

SAA 2014

Seminar 48, "Theater and Neighborhood in Early Modern London"
Seminar Leader: Chris Highley (The Ohio State University)

Abstracts

Mark Bayer
University of Texas, San Antonio

'Data-Mining' Early Modern Drama

Much of my previous work on early modern playhouses and the plays staged there has tried to localize that drama. Did certain theatres, catering to residents of certain neighborhoods and other urban communities, specialize in certain types of drama? To what extent were theatre professionals able to target particular groups of playgoers, and how did they go about doing this? Why were certain plays, on certain themes, and featuring certain figures, more popular at one playhouse than another? Since we don't know that much about audiences, answering these questions has always been a matter of interpretation, speculation, and educated guesses. It's certainly possible to discern patterns—plays staged at the Red Bull tend to contain more bombast and spectacle than those at the Globe, for instance—but it's difficult to verify whether and how these patterns are meaningful, or simply spurious. In other words, I have yet to find a satisfactory methodology to correlate specific features of plays to the playhouse and neighborhood where they were staged.

In this paper, I want to probe the limits of using fairly rudimentary statistical analysis of certain terms used in a fairly large number of plays as a starting point for making certain conclusions about plays staged in certain theatres and in certain neighborhoods. Specifically, I've come up with about 175 terms that I will search for in the text of about 150 plays staged at public playhouses from 1603 and 1620. The terms will include historical and mythical figures, places in England and abroad, and locations in and around London, and the names of certain occupations and trades. The results of this extensive search can then be correlated to the playhouse (and therefore the neighborhood) in which these plays were staged. Using this raw data, I will compile a database to determine, in the first place, the usefulness of the results as well as a starting point for hypotheses on any number of related matters.

In my paper, then, I will state and explain the results of this analysis, and hopefully be able to make a few very tentative conclusions. More than the results themselves, however, I wish to discuss the value of using this type of statistical modeling to conduct certain kinds of historical and literary analysis. I certainly don't think that searching key terms in plays can adequately substitute for the archival research and literary interpretation that we usually do, but it may be that 'data-mining' might prove an additional and under-utilized methodological tool to approach a topic where evidence is scarce. I am fully prepared to conclude that this kind of data analysis is ultimately not a

viable way of approaching the broader topic of theatre and neighborhood, but even this conclusion can lead to valuable reflection on some difficult methodological issues that perennially confront theatre historians.

Rinku Chatterjee
Syracuse University

‘The Devil is an Ass’: The Devil as an Early Modern London Mountebank

In my paper, I read the theatrical representation of the devil in early modern English drama as a response to the legal, social, and commercial institutions of London. In the opening scene of Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*, for example, the vice Iniquity conjures up the imaginary space of London within the confines of the theater. Landmarks like Tottenham Court, the Royal Exchange, Custom House, and Westminster Hall highlight the institutions that harbor corruption. This corruption is not just tolerated, but normalized in conjunction with the redefinition of urban material culture. Given the exigencies of newly revised business conventions, the understanding that corruption is inevitable initiates the secularization of the devil. I situate Jonson's intellectual aims within the commercial culture of London, highlighting the history of its performance.

Christopher D'Addario
Gettysburg College

October 23, 1610: Blackfriars, London and Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*

As assiduous critics of *The Alchemist* have pointed out, Jonson carefully dates his comedy to correspond closely, if not nearly exactly, to the date of its early performances. Several references in the play unmistakably situate the play amidst the contemporary moment of its performance. Moreover, the play takes place at a house in the same neighborhood, Blackfriars, where it was performed, and over a span of time that roughly coincides with the real time of the performance. As Gail Kern Paster has noted, the audience thus seems to be watching or eavesdropping upon events that could be happening “out there” just around the corner. The theatre, to some extent, becomes a continuation of the everyday events that had populated the audience members' days up to that point. As with the various gestures to spectating and performance in *Bartholomew Fair*, there is an erasure of the boundary between theatre and life.

These are not entirely unfamiliar points to make about *The Alchemist*. But it is useful to consider more fully and closely the audience's perception of this blurring as it sat in the recently renovated and re-opened private theatre. The Blackfriars Theatre uniquely sat within and amidst the interconnected buildings that once housed and serviced the Dominican friars, existing in often uneasy “structural codependency” with what by 1610 were wealthy residences, tenements and shops owned and rented by the neighborhood's denizens. The audience members at *The Alchemist* would have been much closer, so to speak, to other structures, inhabitants and occurrences than at the

Globe. At the same time, the theatre's indoor space, its spectacular lighting and crowded galleries would have made the audience feel set off from the immediate neighborhood, from the abutting dwelling of Lord Hunsdon and his household, from the coaches that likely crowded and jostled for space in the narrow streets and alleys, from the nearby parish church and its prominent Puritan preacher, Stephen Egerton.

Jonson seems to take advantage of the contradictory place that the theatre occupied in its neighborhood. As the spectators sit in Blackfriars observing the performance, they would be aware of the fictionality of what they are watching, aware of their separation from the outside world, aware that Jonson shaped his comedy around a five act structure, that the events on stage are not real. However, even as they slip into the fictional world of Face, Subtle and Dol's schemes, laugh at Dapper's dealings with the Queen of Fairy or wonder at Mammon's splendid imaginings, they are insistently brought out of this fiction not only by the setting of Jonson's play, but perhaps even by the shadows cast by the surrounding Blackfriars' buildings or the noises of the surrounding streets and yards. The audience member senses an oscillation between stage time, where no time ostensibly passes in the spectator's world, and real time, where the hours march ever onward. With his gestures to the exact space and time of performance within the play, Jonson has made the dissonance between the created world of his comedy, the movements of the pentameter, the quick witty exchange, the sudden denouement, and the complex occurrences of the spectator's day, one of the central experiences of watching his play.

Roze Hentschell

Colorado State University

Paul's Boys: Actors, Choristers, Students, and Children in St. Paul's Cathedral Precinct

Most students of the early modern period know "Paul's Boys" to mean the child actors of St. Paul's Cathedral who were drawn from the ranks of the cathedral's choir school and who performed in the cathedral precinct. This essay will discuss the boy actors in relation to their playing space, but will also argue that a better understanding of the spaces and activities of the cathedral precinct at large may help us to understand more precisely the daily life of the boys. In particular, I will explore the boys' church-related activities in order to complicate our understanding of their secular and commercial practices. In addition, I will contextualize the boy actors in the spaces and activities of Paul's *other* children: the pupils of the grammar school, located in Paul's Churchyard. The ten or eleven boy choristers of the cathedral had the primary role of singing each day in the cathedral and at other church services. The choir students also regularly sang and performed plays at court and comprised The Children of St. Paul's, a lucrative and popular theater company that—in its later incarnation (1598-1606)—performed the sophisticated comedies of John Marston, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton, and others. Scholars have vigorously debated the space in which they performed their plays, but have determined some details: the boys performed and lived inside a building, likely the almonry, adjacent to the west wall of the Chapter House wall, and they performed primarily to an audience drawn from the nearby Inns of Court and local merchants. In this paper I will examine what this space might tell us about the lives of the boys and the

plays they performed. Sandwiched between the Dean and chapter's official meeting place and the "Little South Door" to the nave, though which so much secular traffic flowed, the place of the small, multi-use hall reveals the pressures on and opportunities afforded to the boys. Plays staged by Paul's boys were likely shorter than those put on at the public playhouses, as they needed to be performed between 4:00 p.m., when evening prayers concluded, and 6:00 p.m., when the precinct gates closed. Paul's Boys present us with a wonderful example of how secular and religious life in the precinct was intertwined to such an extent that extricating them is a foolish enterprise. The boy choristers for the cathedral put on sophisticated secular comedies for commercial gain in a space that was and was not affiliated with the cathedral at large, and their schedule and schooling were dictated by the rhythms of quotidian church life. .

I will look at Paul's Boys in relation to the other children of Paul's—the boys who attended St Paul's grammar school, established in the 1520s by Dean John Colet and located in the east side of the precinct. The dean and chapter granted land to the Mercers' Company, the guild that oversaw the trade in luxury cloth, to build and run a rigorous day school emphasising humanist education. 153 pupils, generally drawn from London's merchant families from nearby neighborhoods, attended free of charge and were expected to be at school from 7-11 a.m. and again from 1-5 p.m. While the grammar school and the choir school were separate entities and had distinct relationships to the church's activities, they overlapped as well. We know that the choir boys attended the grammar school for three hours a day to study classical rhetoric and Latin and Greek literature. Richard Mulcaster, formerly the headmaster of the Merchant-Tailors school, was recruited to finish his career at Paul's Grammar school, and instructed the grammar boys in music and acting; occasionally grammar school boys were recruited as chorister-actors. Moreover, Mulcaster's influence is linked to the revival of the choir boy's theater troupe. Both groups of boys had strong ties to commercial London, even as their primary purpose was ostensibly detached from these concerns.

This context will inform a brief reading of John Marston's *What you Will* (1601), particularly the school room scene. A play best known as part of the "War of the Theaters," it was performed by The Children of Paul's, and also gives us insight into the spatial and pedagogical world that the boy actors inhabited.

Janelle Jenstad
University of Victoria

The Place of the Playhouses in *The Map of Early Modern London*

Many people visit *The Map of Early Modern London (MoEML)* because of their interest in Shakespeare and early modern drama. While *MoEML* consciously decided not to make Shakespeare its focus, the fact remains that many of our users are professors and students who want to know more about London's playhouses. Compared to other sites in *MoEML*'s encyclopedia, the playhouses are relatively well studied. Other projects (EMLoT, ShaLT) and institutions (Museum of London Archaeology) are doing excellent work of contextualizing, mapping, and excavating the playhouses. So what is the place of playhouses in *MoEML*'s encyclopedia? The playhouse entries will likely be completed by

our pedagogical partners; Kate McPherson at UVU and Peter Herman at SDSU are having their classes write the *MoEML* entries on The Curtain and The Blackfriars respectively. It may be that *MoEML*'s ultimate role will be to point our users (via these student contributions edited by their professors) to other resources. But we are also in an excellent position to provide information to anyone interested in the impact of a theatre on a neighbourhood, particularly when we build the temporal tools that will enable users to search literary and historical references in our library by date. My paper will be divided into two parts: the first part will be an expanded set of guidelines for our partners writing the playhouse entries; the second part will offer some prototypes and suggestions for *MoEML*'s role in making it possible to research theatre neighbourhoods.

Sally-Beth MacLean
University of Toronto

Mapping Early Modern Southwark: A Progress Report

In collaboration with Byron Moldofsky, head of the GIS and Cartography Office (Geography, University of Toronto), I am currently engaged in developing a detailed historical GIS map of early modern Southwark. We have consulted with Prof. Matthew Davies and the development team for the *Locating London's Past* project (University of London), which allows users to search a wide body of digital resources relating to early modern and eighteenth-century London, and to map the results on to a fully GIS compliant version of John Rocque's 1746 map. With an eye to collaborating on the extension of historic GIS London area mapping further back in time, we have agreed to use as our base for early modern Southwark the *Survey of the City of London and the surrounding built-up area (including Westminster and part of Southwark)* published by William Morgan in 1682. Unlike its pictorial predecessors of the pre-1642 era, Morgan's map is a large-scale and more accurate ground-plan, suitable for geo-referencing with modern Ordnance Survey maps.

The map is destined not only to extend current interactive mapping of provincial England and Wales via REED's open access *Patrons and Performances Web Site* but also to link with REED's *Early Modern London Theatres* bibliography site and the Surrey dramatic records to be published in the REED series. Our ultimate goal is to merge our theatre history data with demographic, economic and social history data compiled by other partners, such as, in the first instance, William Ingram and Alan Nelson's newly launched *The Token Books of St Saviour Southwark*.

Sites of interest include historic inns, theatres, parish churches, and private residences, as well as streets and lanes, manor, parish, and ward boundaries, all relevant for probing the relationships -- social, parochial and administrative -- of residents in the area with associations with the theatres. The data to be linked will include not only Ingram and Nelson's data culled from exhaustive transcriptions of the St Saviour's Token Books (1570s to 1643) but also a wider selection of records relating to Southwark's parish churches, legal cases, leases, deeds, and wills, as well as the Surrey and Kent commissioners of sewers' reports and Henslowe-Alleyn papers directly connected with the Rose and Hope/Bear Garden.

An interim report on progress, with mapping examples, will be provided.

Linda Neiberg
Baruch College, CUNY

Ferry Me to the Promised Land: The Thames as Early Modern Theatrical Neighborhood and Underworld Waterway

My project builds on Mark Bayer's study, *Theatre, Community, and Civic Engagement in Jacobean London*, in which he details the intimate relationship between London's theatres and their surrounding communities, and Mary Bly's article, "Playing the Tourist in Early Modern London: Selling the Liberties on Stage," which argues that the Liberties were not hegemonic places in the cultural imagination, but quite unique and thus drew varied audiences to their respective theatres. In this brief essay, I examine the River Thames as a neighborhood that links early modern London and the theatres of Bankside. With the congested London Bridge as the sole bridge connecting the city's northern and southern shores, the river was the only other means of crossing from one side to the other. The Thames was thus bustling not only with cargo and fishing vessels, occasional royal pageants, but also ferries, which, for a few coins, transported passengers to and from Bankside. While the Thames served as a commercial trading route and a royal stage, I posit that it was also a neighborhood intimately connected with Bankside and—where it lapped at its shores and stairs—an extension of it.

My reading of the Thames as a vibrant neighborhood in early modern London's playhouse geography is informed, too, by a look at how the Thames morphs into a variation on the river Styx, as its ferrymen carried pleasure-seekers from London to the Liberty on the "other side" of this waterway—to an underworld that was actually quite visible, albeit removed from the city proper; more so, an underworld from which one could readily return and visit again. Lambasted by a vocal minority of city magistrates and antitheatrical polemicists as a filthy underworld that bred civic disorder and led to divine damnation, Southwark was both a Liberty that supported theatres, brothels, and animal-baiting arenas as well as an underworld that—not unlike the mythological Hades—seeded and nourished. The Thames as a neighborhood in London's theatre cityscape has not been explored as such, nor have its similarities with Styx in this context. By reading the Thames as an inhabited thoroughfare to the "forbidden," we are able to see Southwark's theatres as a "promised land" for pleasure, knowledge, work, and financial profit – key elements in the expansion of artistic, residential, and commercial boundaries of an ever-growing metropolis. We are also able to see, coextensively, that the Thames, as a link between London and Bankside theatres, unsettles ideas about surface and depth, cleanliness and filth, city and liberty as the boundary between the two is so freely traversed and re-traversed. To help build my case, I touch on some of the dramas staged in Southwark that feature (or allude to) the Thames, such as Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (The Swan) and Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (The Hope) and read them in the context of Edmund Spenser's and John Taylor's poems that likewise feature this river as a (re)generative and thriving space.

Lori Humphrey Newcomb
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Theater and Parish

Despite the commonplace of church opposition to the commercial theaters, every theater was situated in a parish, and leading theater figures were active in their home parishes as churchwardens. This paper reports on my preliminary research into churchwardens' well-documented work in the parish – managing income, spatial demands, and social hierarchy. The correspondence of this work to theater management, I argue, suggests surprising homologies, architectural and experiential, between the two institutions. Early modern theater audiences may have borne more resemblance to early modern congregations than anyone wanted to admit at the time; today, that opposition can be re-read for fresh evidence of the dynamics of both groups.

Christi Spain-Savage
Fordham University

'A Choice Pair of Noble mens Oares': The Bankside Players and Thames Watermen

In Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, Touchwood Senior describes an incident in which watermen, boatmen who carried playgoers and other entertainment seekers across the Thames, helped a gentleman elude "varlets" who had chased him into the Blackfriars theater. The "most requiteful'st" watermen also helped Touchwood Senior escape eight sergeants, he admits. The timeliness of this scene in *Chaste Maid*, performed in 1613 at the Swan theater on the Bankside by the Lady Elizabeth's Men, sheds light on then current conflicts between watermen and the players. The Bankside playhouses were suffering, particularly after the Globe burned in June of 1613, and playing companies were performing north of the city in Middlesex, circumstances that resulted in a financial crisis for the watermen, who heavily relied on the business of Bankside theatrical patrons. In fact, John Taylor the Water-Poet, representing the Watermen's Company, petitioned the Privy Council in January of 1614 to limit playing in London and Middlesex in favor of the Bankside and was accused of taking bribes from the players when the deal fell apart, a series of events he describes and defends in *The True Cause of the Watermen's Suit Concerning Players*. In her notes to *Chaste Maid* regarding Touchstone Senior's speech, Linda Woodbridge intriguingly writes, "To report [the episode about the watermen saving him and the gentleman] on the stage of the Swan was to denigrate a rival theatre, on the wrong side of the river in the watermen's view, as a rowdy, dangerous place" (946, n. 6). My paper for our seminar will attempt to investigate the proposition Woodbridge raises, by analyzing Middleton's play in relation to historical evidence regarding the interactions between these two theaters and their connection to the watermen's trade. I hope to uncover the cultural and financial tensions alluded to in the play and their effects on the neighborhood of Bankside in 1613.

Alicia V. Tomasian
William Rainey Harper College

‘Our Sober, Scurvy, Precise, Neighbors’: *The Alchemist* and Blackfriars

What is at stake in the question of whether Ben Jonson wrote *The Alchemist* for Blackfriars Theater? Certainly, it answers to the play’s unity of space. The stage consistently represents the Blackfriars house. As Doll Common escapes out the back, it is delightful to think of her disappearing into the streets of Blackfriars, where theater patrons would have walked past well-known con artists with similar bags of tricks and performances. Most notably, Judith Philips and Alice West (who operated in most of the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the theater), became infamous for acts incorporating the Queen of Fairies. Part of the pleasure of Jonson’s comedy, of course, is that Subtle, Face, and Doll know how to use the beliefs and practices of their Puritan neighbors to prey on their victims. Doll’s performance as Lady What’s’hum, obsessed with Hugh Broughton’s *A Concoct of Scripture*, perhaps best exemplifies this. However, the “venture tripartite” of the play must balance this great source of material with the constant risk of exposure and condemnation from their “sober, scurvy, precise neighbors” much as perhaps the theater and theater patrons might. In fact, the play opens with Doll desperate to silence the rowdy fight of her partner; she chastizes, “Will you have / The neighbors hear you?” I argue that the neighborhood of Blackfriars plays an essential part in the play, and that Jonson purposely draws source material not only from the Friars itself but from neighborhoods circling the theater, such as Katherine’s, the Strand, Smithfield, and St. Giles-Cripplegate. In the world of *The Alchemist*, neighbors who condemn vice serve as an important backdrop, just as neighbors who condemn theater might have been important to the Blackfriars Theater itself.

Rebecca Tomlin
Birkbeck College, University of London

‘I trac’d him too and fro’: Walking the streets in *A Warning for Fair Women* and *Edward IV*.

This paper will work with mapping methods suggested by Franco Moretti to formulate a geographical representation of the shared concerns of two plays, Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV* and the anonymous *A Warning for Fair Women*. This method generates a discussion of the meaning of the shared places of the plays, in particular the eastern part of what Lawrence Manley has called the ‘ceremonial route’ through the city and the exit through Aldgate. My paper will also consider the place of the suburb outside Aldgate as a theatrical space of penance and the performance of alms solicitation and receipt. Theatres in the neighbourhood under discussion are the inn playing houses, The Bell, The Bull and The Cross Keys in Gracechurch and Bishopsgate Streets and my paper will consider whether and how the presence of these playing spaces is reflected in these dramas that imagine London in the 1590s.

