The title of this essay, “[H]ere in London where I oft have beene,” is one such example of the fleeting and generalised reference to the city typical of the Globe repertory from *Thomas Lord Cromwell*. Aside from Jonson’s *Every Man Out*, at the Globe, audiences did not see an interrogation of the recognisable details of their city in the way that they did at the Blackfriars and, indeed, many other theatres of early modern London.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that London was utterly absent at the Globe. The city was of course very much present at this outdoor theatre as foreign and historical settings formed substitutes or distant reflections of London; for instance, Shakespeare’s Rome in *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus*. Thus I wish to suggest that while at the Blackfriars, audiences saw a localised slice of city life – an imaginative *map* of real London locations – at the Globe they saw a distant, more obliquely reflected view of London: not a map but instead a *panorama*.

Panoramas of London were an early modern artistic phenomenon, and they began appearing around 1550. As historian Peter Whitfield notes, from this time the city became “in its own right, a subject of interest for artists to focus on, and to embody in both manuscript and printed images” (8). From 1550, artists conceived of the city in a new way; they created a large-scale vision, previously unseen, and established London as a legitimate artistic subject. These artists implicitly aligned England’s capital with earlier great metropolises such as Rome and Jerusalem by drawing the city in the same panoramic format. The panoramas of London, such as Wenceslaus Hollar’s 1647 “Long View,” were usually drawn from the south bank of the Thames near to where the Globe stood.<sup>5</sup> From this position, artists saw the entire scope of the well-developed north bank and could depict the impressive sprawl of buildings. This position, of course, was the same one that audiences occupied when they travelled across the river to attend a show at the Globe. Versions of the view they saw as a result of their journey survive in those contemporary panoramas.

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<sup>4</sup> The repertory includes: *Julius Caesar* (1599), *As You Like It* (1599), *A Larum for London* (1599), *Every Man Out of His Humour* (1599), *Thomas Lord Cromwell* (1600), *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (1600), *Hamlet* (1601), *Twelfth Night* (1601), *Troilus and Cressida* (1602), *Sejanus* (1603), *The Fair Maid of Bristow* (1603), *The London Prodigal* (1603), *Measure for Measure* (1603), *All’s Well That Ends Well* (1603), *Othello* (1604), *Volpone* (1605), *The Miseries of an Enforced Marriage* (1606), *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (1606), *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1606), *Macbeth* (1606), *King Lear* (1606), *The Devil’s Charter* (1606), *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1608), *Timon of Athens* (1607), *Pericles* (1608) and *Coriolanus* (1609). Content and dating has been constructed using Harbage, Knutson, and Gurr.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of contemporary panoramas of the north side of the river Thames, viewed from south, include J.C Visscher’s *Londinum Florentiss[i]ma Britanniae Urbs* (1616), Ralph Agas’s *Civitas Londinum* (1633) and Wenceslaus Hollar’s “Long View” of London from Southwark (1647). For images and more details please see Foakes 19-20, 4 and 36, respectively.

At the Globe, audience members were presented with a literary and imaginary version of London as a panorama, and playwrights, including Shakespeare, explored the potential for reflection and analysis that the physical position on the Southbank initiated. In *Measure for Measure*, when it is time for the Duke to throw off his disguise he is insistent on the location for his ‘return’ and the place where he will articulate his discoveries. He writes to caretaker ruler Angelo, who has proved so immoral throughout the course of the play, demanding to meet him “A League below the Citie” (TLN 2182).<sup>6</sup> The Duke reiterates the location to Isabella while disguised as the friar. As the ‘friar’ he speaks in the third person to confirm that the Duke

hath carried  
Notice to Escalus and Angelo,  
Who do prepare to meete him at the gates,  
There to give up their power (TLN 2219-22).

Just before this final scene begins Friar Peter also reminds the audience of its location, telling them that the trumpets have sounded and the “generous, and gravest Citizens / Have hent the gates” (TLN 2340-4). After receiving the Duke’s letter Angelo wonders at his request: “why meet him at the gates, and re[de]liver our authorities there?” (TLN 2276-7). In this final scene, the Duke does not state why he chooses the city gates for his revelation. We, like Angelo, may wonder about location. Why does Shakespeare place this scene outside the city gate, and include several reminders of this setting? I believe that this location gives the play’s ending a degree of spatial symbolism that would have been recognisable to the audience. The strands of the narrative resolve outside the city: Angelo’s immoral transgressions are revealed, he is forced to marry, Isabella learns her brother is not dead and the Duke removes his disguise. At this site the Duke chooses to gather all the disparate groups of characters together and initiates their reflection on the play’s events. The ending of *Measure for Measure* set outside the city gates forms a subtle response to its performance venue. The Globe, on the margins of the city, was a space in which audiences escaped from the dense urbanised northern part of London and had the opportunity to reflect on the city which they had left. In the final scene, the Duke chooses a parallel geographical position for a similar activity: at the gates of Vienna he initiates the citizens’ reflection on the play’s events and the degradation of their city.

In *Timon of Athens*, Shakespeare again represents an area specifically beyond civic boundaries as a site of personal revelation and social analysis. The debt-ridden and impoverished Timon is denied money by the Athenian state and his friends. His pecuniary difficulties, as the first half of the play portrays, are a result of his excessive generosity to the people who now deny him. An enraged Timon exits Athens and, from here, unleashes his venom against those inside the walls. He rants:

Let me looke backe upon thee. O thou Wall  
That girdles in those Wolves, dive in the earth,  
And fence not Athens. (TLN 1504-6)

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<sup>6</sup> All references to Shakespeare’s First Folio are from *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, The Norton Facsimile and follow the through line referencing (TLN).

After a tirade against different groups that constitute the city of Athens (matrons, maids, children, slaves, fools, senators), Timon concludes: “[t]he Gods confound (heare me you good Gods all) / Th’ Athenians both within and out that Wall.” (TLN 1540-1). In *Measure for Measure*, Shakespeare reminds the audience of the final scene’s location outside Vienna’s city gate by making several characters mention it. In *Timon of Athens*, as also discussed by Galena Hashhozheva in this issue, Timon not only notes his position outside Athens’ city wall but directs an entire monologue at this civic boundary. I am drawing attention not so much to the ‘what’ of this scene but the ‘where’: Shakespeare, once again, foregrounds a position outside the city as the site where characters make critical, distant assessments of their society.

In the previous scene, Timon holds a dinner party for his so-called friends, angrily throws water in their faces and directs a tirade against these “[m]ost smiling, smooth, detested Parasites” (TLN 1474). His final lines reveal, though, that his anger has moved beyond his false friends: “Burne house, sinke Athens, henceforth hated be / Of Timon Man, and all Humanity!” (TLN 1484-5). Timon’s transformation from generous socialite to the misanthropic outsider – the play’s driving narrative – really begins at this moment. In the next scene outside the wall, Shakespeare highlights that Timon only achieves his critical judgement of his city by crossing its boundary. The culmination of Timon’s breakdown – the shift from specific rage directed at his personal friends to aggressive scrutiny of his society – occurs outside the walls. As in *Measure for Measure*, *Timon* pointedly ends outside the city. The disgruntled soldier Alcibiades, disgusted by the immorality of the Athenian rulers, attacks the city. In the final scene, he arrives outside and negotiates with the Athenian senators who appear “upon the wal[l]s” (TLN 2512). This stage direction probably meant that the senators appeared in the upper gallery of the stage; the tiring house wall represents the city boundary. It is likely that when Timon directs his speech at the wall, earlier in the play, the actor addressed the *frons scenae*. The imaginative space Shakespeare creates – civic border as back wall and stage as outside the city – is a reflection of the Globe’s London location. The entire theatre directly faced a natural border, the Thames, and a civic border, the City of London’s wall.

It is often said that every generation reinvents London, or any major metropolis, for themselves. However, the repertoires performed at the Globe and Blackfriars from 1599-1609, suggest that the reinventions of one generation can be as multiple, rich and complex as London itself. The Blackfriars was immersed in the heart of the city, near the Inns of Court, the Royal Exchange and the Strand, and playwrights placed the dense, urban environment surrounding the playhouse on stage. Conversely, the Globe was outside this crowded, complex topography, on the less developed south bank of the Thames. From this space, audiences, playwrights and players looked back over the sprawling urban landscape of the North bank and saw their city as a whole and from a distance. Ultimately, though, whether it was a map (at the Blackfriars) or panorama (at the Globe) on stage, it is clear that early modern playhouses offered a space in which playwrights, audience and players gathered to contemplate their rapidly changing and developing urban environment.

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## Zusammenfassung

Betrachtet man vergleichend das Repertoire am Globe und im Blackfriars Theater im Zeitraum zwischen 1599-1609, dann werden Unterschiede deutlich, die die jeweilige topographische Lage der beiden Theater spiegelt. Das Blackfriars Theater im Herzen der Stadt, in der Nähe der Advokatenstifte, der Börse und an der Hauptverkehrsader zwischen Westminster und der City gelegen, lud die Dramatiker ein, das urbane Treiben auf die Bühne zu bringen. In diesen Stücken, beispielsweise in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, bewegen sich die Figuren zwischen den Gebäuden der Stadt. Die Zuschauer sind eingeladen, mit diesen Figuren die Stadt aus wechselnden Blickwinkeln zu erkunden. Am Globe hingegen, das sich außerhalb der Stadtgrenzen an der Southbank befand, richteten die Dramatiker den Blick aus der Distanz auf die Stadt. Hier spielen entscheidende Szenen, wie beispielsweise in *Measure for Measure* oder *Timon of Athens*, vor den Stadttoren. Die Präsentation der Stadt als Straßengewirr (am Blackfriars) oder als Panorama (am Globe) bildet dabei zwei Fokalisationspunkte in einem Kontinuum der Repräsentation ab. Dramatiker, Schauspieler und Zuschauer konnten diese Perspektiven spielerisch einnehmen, um so ein komplexes Vexierbild der sich rapide verändernden Metropole zu zeichnen.