

Digitally Mapping the City Comedy: the Urban Landscape of *Eastward Ho*,
Bartholomew Fair, and *The Roaring Girl*

“Mapping Jacobean London” is a digital humanities project, with an interactive, annotated map at its centre. The map provides detailed information on some of the key London locations that appear in Jonson’s *Bartholomew Fair*, Jonson, Chapman, and Marston’s *Eastward Ho*, and Middleton and Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl*. I chose to focus on these three plays because the navigation and interpretation of urban space is central to their dramatic projects. The idea of using a digital, interactive map as a method for analysing them grew out of this initial interest in these plays’ treatment of space. Although one key goal for my project was to provide fully accessible digitised and visualised information for students studying these plays, the foregrounding of physical space and movement in the form of a map also serves as an interpretative framework for understanding these plays as Jacobean city comedies.

The connection between Jacobean city comedies and their contemporary urban setting has been well documented by various scholars, notably by Jean E. Howard in *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598-1642* and James D. Mardock in *Our Scene is London: Ben Jonson’s City and the Space of the Author*. These works foreground the importance of the space of the Jacobean city in interpreting city comedies, as well as how “the theatre, in turn, was important in shaping how people of the period conceptualised or made sense of this fast-changing urban milieu” (Howard, 2). Despite this, traditional scholarship has made startling little effort to

visualise or characterise the space of the city, adhering to the traditional parameters of academic discourse.

In "Mapping Jacobean London" I hope to have inverted this relationship between space and (academic) text, as the digital, interactive map forces the reader to confront the space of London before accessing any information about a location or its significance to Jacobean city comedies. As a result, the reader's primary interaction with London as a spatial text frames all of their subsequent interpretations of the locations and their significance to the plays. Adam Kirsch asks, in his essay "Technology Is Taking Over English Departments: The False Promise of the Digital Humanities", "does the digital component of digital humanities give us new ways to think, or only ways to illustrate what we already know?" Kirsch's question seems misplaced at best, because digital projects can and should be about visualising existing scholarly thought in new ways, in order to facilitate new interpretive work: "Mapping Jacobean London" is a project that attempts to balance the shared pedagogical and interpretive functions of the Digital Humanities.

A key project of "Mapping Jacobean London" is to convey Jacobean city comedy's concern with the theatrical representation of urban space. City comedies frequently negotiate the relationship between the urban space of London and the theatre stage: as Mardock argues that "Jonson's city comedies are often centrally about London as a stage [...] They expose London, the London inhabited by Jonson and his audience alike, as inherently dramatic" (45). The Jacobean London portrayed in *Bartholomew Fair*, *Eastward Ho*, and *The Roaring Girl* bears a geographic

resemblance to the real city outside the theatre, but it is essentially a theatrical and fictional space. I have tried to convey this nuance in “Mapping Jacobean London” by limiting the locations featured on the map to a few key locations that appear in the three plays at the centre of the project. Unlike the University of Victoria’s “Map of Early Modern London Project”, which uses a map of early modern London as a way to display and collate encyclopaedic information from its various databases, “Mapping Jacobean London” is a project concerned with a small number of locations and the ways that they feature in the theatrical city fabricated by *Bartholomew Fair*, *Eastward Ho*, and *The Roaring Girl*. In this way I believe that my project counters Adam Kirsch’s claim that “the tools of digital humanities are only suited to understanding things in the mass”. “Mapping Jacobean London” provides an intimate and close analysis of these plays through the medium of digitally rendered space. It is an example a digital humanities project that does not concern itself with the massive and the vast, but rather with the particular and the precise.

An example of real and theatrical urban space collapsing into one another can be found in Chapman, Jonson, and Marston’s use of the Counter as performative space in the final act of *Eastward Ho*. The ‘Counter’ was the general name given to the two prisons, one located on Wood Street and the other on Poultry Street. The Counters’ main function was as debtor’s prisons, although they were open all night “and anyone caught by the watch for any crimes or disturbances would be brought to them” (Howard, 76). *Eastward Ho* does not specify which one of the Counters is the setting for Act 5; however, considering that both Counters were located just off Cheapside and were often referred to as a single entity, this does not affect an

interpretation of their significance. The function that the Counters performed, as debtor's prisons, meant that they were performance spaces in real life as well as on the early modern stage, because their inmates had to persuade a friend or creditor to lend them money before they could be released. Not only were the Counters themselves theatrically coded spaces, but neighbouring Cheapside was also frequently used for the performance of royal and civic rituals (Griffiths, 176).

The events of Act 5 unfold in and around Touchstone's shop in Cheapside and the Counter (either Wood Street or Poultry Street), and the action follows Quicksilver and Sir Petronel's performances of penance. Although many twentieth century scholars, such as R. E. Knoll and J. I. Cope, have read *Eastward Ho* as a conventional Tudor morality play, recent scholarship has tended to interpret Quicksilver's repentance in Act 5 as performative and disingenuous. Mardock argues that the play, and particularly the final Act, establishes that "the most effective values [are] those of the theatre itself" (61) and those values are essentially communicated through the actions of Quicksilver. The relationship between real and dramatic urban space is demonstrated through the playwrights' use of these two locations, the Counter and Cheapside, which were coded as performance spaces in the cultural imagination.

The playwrights begin to equate the space of the Counter with the stage when Quicksilver is arrested. Touchstone's remark to him at the end of Act 4, "Offer not to speak, crocodile; I will not hear a sound come from thee. Thou hast learnt to whine at the play yonder" (4.2.349-351), establishes his fear that he will be taken in by a

performance of repentance. Touchstone's reference to the crocodile here alludes to the belief that "the crocodile wept either to lure a man in order to eat him or while (or after) eating him" (Van Fossen, 178): thus Touchstone accuses Quicksilver of pretending sorrow in order to lure him into forgiving him, foreshadowing the later scenes in the Counter. Similarly, the accusation that he has learnt to whine at the playhouse refers to actors' ability to manipulate their audiences' emotions. It is clear that Quicksilver's frequentation of the playhouses has taught him how to manipulate performative spaces and persuade a crowd, and Touchstone's unfamiliarity with the playhouses has left him unable to distinguish reality from performance.

Touchstone's fear that he cannot distinguish between performance and reality is fulfilled as soon as he is inside the theatrical space of the Counter. Once confronted with Quicksilver's performance of penance he is unable to resist and promptly forgives him. Touchstone's exclamation "This cannot be feigned, sure. Heaven pardon my severity" (5.5.76-77) obviously misinterprets the performance he is watching, as whether or not his repentance is genuine, Quicksilver's performance is being 'feigned' by an actor. In addition, his statement "Quicksilver, thou hast eat into my breast, Quicksilver, with the drops of thy sorrow, and killed the desperate opinion I had of thy reclaim" (5.5.137-140) suggests that Quicksilver performance has invaded his body and physically altered his disposition. Quicksilver collapses the space of the Counter into the space of the stage, performing the character of the penitent prisoner, as portrayed in the theatre, by denying himself worldly comforts, cutting off his hair, singing psalms, and composing remorseful ballads. Chapman, Marston, and Jonson are clearly gesturing to their dramatically knowledgeable

audience in these scenes, as well as marking the Counter out as a potentially dangerous theatrical space within the City.

The tension between the space of the Counters and Cheapside and the space of the stage continues to be played on in Eastward Ho's Epilogue: "Stay, sir, O perceive the multitudes are gathered together to view our coming out at the Counter. See if the streets and fronts of the houses be not stuck with people, and the windows filled with ladies, as on the solemn day of the Pageant!" (Epilogue.1-6). While in the previous scenes the interior of the Counter was transformed into a stage for Quicksilver to perform his penance upon, in the Epilogue the exterior of Cheapside and the interior of the theatre are collapsed together and inhabit the same space. Thus, the yard and the lower galleries become the streets and house-fronts of Cheapside, and the upper galleries, where presumably more women and gentry were seated, become "windows filled with ladies". The Epilogue explicitly conflates two public urban performance spaces, the theatre and Cheapside, acknowledging the relationship between the real City inhabited by the audience, and the fictional City created by the play.

"Mapping Jacobean London" highlights the importance of this relationship between the real City and the City of the city comedy through the set up of the Map and the information pages. The significance of the Counters and Cheapside to readings of city comedies is highlighted to users by their physical locations' presence on the Map. Consequently, users navigate to the information pages, which include *both* factual information about a location in the real City, *and* information about what

dramatic role that location plays in the City of the play. The hugely significant role that I have demonstrated the Counters and Cheapside play in the final scenes of *Eastward Ho* could easily be overlooked in a traditional reading of the text where the importance of locations is sidelined.

At this point I would like to go into more detail about the specific interactive capabilities and features of “Mapping Jacobean London”, as well as potential interpretative functions. The map that this project uses as its base layer is *Civitas Londinium*, commonly named the Agas Map, first printed from a woodcut c.1560. The copy of the Agas Map used in this project is a public domain image of the map from Wikimedia Commons and as such is of inferior quality to the copy held at the London Metropolitan Archives. However, the quality of the image does allow for a relatively high degree of zoom and panning capabilities, as well as being one complete image rather than separated into squares. I have used Leaflet, an open-source javascript library, to add markers to the map as well as to highlight particular zones or buildings; these highlights can be turned on or off using a checkbox menu on the right hand side of the map. There are also checkboxes for each of the three plays which, when clicked, highlight all of the locations that appear in that play.

When the location markers are clicked on a popup text box appears with the hyperlinked name of the location; this hyperlink takes the user to the location’s information page containing both historical and dramatic information. When places marked on my map are not directly represented because they were not built at the time the map was printed I have marked them at their approximate future location.

There are only two locations that cannot be displayed at all on the Agas Map because they are located too far east, Cuckold's Haven and the Isle of Dogs: for these I have included interactive google maps on the information pages that display their approximate location, as well as representations of the various journeys that the characters in *Eastward Ho* make between them during Act 4. The markers for these two locations on the Agas Map are positioned on the river in the direction of their actual position. I have limited the navigability of the site so that the markers on the Map are the only way for users to move between location pages: this forces readers to treat the map as an essential navigational tool, as well as to consider the spatial relationships between the various locations.

In an attempt to capture the eclectic nature of many of the plays' local references I have created a word cloud for each one of the plays that represent the frequency that a location is mentioned. As reliable digital texts are not available for all of the plays that I am using I collected the data for these word clouds manually by going through each play and noting every instance of a location being mentioned. The only location that I was forced to exclude from my data was 'the Fair' when it appeared in *Bartholomew Fair*, as the incredible frequency of references to it made the rest of the word cloud practically unreadable. I also made the decision to include references to the cardinal points, not only because 'eastward' and 'westward' are thematically key in *Eastward Ho*, but also because movement through the city in a particular direction indicates a concern with the navigation of space. While the largest location for each play tends to be fairly predictable, with 'Smithfield' featuring most in *Bartholomew Fair*, 'Eastward' in *Eastward Ho*, and 'Brentford' and "Gray's Inn Fields"

featuring prominently in *The Roaring Girl*, the wide range of peripheral locations, such as 'The Three Pigeons' tavern, 'Fish Street', and 'Puddle Wharf', crucially sheds light on the breadth of local reference points familiar to both playwrights and audience alike. The word clouds function as peripheral texts to the main text of the map, but they indicate the massive range of geographical references found in these plays, and visualise that range in a way that was not possible on the main map.

One of the key features of the Agas Map is that the reader is able to see both the well known and the obscure topographical features of London existing together in one shared space: for example, St. Katherine's, a hospital for fallen women and the mentally ill, lies nestled in the shadow of the Tower of London, a holding place for the more notorious of society's ne'er-do-wells. In the space of the map all locations are displayed on equal terms, and the plays themselves place far more emphasis on locally known spots rather than famous monuments. The annotations that I have made to the Agas Map for this project have been guided by the locations that are significant to the plays: as a result I have highlighted certain important landmarks, such as 'the Tower of London' and 'London Bridge', but I have not included any additional information about them because they are not heavily referenced in the plays. On the other hand, locations such as 'Cheapside' and 'Smithfield' play important thematic roles in the plays I am focusing on and so they are highlighted, marked, and have their own information pages.

It is also significant that the divisions of the urban space are not immediately apparent: this image of the Agas Map is black and white, and the reader's initial view

is of the city from a long way off. Consequently, the reader does not instantly apprehend the divisions between City and suburbs, City and Westminster, and urban and rural space that are represented on the map: for example, at first glance a reader would not be able to see that while there are no living creatures represented on the map within the City walls, as soon as you leave the City, grazing animals and people walking, riding, and practicing archery begin to appear. To get the most out of "Mapping Jacobean London", the reader is required to engage closely with the map as a text, as well as make full use of the highlighting features, in order to get a sense of the multiple interconnected zones that made up Jacobean London.

Another connection that I was able to make by using a map as an interpretive medium was between the theatres where *Bartholomew Fair*, *Eastward Ho*, and the *Roaring Girl* were performed and the locations that feature most prominently in their content. Considering that the London that is portrayed in these city comedies is essentially a dramatic construction, I wanted to put the theatrical spaces that housed the performances on an equal footing with the places that are referenced, so that the reader does not forget that the wide-ranging movement of the plays through the city is at the same time contained within the space of the stage.

A particularly good example of this kind of fantastical movement on stage occurs in Act 4, scene 1 of *Eastward Ho* when the shipwreck is narrated to the audience by a character called Slitgut, who is sitting on top of a pole at Cuckold's Haven: in this scene various characters are shipwrecked at location appropriate to their personalities. Mardock describes it as "among the most brazen abandonments of

classical unities to be seen in Renaissance English theatre” and argues that “the lower stage becomes like a map that they [the audience] can read, zooming in and out and gaining the aspect of a controlling, superior reader, omniscient, omnipresent, and capable of comprehending multiple simultaneous scenes at once” (62). In this instance then, the twenty-first century users of “Mapping Jacobean London” are in the same position as the early modern audience watching *Eastward Ho* for the first time on stage. The information provided by “Mapping Jacobean London” puts twenty-first century readers on equal footing with the early modern audience watching *Eastward Ho* who would obviously have implicitly understood the significances of the movements across London.

The arrangement of the markers on the map also means that the theatres are connected spatially to the locations that appear in the plays. For example, Bartholomew Fair was first performed at the Hope Playhouse, located on the South Bank of the Thames. At least some members of the early modern audience for this play would have made the journey out of the City and into the Liberties of Bankside for the privilege and pleasure of watching this play. Similarly, Act I of *Bartholomew Fair* is concerned with the journeys of various characters out of the City and towards the Fair at Smithfield. Both the Hope Playhouse and Smithfield are located within sight of the City limits, in fact their distances from the City are almost equal. The ability to view and highlight these locations on map simultaneously means that the reader of “Mapping Jacobean London” can place both the Hope and Smithfield in a shared zone of misrule, making the connection between the theatre and the Fair even more evident than it is in the play. Thus, the map’s visual layout of

interconnected locations allows for connections to be drawn, which might be missed if the information was presented in text form.

I hope to have characterised here some of the main functions of the “Mapping Jacobean London” project and given a sense of how they might be used to generate new readings of *Bartholomew Fair*, *Eastward Ho*, and *The Roaring Girl*. The digitised Agas Map is a rich and fascinating text in its own right, and the annotated map effectively signals the importance of the marked locations to its users. By foregrounding of the significance of these locations, “Mapping Jacobean London” ensures that readers understand the dramatic roles that these locations are playing, and so enhances readings of these plays that are so bound up with the significance of space and place.

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