

# James Burbage and William Shakespeare: Location-Consciousness and the Significance of Elizabethan Theatre Locations

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## ABSTRACT

In discussing James Burbage's choice of locations for his two playhouses, this paper emphasizes the economic and political background and explores Burbage's relationship with the young William Shakespeare. In particular, it looks at Burbage and Shakespeare's location-consciousness, relating this to the role played by space and location in onstage dramatic performances, and reading scenes in Shakespeare's *Henry* plays in terms of space, location, and the theme of forcefully moving from the outside or margin to the center. It will be argued that the actual location of English Renaissance theatres—"theatre" can also mean "map" or a "collection of maps"—affected the development of English drama in general, and of the drama of England's national poet, William Shakespeare, in particular. The paper also explores the meaning of the names given to Burbage's first theatre (the Theatre) and the one built with the timbers from the Theatre (the Globe), and engages in a more in-depth interpretation of what may have been the "sign of the Globe"—which was said to have depicted Hercules holding aloft the world or globe—in the light of Greek mythology (Hercules vs. Atlas) and Mercator's art of map or "atlas"-making.

**KEYWORDS:** William Shakespeare, James Burbage, London theatre locations, the Theatre, the Globe, Atlas, Hercules, Gerardus Mercator

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# 詹姆斯·伯比奇與威廉·莎士比亞： 地點意識與伊莉莎白劇場位置的意義

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## 摘 要

本文強調詹姆斯·伯比奇在為他兩個劇場選擇具體的地理位置時，其中所投射出的經濟及政治意涵，並探討其與年輕時的莎士比亞關係，尤其著重於詮釋他們兩者都具有相同且強烈的地點意識，並將此意識與莎翁所著劇作中的空間與地點場景的設計安排相連結，重新解讀由邊陲突破從而邁進中心的主題。

本文主張英國文藝復興時期劇院的具體地點——「劇院」一詞也可做「地圖」或「地圖集」解釋——不僅影響英國戲劇總體上的發展，更影響了英國國家詩人莎士比亞的劇作。除了爬梳伯比奇的第一個劇院名字以及後來所建的環球劇院在命名稱謂上所具有的特殊意義外，本文亦藉由希臘神話中海克力斯(Hercules)與阿特拉斯(Atlas)的故事，以及其和吉拉迪斯·墨卡托 (Gerardus Mercator)在其流傳盛廣的地圖集卷首中用以表示的圖像，來重新詮釋長久以來備受爭議的環球劇院標誌——也就是海克力斯舉着地球的意象——所具有的意義。

**關鍵字：**威廉·莎士比亞、詹姆斯·伯比奇、倫敦劇院地點、劇院、環球劇院、阿特拉斯、海克力斯、吉拉迪斯·墨卡托

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## I. Burbage and His Theatre

Although for quite a long time it was thought that the Theatre, built and opened in 1576 by James Burbage, was the first commercial playhouse in England,<sup>1</sup> subsequent discoveries suggest that it might not have been the first. We know, at least, that the Red Lion was built by John Brayne, Burbage's brother-in-law, in 1567. The exact location of the Red Lion has been disputed, but most likely it was in an area near Mile End, Stepney and Whitechapel.<sup>2</sup> This precursor to the Theatre does not seem to have been very successful (Gurr, *Shakespearean* 30), and Tim Braybrooke, Senior Archaeologist at the Museum of London Archaeology, simply uses the word "failed" for this "earlier Brayne theatrical enterprise." There may have been several reasons for the failure of the Red Lion; a map of London suggests that one of them could have been the considerable distance between London city proper and Mile End, Stepney and/or Whitechapel. In any event, when Burbage started planning the construction of the Theatre, he must have taken into consideration the various factors that led to the failure of his brother-in-law's business. It seems likely, then, that he would have been very cautious about his own choice of a location.

It would seem logical to locate any sort of "popular entertainment" inside a city, where many potential audience members already live. As the saying goes, "where there are people, there is money." Any business-savvy person would have thought about this before choosing a location. However, the history of Elizabethan playhouses tells us that none of the early playhouses—the Red Lion, the Theatre, the Curtain, the Rose and the Swan—were built inside the city of London. There could be many reasons for this, including the difficulty of finding a plot of land spacious enough to accommodate a theatre inside the densely-populated metropolis, and the fact that even should such a spacious property be found it would surely be too

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<sup>1</sup> An example of this viewpoint is that of W. J. Lawrence, who writes on the first page of his book *The Elizabethan Playhouse and Other Studies* (first published in 1913) that James Burbage's Theatre ranked "not only as the first permanent English playhouse but as the first organised public theatre in modern Europe" (1).

<sup>2</sup> According to Tim Braybrooke, Senior Archaeologist at Museum of London Archaeology, the Red Lion was in Mile End. Andrew Gurr, a major academic advisor to the reconstruction of the Globe, speculates in *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* that the Red Lion was located in Whitechapel (14), but in *The Shakespearean Stage*, he writes that it was in Stepney (30).

expensive. However, one of the major reasons, according to many modern-day scholars, was the necessity of having one's theatre business outside the jurisdiction of the city authorities. This was mainly because the theatre business was generally thought to be licentious, while the city fathers were mostly puritanical. Andrew Gurr, for instance, comments in *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* that the first commercial playhouses were "in liberties free from the Lord Mayor's jurisdiction" (14), and R. E. Pritchard writes in *Shakespeare's England: Life in Elizabethan & Jacobean Times* that "generally the players needed to be beyond the reach of the City authorities" (190). W. H. C. Moreton speculates that though Hoxton and Finsbury Fields, an established recreation zone for "archery and athletic sports," seemed a suitable location for Burbage's playhouse as they were "easily accessible to the city, both by way of Bishopsgate and Moorgate and across the fields," Burbage could not choose the Fields as they were "the property of the City Corporation," which means that "he could get short shrift from them" (7).

Thus it was generally thought that the suburbs were safer locations for the theatre business, and Burbage would naturally have turned his attention to London's suburban entertainment zones. Besides Hoxton and Finsbury Fields, there was also Bankside (Southwark), an area south of the Thames. However, Bankside was an infamously licentious area in Renaissance England. This licentiousness is best depicted by Steven Mullaney, who compares Bankside to a "sewer" (42) and speaks of its prisons, execution platforms and leper houses. Charlotte Carmichael Stopes writes that Bankside was said to hold "all the off-scouring of the city" (63), and Anthony van den Wyngaerde's *Panorama of London*, painted around 1543, already depicts, as Mullaney informs us, the "houses, churchyards, hospitals, and stews of the Bankside" in "photographic detail" (1). In contrast, the northeastern portion of the picture, where Shoreditch was supposedly located, was mainly open fields spotted with small cottages and thus seemed a much more pleasant and upright area than Bankside. The residents of Shoreditch clearly had a higher social status than those of Bankside, and Peter Thomson informs us that the taste of the northern (Shoreditch) playgoers was more conservative, while that of Southwark (Bankside) was very bold (103). Finally, Burbage decided to build his playhouse in Shoreditch, and Moreton points out one of the likely reasons: he "would not build his precious playhouse in an area which was a common target for puritans," for Bankside was "where the citizens indulged mainly in

the lower orders of pastime” (7). Burbage, then, did not consider his theatre business to be a low-life pastime and he eschewed the infamy of Bankside.

We now know that Bankside would have been suitable because playhouses built in this area were quite successful. Moreover, Bankside was outside the city’s jurisdiction. Burbage should have considered it a good location, and clearly more convenient than Shoreditch to the northeast of the city, but he did not choose it. In fact, in 1576 Burbage was living on Holywell Street (the southern part of Shoreditch High Street today), and so he had had “his eye on a suitable piece of ground in this neighborhood” (Moreton 6-7). But this location was challenging because there seemed to be no other major attraction or business in the area, and city-dwellers would have to walk outside the city wall and cross open fields (the Finsbury Fields) to get to the new theatre. The open fields could be muddy, especially in foul weather, which would be a further inconvenience. It was generally believed that the Theatre stood next to a barn, a location which while safer and more quiet might also have seemed less exciting than that of a playhouse, surrounded by stews and places for music and dancing, which Bankside would have offered. So by choosing Shoreditch and eschewing Bankside, Burbage was taking a risk for the sake of his ideal, his dream. This ideal was reflected in the name he gave to his Shoreditch playhouse. The “Theatre,” as Gurr observes, is “a grand Roman name” (*Shakespearean* 31). It was “an allusion to the Roman theatres” though at that time a “theatre” was “normally not thought of as a playhouse but as an atlas, a collection of maps” (Gurr and Ichikawa 14). This perhaps unexpected meaning is made clear in a book, published by Shakespeare’s contemporary John Speed in 1611, called *The theatre of the empire of Great Britaine: presenting an exact geography of the kingdomes of England, Scotland, Ireland, and the iles adioyning: with the shires, hundreds, cities and shire-townes, within ye kingdome of England, divided and described by Iohn Speed*.

This book is a collection of maps and verbal descriptions of places in England, and Speed writes in a sort of preface to his readers: “So great was the attempt to assay the erection of this large and laborious THEATRE” (B2)—which of course means his book. In the section “What is performed in this Worke,” Speed writes, “The true plot of the whole Land, and that againe into parts in seuerall Cards are here described, as likewise, the Cities and Shire-townes are inserted, whereof some heue bin performed by others,

without Scale annexed, the rest by mine own trauels, and vnto them for distinctions sake, the Scale of Paces, accounted according to the Geometrical measure....” These words make it clear that his “theatre” is a map, and although Speed’s book was published in 1611 while Burbage’s Theatre was built in 1576, I believe Speed’s book could still serve as circumstantial evidence for the more expansive meaning that the word “theatre” would have had for Burbage. Indeed, the fact that “Theatre” can also mean a sort of national “atlas” may suggest Burbage’s extreme location-consciousness, just as this name’s allusion to the ancient Roman theatres, which were traditionally not marginal at all but had numerous and important civic functions, manifests the high regard and great expectations Burbage had for his playhouse.

In 1596, when the lease of land for the Theatre was about to expire and the chance of renewing it seemed slim, Burbage attempted to build a second theatre in Blackfriars. He paid £600 for the purchase of an old building once used for parliament meetings, and in contrast to the rent he paid in Shoreditch, which was £14 per year (Stopes 19, 63; Gurr, *Playgoing* 29), the sum was huge. Actually, other playhouses in Bankside had already experienced success by the time Burbage planned to have a playhouse in Blackfriars. In 1587, the Rose began its operation in Bankside and the Swan appeared there, too, in 1595 (Gurr, *Playgoing* 14-15; Bradbrook 3). A business-savvy person in 1596 would have seen the advantages of opening a playhouse in that neighborhood. Burbage could have a second successful playhouse in Bankside, just as the subsequently built Globe, which, though he did not live to see, proves to us. But once again his choice was not Bankside.

“Why not Bankside?” It is an interesting question. Most critics stress the profit Burbage hoped to make from his Blackfriars investment (e.g. Gurr, *Playgoing* 27, 31; Stopes 62). Their main observation was that the Blackfriars building could provide indoor space and it could serve as a solution for the frigid winter season when the semi-open amphitheatre outside of the city walls across the inconvenient muddy fields would be hard to use. Moreover, Blackfriars was nearer the wealthy residents, and could thus charge a higher entrance fee. All these could be true. But there could be still another reason: it was Burbage’s wish to move his business away from a marginal zone and into a central area. It was a wish to raise the social status of the low playhouses that were often attacked and despised. It was a wish to revive the splendid days of the theatre back in the Roman era, when theatres were not

marginalized socially or location-wise. The name “Theatre” that Burbage had given to his Shoreditch playhouse, which is a Roman allusion yet with the meaning of an atlas in the England language then (Gurr and Ichikawa 14), becomes meaningful in this light.

It is not hard to understand a man’s wish to raise his social status during the English Renaissance, as stories about rich commoners trying to become members of the gentry by acquiring a coat of arms abounded. The Shakespeares themselves are examples. It is said that Shakespeare’s father John, a glover and businessman, applied for a coat of arms but did not succeed; his dream was realized by his player and playwright son. In fact, had the father not wanted to raise his social status the son might have been less ambitious. This story of how William Shakespeare obtained a coat of arms, whether or not true, suggests the importance attached to one’s social status at the time. Indeed it was also said that an official in the College of Heraldry complained about the granting of arms to “such a dubious figure as ‘Shakespeare the player’” (Bate 347), showing us how prejudiced the members of the upper class were against those in the theatre business. 1596, thought to be the year the young Shakespeare was granted a coat of arms, was also the year that Burbage’s Blackfriars venture was frustrated due to a petition, signed by the precinct’s upper-class residents, demanding that the theatre not be opened. Seen in this context, the phrase commonly believed to be what Shakespeare had chosen as the Shakespeare family motto for their coat of arms, “*Non Sanz droict* (not without right)” (Frye 43), takes on a clearer meaning: it advocates the rights of players, and it reminds one of the rights bestowed upon James Burbage and other players by the Queen.

Indeed, as early as 10 May 1574, Queen Elizabeth issued a license to James Burbage and four other players, bestowing upon them a special privilege:

Elizabeth by the grace of God quene of England, &c . . . haue licensed and auctorised, and by these presentes do licence and auctourise, our loving Subiectes, Iames Burbage, Iohn Perkyn, Iohn Lanham, William Iohnson, and Roberte Wilson . . . to vse, exercise, and occupie the arte and facultye of playenge Commedies, Tragedies, Enterludes, stage playes, and such other like . . . to shewe, publishe, exercise, and occupie to their best

commoditie during all the terme aforesaid, aswell within oure Citie of London and liberties of the same, as also within the liberties and fredomes of anye of oure Cities, townes, Bouroughes &c whatsoeuer as without the same, thoroughte oure Realme of England. (qtd. in Chambers 87-88)

Here it is important to note that with this license, the Queen was unambiguously specifying, to Burbage and the other players, the locations where they could perform their plays: namely, anywhere in England including “within our Citie of London.” The license included conditions: the plays should be approved by the master of the revels, they should not be performed during times of common prayer, and also not during times of plague in the city of London. The license also clearly states that no one should hinder the players from performing.

Willyne and commaundinge yow and everie of yowe, as ye tender our pleasure, to permytte and suffer them herein withoute anye yowre lettes, hynderaunce, or molestacion duringe the terme aforesaid, anye acte, statute, proclamacion, or commaundement heretofore made, or hereafter to be made, to the contrarie notwithstandinge. (qtd. in Chambers 88)

Thus we see that any prohibitions against performing plays inside the city of London were contrary to this license and hence not valid.

Andrew Gurr informs us that though in 1594 the Privy Council and the Lord Mayor issued a prohibition against playing at all city inns, Burbage still asked for permission to do so via his patron (*Playgoing* 27). In Gurr’s words, it was “an intriguing request” (*Playgoing* 27). Nevertheless, it is understandable why Burbage would make such a seemingly bold request: this prohibition deprived him of a right already bestowed upon him by the Queen in 1574. Therefore it was “not without right” (as Shakespeare’s family motto says) for Burbage to have a playhouse inside the city. Blackfriars, as most critics have noted, was chosen discreetly because it was an ancient monastic precinct free of the City of London’s jurisdiction, even though it was inside London (e.g. Gurr, *Playgoing* 27; Wells 16). “It was only possible to contemplate using a building in this exclusive area as a theatre,” according to

Stanley Wells, “because it was not technically part of the City and so did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor, who with his colleagues would have been bound to object” (16). There is no doubt that Burbage planned to take advantage of this special feature of Blackfriars. He had the right given him by the Queen to perform inside the city, but confronting the authorities in London was not a tactful move. The city mayor and his colleagues had always regarded players as vagabonds, and had issued prohibitions against adult players playing inside London. Blackfriars, therefore, seemed to Burbage to offer a way to get around the prohibition for his given right to play inside the city.

Another likely reason for Burbage to choose this location was the symbolic meaning of Blackfriars, which we know about from John Stow’s *A Survey of London Written in the Year 1598*. According to Stow, the precinct of Blackfriars was named after an order of friars initially residing in Holborn, outside of London. The friars eventually moved to a precinct inside London, which was afterwards named after them. There were two historical factors that made Blackfriars appealing to a theatre owner like Burbage: the friars’ connection with Whitehall, and their move from the margins of London to a central zone near Westminster Abbey. According to Stow’s account, back in 1276 the mayor of London had granted the Archbishop of Canterbury two lanes in the precinct, and the Archbishop built a church and placed the order of Blackfriars there (290). The church building was later used for parliament meetings, and it was here that Henry VIII and Queen Katherine’s historically important divorce lawsuit took place (290-91). Then, in another part of *A Survey of London*, Stow writes that “on the west side of New Street, towards the north end thereof, was of old time the church and house of the Preaching Friars,” and when the Preaching Friars arrived in London, they “had their first house without the walls of the city by Oldborne” (367), which is Holborn.<sup>3</sup> Then the Earl of Kent gave these friars his place at Westminster, which they “afterwards sold to Walter Grey, Archbishop of York; and he left it to his successors in the see for ever. . . . And therefore, the same was called York

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<sup>3</sup> Oldborne is the same as Holdborne, as Stow explains when he refers to Oldborne later—“(juxta Holborne, saith the patent)” (368). According to *A Selection of Curious Articles from Gentlemen’s Magazines* published in 1811, “Holborn was formerly a village called Old-born” (“An Account of the principal Buildings” 257). The same was said in “Names of London Streets and Buildings” in *The British Journal* published in 1853 (366).

Place; which name so continued until the year 1529, that King Henry VIII took it from Thomas Wolsey, Cardinal and Archbishop of York, and then gave it to name Whitehall” (367).

Whitehall, as it is generally known, was one of the major locations where Queen Elizabeth had players stage their plays; that is, the location of the Queen’s stage had once belonged to the Blackfriars. Thus, Burbage’s wish to have a playhouse in the precinct of Blackfriars might have been prompted by a wish to be imaginatively interconnected via the history of the Blackfriars with Whitehall, a place that had honored players. The building Burbage had chosen, according to Gurr, was “a great chamber once used for meetings of Parliament” (*Playgoing* 29), and according to Stow’s description of the former Blackfriars’ church, meetings of parliament had also been held there. According to Stephen Porter, the Blackfriars theatre had been the Parliament Hall (31); Peter Thomson writes that Burbage’s Blackfriars building was “the Parliament Chamber of the dissolved monastery” (122), and Glynne Wickham makes a similar observation about the building’s location (124). All these speculations suggest that the building Burbage bought was the Blackfriars’ church, the very church that Stow had mentioned as the place used for Henry VIII’s divorce lawsuit. Burbage probably knew the building’s history because it would have been hard to overlook the magnificent past of such a sizable building, especially if one wanted to buy it. In fact, both its location and the role it had played in the past might have reminded Burbage of ancient Greek theatres. In ancient Greece, where theatrical performances, both tragic and comic, enjoyed great prestige, theatre buildings were also used for public assemblies that included “meetings of the local legislative assembly” (Csapo 89). Burbage’s choice of a building that used to be the venue for meetings of Parliament, therefore, might have also been prompted by a wish to bring his theatre business back to the glorious days of ancient Greece.

Stow’s *A Survey of London* also tells an interesting story about how the city wall was torn down and rebuilt for the Blackfriars. Stow writes: “in the year 1282, King Edward I. having granted to Robert Kilwarby, Archbishop of Canterbury, license for the enlarging of the Blackfriars’ church, to break and take down a part of the wall of the city, from Ludgate to the river of Thames . . .” (31-32). The wall was then rebuilt to include the church inside the city of London (32). The breaking of the city wall, and the rebuilding of it so as to include the Blackfriars’ church within the city, must have seen like a

dream come true to Burbage since his own theatre business had been banned in the city. Perhaps he pictured himself as being like the Blackfriars, who had advanced not just from the outside to the inside of the city but eventually to Westminster, traditionally the site of the monarch's palace and hence the center of power. This might have been the bold vision of a man who had been invited to play in Whitehall, and who knew the significance of locations.

## **II. Burbage and Shakespeare**

In spite of Burbage's bold vision, the protection he had from the queen's license, and his tactful move to have his playhouse inside the city within the precinct of Blackfriars, which was a special ancient monastic precinct free of the City of London's jurisdiction, his plan still failed in 1596. His Blackfriars playhouse could not open for business because the precinct's local residents successfully petitioned the Privy Council against the opening of the theatre there (Wells 16). Burbage died in early 1597, not long after the petition incident, so he did not live to see the use of his theatre in Blackfriars by his playing company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The unused theatre was later leased to a boys' company which, because of their more quiet nature with noise and music, was tolerated, and they performed there from 1599 (16). It was speculated that playing in the Blackfriars theatre by an adult company did not happen until 1609 by what was then the King's Men (16). That was already more than a decade after Burbage passed away. Despite the initial failure, Burbage's vision of a theatre in Blackfriars was eventually realized. His vision was of great consequence in the history of English drama not just because it moved a playhouse from the margin of the city to the inside, but also because it affected Shakespeare's fate. It was said that since Burbage had spent a large sum for the building in Blackfriars but was not able to make any good money out of it in 1596 as it was not allowed to be opened, his trapped investment eventually caused his sons, Cuthbert and Richard, to sell shares of their theatre business to fellow players. They needed money to move the playhouse from Shoreditch, when the lease of land on which it stood was about to expire, to Bankside. This allowed Shakespeare, who had been a hired actor and playwright, to become the co-owner of the theatre business set up by James Burbage. The co-owner position not only gave Shakespeare more income but more creative freedom as a playwright. Burbage's financial

problem with the theatre in Blackfriars thus became an opportunity for Shakespeare.

Burbage and Shakespeare must have been closely interconnected. Despite the fact that there are different versions of how Shakespeare started his theatre career, it is generally accepted that he began it in London at Burbage's Theatre. According to Graham Phillips and Martin Keatman, "Shakespeare's theatrical experience was originally gained at Burbage's Theatre in Shoreditch" (92), and Eric Sams claims that "the Shoreditch Theatre certainly housed Shakespeare" (55). At a time when job seekers and vagabonds abounded, Burbage should be given due credit for discovering the artistic talent of the young Shakespeare. That is to say, if Shakespeare began his career holding horses outside the Theatre, as some stories have it, then it is likely to have been the Theatre's owner who first gave him the chance to approach the stage. Burbage must at the very least have been a mentor and a key influence, even if only in the early stages of the young actor's dramatic career. Shakespeare "owed a greater debt," as Russell A. Fraser writes, "not payable unless by art, to James Burbage" (110). There were even stories about the young Shakespeare, who had been impressed by Leicester's Men who were themselves led by James Burbage, performing in or near Stratford (e.g. Schoenbaum 9; Fraser 79; Sams 55). There were also rumors about some Burbages living in Stratford, through whom Shakespeare was introduced to London theatre. The relationship between Burbage and Shakespeare was best described by Stopes, who writes that it was Burbage "who gave Shakespeare the chance to make the best" (1).

Their close relationship would likely have made Shakespeare sympathize with Burbage when the latter was frustrated by his Blackfriars venture. As a playwright who had to decide where his plays and scenes should be set, and as a player who had to be aware of these imaginary settings when performing on stage, Shakespeare would naturally have been sensitive to the importance of locations. By moving from Stratford, where his family was, to the metropolis of London to pursue his career in the theatre business, Shakespeare had already proved his sensitivity to the significance of one's location. He knew he could never have pursued a career in the theatre, whether as an actor or a playwright, back in Stratford as there were no playhouses there. Moreover, the well-known story that Shakespeare was caught poaching and was forced to leave Stratford only reinforces our impression that he was sensitive to

locations and to the concept of boundaries. According to Nicholas Rowe, who wrote a short biography of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century, because of his poaching Shakespeare was eventually “obliged to leave his business and family” to “shelter himself in London” (4). It seems that being forced to leave one’s hometown would really have made one aware of the seriousness of boundaries. Indeed, poaching itself, as Stephen Greenblatt interprets the term, was a challenge to spatial boundaries and to authority. Greenblatt claims that for many youngsters in the Elizabethan era, poaching was engaged in not mainly for food but for sport: “it was a story not about desperation but about risk” (152). Thus seen, not unlike Burbage whose plan to have a playhouse in Blackfriars was a challenge to the boundary lines drawn by the Privy Council and the Lord Mayor against players, Shakespeare also had a history related to boundary challenging.

It would therefore have been quite natural for the latter to interpret Burbage’s Blackfriars venture as a marginal force, originating (like the young Shakespeare himself) outside of the city and attempting to penetrate into its center. Such an attempt to penetrate, to cross boundaries was not very different in spirit from the act of poaching, in which an unauthorized person enters into a space or enclosure that explicitly prohibits trespassing. In fact, many of Shakespeare’s plays give thematic significance to the friction between margin and center, which could be seen as the author’s artistic transformation of the events he was really experiencing. Romeo’s lament, “There is no world without Verona walls” (*R&J* 3.3.17), may seem to resonate with the feelings of players who are being excluded from the city of London, and with Shakespeare’s own forced departure from Stratford after he was caught poaching. This conflict between margin and center has indeed found dramatic expression in many of Shakespeare’s plays, and here the history plays are especially pertinent as they seem to be particularly boundary-conscious. The wars that are of central concern in the majority of Shakespeare’s history plays naturally involve direct clashes, negotiations, the sending of messengers, and other forms of boundary-crossing. Unlike the plays of other genres, with scenes set in unspecified or far-away, imaginary places, many of the scenes in the history plays, for example those featuring wars between England and France, are very specifically “located.” In plays focused on England’s civil wars, it is often of great consequence for military commanders to know the exact present, and predicted future locations of

enemy forces. Furthermore, the siege of a city, such as that of Angiers in *King John*, makes clear the strategic importance of a city boundary. Among the many location-conscious scenes in Shakespeare's history plays, here I would like to focus on just two which feature this friction between margins and center.

The first of these is the attack on London by a rebel, Jack Cade, in the second part of *Henry VI*. Shakespeare elaborately maps out the path of Cade's advancement from Blackheath (Act 4 Scene 2) to Southwark (Act 4 Scene 4), and he sets the climactic rebellion in Cannon Street, where London Stone was (Act 4 Scene 6). The playwright gives great significance to London Stone when he shows Cade striking his staff against it and declaring: "Now is Mortimer lord of this city. And here, sitting / upon London Stone, I charge and command that . . ." (2H6 4.6.1-2). London Stone, a remnant of Roman England, "since at least medieval times has been regarded as the very hub of the City of London" (Sheppard 29). It was commonly believed that the Romans used it as a central point by which to measure distances in England. London Stone, then, may be seen as the symbolic center of England, while Cade is a marginal force coming from outside of the city to invade the center. This scene attests to Shakespeare's sensitivity to the historical and symbolic meaning of the stone and to his location-consciousness.

The second scene I want to call attention to is the one in which Prince Hal renounces his friendship with Falstaff, saying: "I know thee not, old man" (2H4 5.5.47). This scene is set in a public space near Westminster Abbey, where Prince Hal has just been crowned Henry V. Westminster Abbey has long been the site of coronations; it is a landmark symbolic of power that is perhaps comparable to the London Stone of the Jack Cade rebellion. Here it is important to note that before his coronation the Prince, who enjoys playing roles, hangs out with Falstaff in a tavern in Eastcheap. Falstaff has great hopes of advancing in the world when his old friend is crowned, but as he earnestly approaches the newly crowned king the latter renounces their former friendship. Thus it is now Falstaff who becomes the marginal force trying to approach the center. The scene also reveals how out of place it is for "tavern people" to approach the king anywhere near Westminster Abbey, and the fact that in the tavern world the prince and Falstaff can both enjoy playing would seem to liken this world to the world of players.

This may remind us that when James Burbage intended to have his

playhouse in Blackfriars, near Westminster, the residents petitioned the Privy Council to stop him. One of those who signed the petition was Burbage's own patron, the second Lord Hunsdon (Stopes 65). Stopes writes that James Burbage "must have groaned in spirit when he heard that name" (65), and in fact he died two or three months afterward. Shakespeare would have been sensitive to Burbage's frustration, because the petition was not a renouncement of Burbage personally but of the theatre business as a whole. Moreover, stories have it that Shakespeare's well-to-do publisher friend from Stratford, Richard Field, who published some of Shakespeare's plays, was among the wealthy residents of Blackfriars who signed the petition (Pogue 23). According to Kate Pogue, Field was "the first and only one of Shakespeare's boyhood friends to settle in London" (34). Hence Shakespeare must have been sensitive to what likely seemed a belittlement of his trade, and perhaps a betrayal, by an old friend, especially as this was around the time when Shakespeare had high hopes of elevating his status by acquiring a coat of arms. We may see, then, a certain parallel between the petition against Burbage and the renouncement of Falstaff. When the latter falls ill, Mistress Quickly, hostess of the tavern where Prince Hal and Falstaff often used to hang out, makes a comment that reinforces this comparison: "The king has killed his [Falstaff's] heart" (*H5* 2.1.88). Nonetheless, not unlike Burbage's patron who prevented his players from being arrested as vagabonds, Prince Hal protected Falstaff when the sheriffs threatened to arrest him, and thus might also be seen as having been Falstaff's patron.

According to A. R. Humphreys, the second part of *Henry IV* was written in 1596-1597 (Introduction to *2H4* xvii), and according to J. H. Walter, *Henry V* was written in 1599 (Introduction xi). Herschel Baker agrees with 1599 for *Henry V*, but assigns the second part of *Henry IV* to 1598 (Introduction 885, 978). Despite these minor discrepancies, the period when these works were written clearly corresponds fairly closely to the period between Burbage's thwarted Blackfriars venture in 1596 and the opening of the Globe in 1599. In other words, Shakespeare wrote the two *Henry* plays around the same time that Burbage's Blackfriars venture failed. Hence it seems reasonable to assume that the playwright may have sympathized with the theatre owner, who worked so closely with him as a mentor and colleague, and that he may have woven his feelings and sympathies into the plays he was working on.

### III. Acting and Map-Making

Critics have long debated the meaning of the name given to the Globe playhouse built in Bankside with timbers from the Theatre. Critics have also long debated the question as to whether the Globe theatre had a sign with a figure of Hercules holding aloft the Globe, under which were written the Latin phrase “*Totus mundus agit histrionem.*” Chambers writes: “Malone conjectured that the name ‘Globe’ was taken from the sign . . . I do not know where he got this information” (434). Richard Dutton argues for the existence of such a sign by using lines in *Hamlet* as evidence. He interprets Hamlet’s words, “Do the boyes carry it away?” and Rosencrantz’s answer, “Ay, that they do, my lord, Hercules and his load too” (2.2.360-2) as a reference to the sign of the Globe (37). Dutton suggests that we should “put the burden of proof on those who would question the authenticity of the tradition of the sign, rather than those who accept it” (42). I agree with Dutton’s viewpoint, and will end with a discussion of this sign.

Stopes convincingly argues that the sign showing Hercules carrying the Globe was meant to depict the Herculean task of moving the old Shoreditch playhouse to Bankside, and that the Latin phrase reveals the analogy between the theatre, the world and the globe, from which the name Globe was derived (77). When Dutton discusses what the sign signified, he draws attention to the fact that in traditional mythology it was Atlas (who had to do it as a punishment) and not Hercules who bore up heaven, but he also argues that Hercules is “more fitting” than Atlas to bear the burden. One reason for this is that Hercules “chose to take up the burden—a grand gesture rather than a punishment,” and another is that we may draw a parallel between the stage actors and Hercules (43). For Hercules, according to Greek mythology, takes up the burden of bearing heaven (*Ouranos*, the Sky) so that Atlas can complete a mission for him, after which he tricks Atlas into taking up his burden again. Hercules is thus like actors, who, in Dutton’s words, “pick up the world/universe with every performance and then make those who regularly bear it (the audience) take it back again at the end” (43).

Thus with these explanations we get not just Hercules but also the titan Atlas from Greek myth. Of course, today we also associate Atlas with a kind of book called an “atlas” which contains many maps. According to the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, an Atlas, a collection of maps or charts, derives its

name “from a custom—initiated by Gerardus Mercator in the 16<sup>th</sup> century—of using the figure of the Titan Atlas, holding the globe on his shoulders, as a frontispiece for books of maps” (1:674). According to the *Encyclopedia Americana*, the term “atlas” meaning a collection of geographical maps or charts “was used first by Gerardus Mercator in the title of his collection *Atlas sive cosmographicae* (1585-95). Frontispieces of earlier map collections had shown the mythological figure of Atlas holding the globe on his shoulders” (2:624). Actually, long before the publication of his Atlas in 1585, this Flemish cartographer was already famous for his *globe*, and even Emperor Charles V placed an order with Mercator for several globes and other equipment. The latter, however, was unable to comply due to his arrest and imprisonment for heresy (Heinrichs 12, 63). Nevertheless, by inventing the technique known as the Mercator projection, a way of representing a round globe on flat paper by making the curved lines of longitude and latitude into straight lines (which inevitably distorts the spatial dimensions), Mercator became famous as the father of mapmaking because his method proved very useful to navigators (Heinrichs 82-83).

It is highly probable that during the period when the English were much concerned with and even fascinated by maritime navigation, a time when inns and taverns in London accommodated sailors who told tales about navigation, Burbage and Shakespeare would have heard about Mercator. Moreover, it is interesting to note that like Burbage’s players, the Flemish cartographer was favored by the crown and the people, but persecuted or even despised by some authorities. In addition, like the art of theatre players, Mercator’s art was also one of representation and even (necessarily) distortion. According to Ann Heinrichs, the Greek mythological titan Atlas had a descendant, “also named Atlas, [who] was a king of the African land of Mauritania. This Atlas was a philosopher and scientist. Mercator claimed to be following in [the latter] Atlas’s footsteps as he compiled his map collection” (90). Actually, even the original titan Atlas was related in a certain sense to maps, for he was the god of navigation. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Atlas is mentioned as one “who has discovered all the depths of the sea, and himself sustains the towering columns which bracket earth and sky and hold them together” (1.52-54).

When we consider the titan Atlas’s connection to mapmaking, then, we may also see his link with the name “Theatre” and the sign of the Globe. As mentioned above, the term “theatre” was “normally not thought of as a

playhouse but an atlas, a collection of maps” in the English Renaissance (Gurr and Ichikawa 14). Moreover, again as discussed earlier, John Speed’s book, *The theatre of the empire of Great Britaine*, implies that the word “theatre” means a collection of maps. Here we might think of the arts of building, of design and architecture, of spaces and boundaries, which Burbage would have known something about, but also of the art of representing or performing dramas on stage, which may seem to be in the first place a spatial art. But we may also think of the spoken language of dramas, of Shakespeare’s poetry, for if Mercator was forced to use distortion in his representation of third-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface, Aristotle in his defense of poets in the *Poetics* claims that the latter do not really represent reality or truth but are able to approximate it.

This connection of the Globe theatre’s name with maps, and especially with Mercator’s maps and with his frontispiece that features Atlas upholding a globe, may partly answer Dutton’s question: “Why has the “celestial body” been replaced by the terrestrial globe?” In the first place, Mercator’s atlas had Atlas carrying the terrestrial globe as the frontispiece for his collection of maps. This might be the inspiration for the Globe theatre’s supposed “sign.” In the second place, the story or conception that Atlas carried the Globe could be in fact a misconception or different interpretation of the Greek myth in Shakespeare’s time. Actually, in the above-quoted Homeric lines translated by Richmond Lattimore, Atlas is said to be “sustain[ing] the towering columns which bracket earth and sky” (*Odyssey* 1.53-55): this would seem to mean that he is supporting both the sky and the earth (globe), and in any case if the sky fell the earth would also be destroyed.

John Cranford Adams points out that a passage in a contemporary copy of the anonymous *Funeral elgye on ye Death of the famous Actor Richard Burbage who dyed on Saturday in Lent the 13 of March 1618* is an allusion to the sign in question:

And you his sad Companions to whome Lent  
Becomes more lenton by this Accident,  
Hence forth your wauing flagg, no more hang out  
Play now no more att all, when round aboute

Wee looke and miss the *Atlas* of your spheare. (32)<sup>4</sup>

Beyond presenting this passage as an allusion to the sign, Adams has not explained its significance. I would like to suggest that the “Atlas of your spheare” connects the sign, which may be on the “wauing flagg,” back to the name Theatre, which originally means a collection of maps.

As for the substitution of Hercules for Atlas, Dutton comments that there is no problem “since it is established in the mythology that he did so do in pursuit of the golden apples of the Hesperides” (36). Yet I would like to offer another interpretation for the substitution, which brings to the fore Atlas’s choice of a side and the location-consciousness suggested by the placement of the sign. In the Greek myth about the rise of Zeus against his father Cronus, Atlas has chosen to side with Cronus, god of heaven. The war is actually between Cronus and his wife, Rhea, god of the earth, who asks Zeus to rebel against his father (Moreford and Lenardon 37-40). Zeus of course punishes Atlas by making him hold up *Ouranos* (sky, heaven, the father of Kronos or “time”) because he (Atlas) has chosen the wrong side at the beginning of the war. He has chosen to support heaven instead of earth (*Gaia*, Hesiod’s Mother Earth of the *Theogony* who gives birth to *Ouranos*). However, Hercules has a very different story. As the son of Zeus and another woman he is naturally hated by Hera, the wife of Zeus and a mother figure who can also represent Earth. The antagonism between Hercules and the earthly Hera results in Hercules being burdened with his laborious tasks, his “labors” (Moreford and Lenardon 424). Yet Hercules is eventually reconciled with Hera, and he even marries her daughter Hebe: this suggests that Hercules, unlike Atlas, is reconciled with earth. The substitution of Hercules for Atlas in the sign of the Globe (Hercules supports the globe), like that of the terrestrial globe for the celestial body, therefore, can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of what turns out to be the correct choice of side/site.

While both the Shoreditch and Blackfriars theatres were located north of the Thames, the Globe was in the south, in Bankside. Of course, the north is always pictured on maps as being “above” and the south as being “below”; moreover, we naturally picture the sky (heaven) as being above and the earth as being below. Thus the moving of Burbage’s playhouse from the north to

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<sup>4</sup> Adams footnoted that this passage was cited from Igleby, “The Elegy on Burbage,” in *Shakespeare, the Man and the Book*, ii. 180.

the south could metaphorically suggest the replacing of the celestial body (heaven) by the terrestrial one (the earth, the globe). Moreover, Atlas's choosing of the wrong side may be seen as corresponding to Burbage's wrong choice of theatre site in his Blackfriars venture. In both cases we seem to have the symbolic reversal of a wrong choice, the latter's inversion or reversal, giving us the right choice. That is, we move from the figure of Atlas, whose image is inherent in the name "Theatre," to the figure of Hercules in the sign of the Globe, and from the celestial body that is carried by Atlas in the original Greek myth to the terrestrial globe carried by Hercules. This reversal resonates with the reconciliation of Hercules and mother earth, and may symbolize the "reconciliation" of the theatre with Bankside.

The Latin phrase supposedly on the Globe theatre's sign, "*Totus mundus agit histrionem*," is loosely translated as "all the world's a stage," a line in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. In fact it actually means, according to Dutton's translation, "all the world plays the player" (38), and according to John Ronayne's translation "the whole world moves the actor" (121). From these more literal translations we can clearly sense the phrase's stress on spatial and physical location, and reimagine its link with James Burbage's location-consciousness. It may perhaps be saying that since the whole world plays the actor, it is acceptable for the actors to play in Bankside, and it is all right for the playhouse to be moved there even though this was not the location originally preferred by Burbage. Moreover, the actors no longer need to remain stationed in one spot like Atlas, doing their duty, but like Hercules they can roam the earth in their pursuit of adventure. Although we do not actually know who chose the sign showing Hercules bearing the globe or the Latin phrase, it seems very possible that William Shakespeare, as a co-owner of this Bankside playhouse at the time, had a hand in it, and that it could even have been a tribute to James Burbage.

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