



Utopia and the Enclosing of Dramatic Landscapes

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article se penche sur le phénomène d'enclôture des terres tel que Thomas More le décrit dans l'Utopie, dans la tragédie anonyme intitulée Arden of Faversham (1589) et dans la pièce carolinienne A Jovial Crew (1641) de Richard Brome. On montre d'abord comment les différentes conséquences environnementales, sociales et économiques ont donné lieu à des mouvements et des débats sociaux au sein de la fiction anglaise moderne, où la l'histoire convenue du passé précédant la Réforme paraît tout aussi éloignée que la fiction d'un monde utopique. On avance que les possibilités de profit qu'offre la nouvelle topographie de terres de plus en plus clôturées, ainsi que l'imaginait l'Utopie, sont évoquées dans la pièce The Unfortunate Traveller de Thomas Nashe, que les conséquences de ces changements apparaissent dans la pièce Arden, et que les déplacements sociaux qui y ont fait suite pour des générations se retrouvent plus tard dans la pièce de Richard Brome ; à cette période, le théâtre procède à un absurde réalignement du lien entre les mondes idéaux et la mendicité.

Utopia and the Enclosing of Dramatic Landscapes*

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This article focuses on the enclosing of the land as depicted in More's Utopia (1516); the anonymous domestic tragedy, Arden of Faversham (1589); and the Carolinian play, A Jovial Crew (1641), by Richard Brome. It discusses how the relationship between the multiple resulting changes in the environmental, social, and economic landscape gave rise to important points for action and social debate in early modern English fiction, in which the customary pre-Reformation past is as irreconcilable as a fictional utopian world. This article argues that the emerging profitability of the newly and increasingly enclosed topography as imagined in Utopia appears in Thomas Nashe's The Unfortunate Traveller, and its initial consequences are disclosed in the anonymous Arden, only to spread through generations of social displacement in Richard Brome's Jovial Crew, by which time an absurd realignment of the relationship between beggary and ideal worlds is taking place in drama.

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“Fifteen hundred shorn, what comes the wool to?”¹

William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* (4.3)

In book 1 of *Utopia* (1516), Hythlodæus calls our attention to the changes happening in the English landscape: the social and economic effects of the

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1. The edition of reference is William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed. John Pitcher, Arden Shakespeare 3rd Series (London: A & C Black, 2010).

transition from agriculture to pasture, especially for sheep grazing. From the sixteenth century onwards, this process, known generally as enclosure, increased in scope and the area affected. The consequences of these modifications found their expression in early modern English fiction and drama. In this respect, book 1 of *Utopia* was an inspiration or indirect influence for some dramatists,² such as found in the plays discussed here. It is this line of *Utopia*'s influence, rather than the creation of imaginary worlds, that will be the focus of this article. These plays discuss and portray changes in land ownership, social displacement, and civic difficulties that are reported by More's traveller, Hythlodæus, as the immediate effects of enclosures.

Enclosures were the result of a redistribution of agrarian priorities, from subsistence cultivation to the commercial feeding of animals, such as cattle and sheep, the latter being the enduring symbol of this agricultural transformation of the landscape. From the landowner's point of view, wool had become a profitable commodity and central to the English economy. Politically, land remained an index of power, not only for military purposes but also as an important socioeconomic factor. Consequently, enclosures reshaped the social space as those who relied on that very soil for subsistence cultivation found themselves displaced from the fields and without the resources to keep going. Sheep were economically associated with these transformations, as emphatically portrayed by Hythlodæus, and so acquired a bad reputation through the sixteenth century.

Sheep in early modern drama, in contrast, do not have the same negative socioeconomic connotations that we find in *Utopia*. They almost always function symbolically (as metaphors of innocence, for example) rather than as literal depictions of the real-world animal and its social impact.³ Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* (1610) is a remarkable exception, depicting the centrality of wool for the rural economy and its value as a commodity. However, rather than focus on representations of sheep and their economic function, my reading of these texts, through the lens of spatial theories, focuses on the process of enclosure: the

2. Some plays are actually successful in incorporating the voyage into different or alternative places in the action. See John Day, William Rowley, and George Wilkins, *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (1607); John Fletcher and Philip Massinger, *The Sea Voyage* (1622); Richard Brome, *The Antipodes* (1640).

3. Bruce Thomas Boehrer, *Animal Characters: Nonhuman Beings in Early Modern Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 164, 166–67.

movements and actions framed by a specific, ever-changing space. This article looks at allusions in these plays to enclosure and engrossing—considered by early modern contemporaries as “twin evils”⁴—as indirect references to *Utopia*. It thus seeks a different path for the possible literary influence of Thomas More than the flashes of utopianism we often see in early modern drama, as in Jack Cade’s and Gonzalo’s speeches in Shakespeare’s *Henry VI Part II* and *The Tempest*. These references are usually short-lived, as drama has limited scope for conveying utopianism due to its own form and rules: plays require the development of action, while utopian societies are usually described rather than lived-in by a fictional character.

My approach, therefore, considers the process of enclosure and its results independently of the reasons that motivated it and addresses the world within the play, not a world conceived by a fictional character. In articulating *Utopia*’s relationship to enclosure, I build on John Freeman’s series of spatial studies⁵ of More’s work and other related approaches to the study of enclosure, developed at length below. Supported by sixteenth-century rural and social history, I argue that such references point to an ambivalent event, concerning not only the effect of the new politics of the land on society (as in Hythlodæus’s diatribe) but also the changing relationships between humans and nature. Central to such an approach, therefore, is the decoding of developments such as the change in ownership and customary rights and how they were understood and expressed in fiction. *Utopia* and the subsequent plays addressed here are

4. Joan Thirsk, *The Rural Economy of England* (London: Hambledon, 1984), 74. According to Thirsk, in engrossing, “when two or more farms were thrown together, the superfluous farmhouses were either reduced to the status of cottages or left to decay” (72).

5. Spatial studies are a powerful theoretical approach to addressing early modern literature, as they combine history, politics, space, gender, poetics, philosophy, geography, and performance. Shakespearean spatial studies have developed significantly over the last twenty years. A useful overview, covering the major studies up to 2013, is found in the article by Sarah Dustagheer, “Shakespeare and the Spatial Turn,” *Literature Compass* 10.7 (2013): 570–81. The book edited by Ina Habermann and Michelle Witten, *Shakespeare and Space: Theatrical Explorations of the Spatial Paradigm* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) provides, besides an excellent collection of representative texts, a taxonomy of these studies, which cover around seven kinds of space, usually overlapping: “(1) structural/topological space, (2) stage space/setting/locality, (3) linguistic/poetic space, (4) social/gendered space, (5) early modern geographies, (6) cultural spaces/contact zones, and (7) the material world/cultural imaginary” (p. 3). Freeman’s texts appeared before the popularization of the so-called “spatial turn,” and thus I reconsider his approach in light of recent scholarship and theories on the topic.

part of a continuous and important discussion on post-feudal social and civil organization. The lines of thought from More's work regarding a changing mindset in relation to the environment were framed in several dramatic texts from the 1590s to the 1640s. Two examples are the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* (1589, printed in 1592) and Richard Brome's *Jovial Crew* (1641, printed in 1652), which discuss transformations in land uses and ownership. Besides the fact that they were successful plays in their period and speak to my topic, these texts give room for the displaced and marginal characters to speak on such related topics as private property, displacement, and vagrancy.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's spatial concept of "social space," this article argues that the dialectic structural elements of *Utopia*—the approach to enclosure found in book 1 against that found in book 2, developed below—were rendered by drama into an aesthetic key to portray ambivalent and different opinions, moments, and perspectives regarding civil dynamics. Moreover, More's text expresses the same anxieties and transformations concerning the relationship between humans and the environment that troubled later dramatists. The argument regarding these three works unfolds in two main parts: the first establishes the conceptual background and highlights the reading of the social space of enclosure in *Utopia*, while the second deals with its appearances in early modern drama and the contrasts to and links with More. Both *Arden of Faversham* and *Jovial Crew* are concerned with the physical place in which problems arise and how the resulting social space is recomposed. The dramatic action is unveiled through either the development of the social space, attempts at its re-composition, or the exposition of the personal history of those involved with the land.

Utopia, enclosure, and social space

Injustice emerges as one of the critical problems throughout the conversation between Raphael Hythlodæus, Peter Giles, and Thomas Morus⁶ in book 1, as Hythlodæus explains why he should not be part of any king's council. He recalls examples drawn from the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII and analyzes fictional accounts of other people and lands, which leads to the

6. Through this article, I use "More" for the historical character and "Morus" for the fictional persona found in *Utopia*.

description of the island of the Utopians in book 2. The whole narrative in *Utopia* draws on examples from past, current, and fictional landscapes. This assemblage of different locations highlights a break between humans and their unstable surroundings during a period in which society displaced humans from husbandry, their means of subsistence. This separation involves several social and economic factors in the transition from feudalism to an early agrarian form of capitalism. According to Robert Brenner, it encompasses a production structure that involved tenant farmers who were now the owners of the means of production, which would lead to competition and displacement.⁷ Consequently, those not absorbed by the new market and without the means would be led to criminal activities.

The main problems discussed in book 1, namely poverty and robbery, are central to More's famous passage regarding the accumulation of sheep. Nevertheless, one might ask, following Shakespeare's lines quoted in the epigraph, what comes of the sheep? Sheep, as we have seen above, retained poetic force as a literary trope⁸ as well as economic force by virtue of being an important element in the English economy. The exportation of sheep remained a crucial issue from More's period, passing through the mid-Tudor crisis, to the development of new trade avenues and commodities, such as those brought by new routes of export, import, and re-export.⁹ In Hythlodæus's account, the peasants' loss of their means of subsistence was the very origin of many problems. As also pointed out by other scholars, such as William Carroll, there are problems in reading More's "paradigm of enclosure"¹⁰ as history, because it depicts only the most complicated use of the practice that was restricted to specific geographical and demographical conditions. The treatment of sheep we find in *Utopia* reflects only part of the enclosure story. Some of these conversions happened peacefully, as in the North of England, where conditions such as the

7. Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution* (London: Verso, 2003), 40.

8. According to Boehrer, sheep illustrated a "conventional series of concepts: pathetic helplessness, endangered innocence, sacrificial submission, bleating obedience, errant stupidity" (164).

9. Brenner, 5–8, 10, 24.

10. The expression is drawn from William Carroll, expressing a set of ideas that have become associated with enclosure. Carroll points to some of the counter discourses of the period. See William Carroll, "'The Nursery of Beggary': Enclosure, Vagrancy, and Sedition in the Tudor Stuart Period," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. R. Burt and J. M. Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 34–47, 35.

small size of the population and the availability of great tracts of land were especially conducive to successful conversion. Enclosure was nevertheless a great problem throughout the sixteenth century, especially in the Midlands where less land was available and the population was proportionately large. The image given in *Utopia* is thus misleading when one considers the disparate ways in which enclosure affected the different regions across Britain. Therefore, as Joan Thirsk concludes, enclosure “varied greatly in character and importance from one part of England to another” and was also “diverse in type and purpose.”¹¹

Following this line of thought, both the availability of geographical space and the population density in a region determined the consequences of enclosure, ranging from a peaceful conversion of available land to uproar that caused confusion and involved the authorities. The latter is what More immortalized in *Utopia* and thus what “lives longest in the memory.”¹² Considering this, Lefebvre’s concepts of social space are valuable for establishing the connections between these three works. According to Lefebvre, space is a product of human experience: “(social) space is a (social) product.”¹³ Wherever enclosures happened, they generated a new space fostering a set of different relationships between humans and the land, and among humans themselves. According to Lefebvre, actions within a specific space become part of it, and any “appearance of separation” actually points to “an ambiguous continuity.”¹⁴ One result of enclosure was the production of a new social space in which inevitably, peacefully or not, “all common rights over the fields or commons were extinguished.”¹⁵ According to Thirsk, the effects of enclosures were unconsciously regulated by the scale of occupation—the visible concentration of a population within an area and the amount of available land. Therefore, the amount of existing relationships, regulated by customs, within a social space determined the impact of such changes. The central point in my reading is that *Utopia* reflects this relationship between density and the enclosing process.

11. Thirsk, 65, 71.

12. Thirsk, 74.

13. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 26.

14. Lefebvre, 37, 87.

15. Thirsk, 67.

Hythlodæus's depiction of the perfect utopian society recalls the practice of enclosure with some ambivalence. John Freeman¹⁶ observes that the "historical" practice of enclosure is condemned in the first book, only to be praised as the "mythical" origin of *Utopia* in book 2.¹⁷ Jeffrey Knapp's reading of enclosure detects a similar contradiction between "hatred of expansionism" and "a vigorous advocacy [...] when Hythlodæus praises Utopian colonialism."¹⁸ When King Utopus enclosed the land, he expelled the native Abraxians and converted others for the Utopian society, separating the land physically from the continent and establishing an island, as Freeman points out:

Thinly disguised, these conquered and expelled Abraxians are in reality the expropriated peasantry of More's period. By effectively appropriating large-scale enclosure as the form of the dominant ideology, Utopus empowers himself to re-make and transform historical England under the auspices of a "new" dominant ideology.¹⁹

This process bears basic similarities to historical enclosure,²⁰ and it is even more relevant when we consider that the second book, containing the overthrow of the Abraxians' social space and description of the land of Utopia, was written before the first one, which contains the dialogue between Morus, Giles, and Hythlodæus. According to Freeman, More was aware that "the text exists at the ideological site of contestation,"²¹ and thus of the need to establish the physical origins of Utopia as a myth.

16. John Freeman has written several studies of *Utopia* and enclosure. See "Discourse in More's *Utopia*: Alibi/Pretext/Postscript," *ELH* 59.2 (1992): 289–311; "More's place in 'No Place': The Self-Fashioning Transaction in *Utopia*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 34.2 (1992): 197–217; "A Model Territory: Enclosure in More's *Utopia*" in *The Territorial Rights of Nations and Peoples*, ed. John R. Jacobson (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 241–67.

17. Freeman, "Discourse," 295. In this article, he explores the order of composition and its relationship to enclosure.

18. Jeffrey Knapp, *An Empire Nowhere: England, America, and Literature from Utopia to The Tempest* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 23. See Louis Marin, *Utopics: Spatial Play*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Humanities Press, 1984), 99–112 for a reading on the physical/geometrical enclosure of the island.

19. Freeman, "Discourse," 290.

20. The passage also contains elements for those interested in new colonialism and early imperialism.

21. Freeman, "Discourse," 297.

There are, therefore, two competing attitudes to the land. One of them is openly against enclosure, whereas the other is covertly in favour. Hythlodæus displays both attitudes. English history and myth converge in the practice of enclosure, but differ in their interpretation of its impacts as negative/positive. Hythlodæus's discourses express these ambivalent attitudes regarding the conversion of the land. Freeman is right when he points out that the description of Utopia invites readers to view enclosure as "a natural process";²² however, large-scale enclosure sometimes, as in Knapp's reading, merges with colonialism in the context of sixteenth-century travels to the West and the East, as both enclosures and colonies delimit an external authority within a certain territory. Considering, then, the two perspectives on enclosure (small in book 1 and large in book 2), More makes use of two scales: the size of both population and available land, which compose the population density. Book 1 (high density, English population) points to a social space that had large depopulation rates, while the space of book 2 (low density, Abraxian population) had sufficient land to set up several nearly identical settlements. Travel is banned throughout Utopia's cities to ensure that the population density is maintained at a safe balance. Utopia tries to consolidate a social space that is not affected by historical processes. Whatever happened to the Abraxians is in the realm of a distant history, outside Utopia's current social space. Another instance that reinforces the desire for population stability in book 2 is the solution for overpopulation: establishing a utopian colony in another place, converting the local people, and repeating Utopus's historical process, rather than reconstituting their current order within the limits of the isle. This is in notable contrast to historical enclosure in England, as absorbed and recounted by Hythlodæus, which shattered any possibility of stability. Moreover, enclosure in England gave way to private property, while in Utopia private property is blocked. Historical contingency defines the social space of enclosure in both book 1 and book 2; while in the first it is an ongoing problem, the second portrays it as an already established solution. Moreover, these two enclosures are economically distinct: there is a historical focus on exchange value, but Utopia's foundational enclosure, according to Richard Halpern, leaves room only for use value.²³ Enclosure leaves the island both geographically and

22. Freeman, "Discourse," 297.

23. On Utopia and use value, see Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 136–75.

economically isolated. Only Hythlodæus establishes a link between them, a gap transposed discursively. Instead of a single “paradigm of enclosure,” *Utopia* offers a complicated paradox in the relationship between humans and the soil taking place throughout the sixteenth century and framing the redefinition of the concept of space: depopulation, vagrancy, the loosening of relationships with the land, the loss of the means of subsistence, and economic upheaval.

According to David Hawkes, the commodification of land, along with the commodification of two other components of everyday life—money and labour—was paramount in a break during a period in which humanity and (a not yet marketable) nature shared space. From an economic point of view, things were starting to lose their essence value, or use value, to be replaced by their relative so-called exchange value. Therefore, household economics (*oikos*, as the Greeks called it) yielded to market economics (*chrematistics*, as Aristotle referred to it).²⁴ Consequently, in the sixteenth century, the use of land for subsistence was compromised by the exchange value and competition (as pointed out by Brenner, above), in the form of products (or the very land itself) that could be extracted from the soil, which ultimately provided the means for survival. *Utopia*, as Freeman remarks, in its depiction of enclosure, “represent[s] a transaction of values that link the formation of social identity to the agrarian crisis of More’s day.”²⁵ The agrarian crisis in sixteenth-century England brought with it a revaluation of the social space. Through the process of enclosure, one’s identity could either be ascribed to a specific land—as in the case of landholders and established tenants—or find itself displaced from the land. In the latter case, the displaced would be left wandering through social spaces in which their identities were changeable and temporary, such as vagrants expelled from the land and able-bodied, unemployed peasants. Enclosure, therefore, appears in *Utopia* as a redefining power, either as a) a violent impulse of transformation, as in book 1, or b) a power that has already affected the landscape and is now part of the distant historical process, as it appears in book 2.

Lefebvre’s conceptual triad is helpful for scrutinizing different attitudes found in the social space, a space produced by societal interactions. These concepts are *spatial practice*, the *representation of space*, and *representational space*, which correspond respectively to the interconnected “triad of the

24. David Hawkes, *Shakespeare and Economic Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 9–14, 127.

25. Freeman, “More’s Place,” 198.

perceived, the conceived, and the lived.”²⁶ According to Stuart Elden, that triad “depends on [both] physical and mental constructs.”²⁷ *Utopia’s spatial practice* refers to both its being cut off from the continent and the establishment of several equally divided cities, a process that redefined what was once called Abraxia. The second concept, the *representation of space*, applies to most of book 2 and the official rules and laws that have defined how *Utopia* is conceived for its inhabitants, as related by Hythlodæus back to Morus and Giles. Third, there is the *representational space*, which in *Utopia* is *completely mediated by* Hythlodæus’s experience—he is the only one who has actually been there—and appears as he details every aspect of Utopian life. The whole triad is dependent on one character’s narrative, even when dissonant opinions appear, as in the episode related in Morton’s house, in which the passage concerning the sheep occurs: it is Hythlodæus who is directing our reading experience. The traveller is the voice of the social space found in *Utopia*. In his account, enclosure is construed as an ambivalent power: mythical and current, and related to the imaginary Abraxia/*Utopia* and to historical England. A final moral judgment on the topic of enclosures is nearly impossible, as Hythlodæus negotiates these opposites, which include history and fiction. As Hythlodæus is also the voice of those who survived, who embraced the crew of Utopus, the process of enclosure—on a large scale and possibly entailing a low density of Abraxians—is relatively obscured in both time and space. Nonetheless, both geographically and socially, the island is the result of enclosure in which the spatial triad (the *conceived, perceived, and lived*) has been completely recomposed, and it clearly evokes the similar practice of enclosure that was the “paradigmatic” origin of chaos in More’s period.

The changing mindset in relation to the land also affected the way *Utopia* could be interpreted by the end of the century. In the 1590s, Thomas Nashe, a prolific pamphleteer, dramatist, and novelist, considered that aspect briefly and insightfully in *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594). Nashe’s fictional traveller, Jack Wilton, wanders around in the early Henrician period and meets More and Erasmus in Rotterdam. Briefly, he describes the works for which these

26. Lefebvre, 33, 38–39.

27. Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible* (London: Continuum, 2004), 190. Through the text, I use italics to mark the terms of the conceptual triad, which are named after its spatial and mental properties (*spatial practice* and *perceived space*; *representation of space* and *conceived space*; *representational space* and *lived space*).

humanists are well known, *Utopia* and *Praise of Folly*, in such a way that suggests *The Unfortunate Traveller* is connected to that same humanistic atmosphere, even suggesting that the encounter played a part in the composition of More's and Erasmus's works. Nashe's novel offers a lively portrayal of the world that supplements Hythlodæus's references to England. Nashe's comment on *Utopia* is notable:

Quick-witted Sir Thomas More travelled in a clean contrary province; for he, seeing most commonwealths corrupted by ill custom, and that principalities were nothing but great piracies which, gotten by violence and murder, were maintained by private undermining and bloodshed; that in the chiefest-flourishing kingdoms there was no equal or well-divided weal one with another, but a manifest conspiracy of rich men against poor men, procuring their own unlawful commodities under the name and interest of the commonwealth: he concluded with himself to lay down a perfect plot of a commonwealth or government, which he would entitle his *Utopia*.²⁸

Nashe merges the utopic dimension with the early modern practice of giving new senses—especially economic—to the land. He reimagines More as someone who foresees the multiple possibilities that emerge during the reshaping of the social space. It is worth remarking that Nashe's traveller almost quotes More's famous traveller's rant on enclosures in the middle of the passage. This extract from *Traveller* is important as Nashe, who was also a dramatist, points to an unusual understanding of More regarding the land as a profitable commodity for the "quick-witted"; this encompasses not only Nashe's fictional More, but anyone in a position to profit from land sales and leases in the period. In addition, it highlights *Utopia*'s importance and influence as a critique for early modern playwrights,²⁹ who were writing for playhouses that were establishing themselves as permanent commercial venues in the London landscape.

28. Thomas Nashe, *The Unfortunate Traveller in Pierce Penniless his Supplication to the Devil, Summer's Last Will and Testament, The Terrors of the Night, The Unfortunate Traveller and Selected Writings* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1964), 218–19.

29. *Utopia* was More's unique work, published under every Tudor monarch: see Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Image of Thomas More in England 1535–1635," in *La fortuna dell' Utopia di Thomas More nel*

Playwrights who portrayed the causes and the consequences of the transformations between society and land typically covered three fundamental points: 1) the dissolution of the religious spaces;³⁰ 2) the closure of fields of common use; 3) the commodification of land through the exploitation of prosperous marriages to rich brides or well-provided-for widows. In the rest of this article, I focus on the second aspect, although the boundaries of the three points are flexible and usually overlap. Shakespeare and his contemporaries depicted the changing relationship between the public and the private in the conflict between a custom-based world and an exchange-based world and in the contradictions of an emergent agrarian capitalism and unprecedented urbanization. According to Garrett Sullivan, land used to be the “basis for a social world”; when it became a commodity, its frailty was exposed and at the same time it was distanced from the moral economy that used to be its “inseparable” pillar.³¹ In addition, some plays, known as city plays, reveal an exaggerated preoccupation with inheritance, lands, and their associated revenues.³²

Louis Marin has pointed out that *Utopia* “folds the time of the narrative over onto the space of *description*.”³³ Thus, the spatial practices and the representations of both books 1 and 2 are brought to us mostly through narrative. When it comes to the plays discussed here, using similar terms, drama unfolds action over into the space of *experience*. The artistic medium changes while the core remains the same: the ruptures in the social fabric associated with enclosure. From the initial uproar caused by enclosure, as depicted in More’s work, the plays individualize the situation, focusing on the experiences of those caught up in these changes—the “quick-witted” and their counterparts—and their handling of the consequences. While the Catholic past

dibattito politico europeo del '500, II giornata Luigi Firpo, 2 marzo 1995 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1996), 5–23, 11, 20, 21.

30. On this topic, see Régis Augustus Bars Closel, “Shakespeare and the Dissolution of the Monasteries: Land, Economics, and Rupture,” in *Shakespeare and Money*, ed. Carla Dente and John Drakakis (Pisa: Pisa University Press, forthcoming).

31. Garret A. Sullivan Jr., *Drama of the Landscape* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 10–11.

32. Some examples include Thomas Middleton’s *The Phoenix* (1604), *Michaelmas Term* (1607), and *Chaste Maid of Cheapside* (1613), and Philip Massinger’s *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1621), to name just a few well-known plays.

33. Marin, 104–05, emphasis added.

in which More lived and wrote may seem a strange country when compared to the late Elizabethan or Caroline period, the environmental, communal, and urban tensions that framed *Utopia* were still very much present as the exploration of social space—through Lefebvre’s spatial concepts—embedded in both *Arden of Faversham* and *A Jovial Crew* will reveal.

Drama and social spaces

The plays that follow in this part are concerned with the cohesion of social space, as changes in customs or ownership might lead to threats and challenges to its stability and disruption among the inhabitants. These plays also depict the consequences of the long historical process of changing attitudes towards the land, first discussed in *Utopia* in the 1510s and then, after more than a century of transformations, in the 1640s. These two plays can be broadly categorized as “topographic plays” in which, according to Henry S. Turner, a space “is used to give form to the discursive scripts embedded in a play and which [...] come to constitute the drama’s primary symbolic content.”³⁴ Turner adds that

[i]n the “topographic” play, the fundamental images, symbols, “ideologemes” (in Althusserian terminology), “philosophemes” (that of Derrida), “myths” (that of Barthes), or discursive “statements” (that of Foucault) that characterized early-modern culture more broadly are articulated through the representation of place and become the primary way in which concrete places themselves emerge into representation. At this level of analysis, places become the vehicles through which problems of social class, political identity and belonging, status aspirations, modes of production and value, competing epistemologies about the social and political world, or attitudes towards urban order and urban experience can be scrutinized and dissected.³⁵

Both plays are troubled by the problems concerning the physical place and the re-composition of the social space. They reflect different moments, the first through the exposition of the immediate results of dissolution—change of

34. Henry S. Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts 1580–1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 32.

35. Turner, 32–33.

ownership and the erasure of customary leases—followed by the rupture of the relationship between humans and land, while the second looks back to similar actions—mainly regarding inheritance and vagrancy—that are located in the action's past as part of the history of that space, but these matters still haunt the protagonist and those once associated with the act of enclosure.

The tragedy *Arden of Faversham* appeared in print in the early 1590s. It is possibly the most comprehensive play on the changes in the relationship between people and land. Based on the story of a murder that took place fifty years before its publication and written by an anonymous author, it remained a popular play for decades. It depicts the story of Thomas Arden, who bought land during the Dissolution of the Monasteries that had previously belonged to the Abbey of Faversham. *Arden* depicts various relationships with the land and their effacement through the action as Arden, the new landowner, eradicates the customs and leases that had been in place for a long time. The play opens as the deeds of proprietorship of the land of the Abbey of Faversham are being handed over to Arden. The new ownership recomposes the social space of the play from the very start and what follows is an attempt to negotiate this space. This venture is risky. The plan is led by Alice, Arden's wife, in pursuance of enjoying freely her affair with Mosby, a man of lower class. To restore the social space to its previous state, Arden's term (or lease) must end, but as it ends only when Arden's life is over, Alice and Mosby hatch their plan to murder Arden, taking advantage of the interests of those affected.

Arden's ownership is discussed and verified through the first scene. His rival Mosby brings up that these lands were made available even to him, as he tries to frame himself in a position similar to Arden's:

Mosby

The Abbey lands, whereof you are now possessed,
Were offered me on some occasion [...]
I pray you, sir, tell me, are not the lands yours?
Hath any other interest herein?

Arden

[...] As for the lands, Mosby, they are mine
By letters patents from his Majesty. (1.293–96; 300–01)³⁶

36. The edition for *Arden* is Anonymous, *The Tragedy of Arden of Faversham*, ed. Martin L. White (London: Methuen, 1973). The reference is to scene and line number.

The “Abbey lands” is a reference only to a physical space, but through this conversation the possession of land is also read publicly as an indicator of status or rank, with Mosby trying to usurp power and claim equal status as a potential landowner who could have been granted the same lands. Arden utterly rejects this claim to the lands and hence equal status on the part of Mosby or anyone else, as the lands are definitively in his (Arden’s) possession. Read through the lens of Lefebvre’s concepts, Arden’s possession is a function of *spatial practice*, “a practice of society that secretes society’s space”³⁷ and denotes the *perception* that is spread through the social space. The *spatial practice* in this sequence refers to the rules and customs that have made Arden and Mosby different from each other in relation to the “Abbey lands,” which in older times belonged to a monastic order and those involved within it. Two different proprietorships (Arden’s and the church’s) are set as *spatial practices* of the redistribution of ownership, both set within the background of the play.

The lands are also a *representation of space* (or a *conceived space*). For both Arden and Mosby, the land’s best representation is as an “instrumental space,”³⁸ as a convenience and as an indicator of wealth, power, and fortune. Land represents much more than a resource for husbandry and subsistence: it displays the class power—economic, social, or political—of an individual over others, and it defines Arden as landed gentry. Although Arden and Mosby share the way in which they *conceive* of the land, and both were potential buyers/holders in the past, the *spatial practice* of official proprietorship re-establishes the difference that Mosby tries to level when he asks not once, but twice, if the lands are really in Arden’s possession.

The third point of the Lefebvrian triad, *representational space*, refers to “space as directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols” and “the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users,’”³⁹ a kind of space that is experienced and is thus lived aesthetically. The *representational space* appears clearly just a little later in the scene, when a different character seeks Arden out for reasons similar to Mosby’s. Greene has been affected by the recent changes in the ownership of the Abbey lands; however, he confronts Alice, not Arden, about his concerns. This development is important because the land is once again a matter of discussion in the same initial scene, but it also presents the early development

37. Lefebvre, 38.

38. Elden, 190.

39. Lefebvre, 39. I have retained Lefebvre’s italics.

of the murderous plan. What troubles Greene is that his personal situation is directly at risk: “that all former grants / Are cut off; whereof I myself had one; / But now my interest by that is void” (1.61–63). After receiving confirmation of both Arden’s proprietorship of the Abbey lands and the voiding of the former grants, Greene appeals to Alice:

Pardon me, Mistress Arden; I must speak,
 For I am touched. Your husband doth me wrong
 To wring me from the little land I have.
 My living is my life; only that
 Resteth remainder of my portion.
 Desire of wealth is endless in his mind,
 And he is greedy-gaping still for gain;
 Nor cares he though young gentlemen do beg,
 So he may scrape and hoard up in his pouch.
 But, seeing he hath taken my lands, I’ll value life
 As careless as he is careful for to get;
 And, tell him this from me, I’ll be revenged
 And so as he shall wish the Abbey lands
 Had rested still within their former state. (1.469–83)

Greene’s *perceived*, *conceived*, and *lived* space diverges significantly from that of Arden and Mosby. The plot of land that Greene speaks of is a *representational space* that is composed of memories and points back to a previous inheritance, the “remainder of my portion” (1.473): it is his mode of production and subsistence, as exemplified in the phrase “My living is my life” (1.472), as well as the site of his personal experiences. The striking contrast in the way Arden *conceives* of the land—a poor tenant and a new landholder—transforms Greene, a minor character, into a landless labourer and sets the emotional stage for Alice to exploit Greene’s vulnerability (and his desire for revenge) to fulfil her personal plans, offering him the opportunity to have his land back.

According to Andrew Thacker, *representation of space* “refers to official organization of space” while *representational space* points “to unofficial; often aesthetic conceptions of space.”⁴⁰ All these references to the changes

40. Andrew Thacker, “Critical Literary Geography,” in *The Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. Robert T. Tally Jr. (London: Palgrave, 2017), 34.

in land ownership, an official *representation of space* (Arden) as opposed to *representational space* (Greene), are indicated in the initial scene. This sequence is where the symptoms of displacement become evident to the audience and readers, but also a plan for the restoration of the land, through Arden's death, is set in motion. The process snowballs as more people become entangled and most of the characters involved either are under the impact of that specific social space or are indirectly associated with Alice and Mosby's plans.⁴¹ At stake for Arden are the abstract aspects of land possession. For him, the whole social space points in one upward direction: land as the mediator of public value,⁴² a pre-requisite for entrance to the gentry,⁴³ and as the confirmation of his mobility. In contrast, for Greene, what matters is the material condition and the subsistence obtained through land use.

Arden spends most of the play outside his Abbey lands. When he returns (and the play is drawing to a close), he meets another minor character, a person affected by the extinction of former customs: Reed, an angler who holds some land and has his own tenants. As the rent he collects is essential for his family, he confronts Arden "about the plot of ground / Which wrongfully you detain from me / Although the rent of it be very small, / Yet will it help my wife and children" (12.12–15). Reed's complaint differs from Greene's, as there is more involved than survival and the means of production. Reed has his own tenants and more lives are compromised in the pyramidal social space of Reed's lands that have now become Arden's property. Unlike Greene, Reed does not get involved in the adulterous couple's nefarious plans. Reed's complaints come after a series of frustrated murder attempts and when the action is about to return to Arden's house, where the initial problems were first discussed.

Arden of Faversham points to a situation similar to that described by Hythlodæus in book 1 of *Utopia*, depicting the consequences of a changing landscape and the enclosure of common lands. It focuses on ownership, accumulation, and different relationships with land. Although it is not clear what Arden plans to do with the land, such as whether there will be agrarian

41. Following Alice's advice, Greene hires two assassins to do the job. The other way in which Alice and Mosby gather people, such as Michael and the Painter, for their purposes is through the promise of marriage to Mosby's sister, Susan. Michael, nevertheless, contemplates the possibility of taking the lands that his older brother has inherited.

42. Scott, 134n23.

43. Martin L. White, "Introduction," in *The Tragedy of Arden of Faversham*, lxiii.

changes, etc., the eviction of tenants suggests that an agrarian change might be a sound inference. The play does not have any “sheep” as symbolic representatives of change to be blamed, but rather known human agents involved in issues of ownership. Like *Utopia*, the transformation of the social space is in progress, producing a desperate landless class who are led to criminal activities and are punished for them; they successfully murder Arden, but moments later are caught, arrested, and executed by the city officials. Like in *Utopia*, a land-related formulation of social space—and the desperate criminal activities that may emerge from it—gives the text its fabric as well as its structure. The next play relates to concerns in both *Utopia* and *Arden* about the land, drawing more topics into this discussion, such as engrossing and beggary.

Brome’s play returns to the problem of vagrancy that sparked the discussion in *Utopia*. It debates one’s place in the social space as a result of the process that creates landed and displaced subjects. Through a select set of relationships among its characters, it goes back to the essential topics in *Utopia*, such as spatiality, displacement, vagrancy, and private property, and it also includes an imagined utopian/ideal commonwealth that contrasts with the dystopian reality. The play explores this dichotomy, a trait found in *Utopia*, in which according to Halpern, “English vagrants in one sense embody the dysfunctional or ‘dystopian’ aspects of English polity [...], but] from another perspective they are already utopian.”⁴⁴ Lefebvre’s conceptual categories illuminate the set of contrasts between an imagined spatiality and the experience of living on the margins of the social space without any effectual possibility of reabsorption.

Richard Brome’s *A Jovial Crew* first appeared on the stage on the eve of the Civil War in 1641 and was then printed in 1652 when the war was over. The text thus gives us a dual historical setting: before the closure of the theatres in 1642 and post-war England. The very idea that it fits both periods speaks a lot about it and the society it depicts. *A Jovial Crew* was probably the last dramatic piece staged before the outbreak of war. Brome was also the last Caroline dramatist to depict the tendency of the 1620s Stuart period to portray alternative worlds.⁴⁵ Among others, these include *Beggars Bush* (1622) by John Fletcher and Philip

44. Halpern, 155.

45. Tiffany Stern, “Introduction,” in Richard Brome’s *A Jovial Crew*, ed. Tiffany Stern (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 35. On the political auspices for a second group of plays and the relationship with earlier works, see Julia Sanders, “Beggars’ Commonwealths and the Pre-Civil War Stage: Suckling’s ‘The

Massinger and *The Spanish Gipsy* (1623) by Thomas Middleton and William Rowley.

The play tells the story of Oldrents, an old and rich benevolent landowner, who is troubled by the prophecy that his daughters will become beggars. The play portrays the world of the mendicants, first as a quasi-ideal imagined to be free of worries, then as an environment of harsh realities when Oldrents's daughters voluntarily join a crew of beggars with their suitors, fulfilling the prophecy. Brome portrays their itinerant social spaces as a world subject to diverse adversities, mainly sexual exploitation. Among those involved, there are five characters from different classes, each with distinct stories that have led them to beggary: a soldier,⁴⁶ a lawyer, a scribe, a priest, and a courtier. The community and the spaces in which they wander are depicted either as an escape from society or as the last recourse for some to keep themselves alive. This Caroline play is filled with several songs and cheerful moments, but according to Tiffany Stern, despite the fact that it is "insistently happy in feel, [it] wrestles with some dark issues."⁴⁷ These issues are spread throughout the play and are important to comprehend the composition of the social space.

Similar to the events in *Arden*, the first scene directs the focus to the land and the relationship between the landowner and his tenants. Contrary to *Arden*, in which the proprietor effaces the customs and the relationships between the landlord and those who live on the land, *Jovial* insists on an old-fashioned feudal "landholding [that] involves a cluster of dependent relationships between superiors and inferiors with reciprocal duties toward each other."⁴⁸ Oldrents is portrayed initially as a concerned father, troubled by a fortune-teller's prediction about beggary. This appears absurd to his friend Hearty, who claims that there is always a degree of caprice in these prophecies. In downplaying his concerns, he also describes Oldrents as a landowner:

Goblins', Brome's 'A Jovial Crew', and Shirley's 'The Sisters,'" *The Modern Language Review* 97.1 (2002): 1-14.

46. The ex-soldier in *Arden of Faversham*, Black Will, is also socially displaced after surviving battles on the Continent (Boulogne, northern France) and becomes a thug and murderer. Middleton and Dekker's *the Roaring Girl* (1607) also has an ex-soldier who can no longer find his place in society.

47. Stern, 6.

48. Kevin Curran, *Shakespeare's Legal Ecologies* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 27.

[...] I would you had, and I
 Such an estate as yours. Four thousand yearly,
 With such a heart as mine, would defy Fortune
 And all her babbling soothsayers. [...]
 Are you not th'only rich man lives unenvied?
 Have you not all the praises of the rich
 And prayers of the poor? Did ever any
 Servant or hireling, neighbour, kindred, curse you,
 Or wish one minute shortened of your life?
 Have you one grudging tenant? Will they not all
 Fight for you? Do they not teach their children,
 And make 'em too, pray for you morn and evening,
 And in their graces too, as duly as
 For King and realm? [...]
 Whose rent did ever you exact? Whose have
 You not remitted, when by casualties
 Of fire, of floods, of common dearth, or sickness,
 Poor men were brought behindhand? Nay, whose losses
 Have you not piously repaired? (1.1.58–86)⁴⁹

The beggars are introduced along with a display of Oldrents's enormous generosity towards them. Dozens of homeless are welcomed into the house and brought into the great hall to spend the night there. In that separate place within the house, several things happen at the same time in a fluid and condensed social space: a child is being born, a wedding is celebrated, and people are eating and drinking festively. The physical boundary set here is important for understanding the segregated social space as it also defines the opposition between early and later scenes. *Jovial* sets contrasts between a physical nomadic *representation of space* and an abstract idea of the *representational space*. In other words, it compares the harsh experiences within the beggar's world or "beggar's commonwealth,"⁵⁰ a system that has its own language (cant) and rites, against a conceived impression of what non-beggar characters imagine how life

49. Quotations are from Richard Brome, *A Jovial Crew*, ed. Tiffany Stern (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). Numbers in parentheses refer to act, scene, and line.

50. Rosemary Gaby, "Of Vagabonds and Commonwealths: *Beggars' Bush*, *A Jovial Crew*, and *The Sisters*," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 34.2 (1994): 401.

is within it. One of the suitors of Oldrents's daughters fancies that the world of these vagrants is a "free state" in which an individual can live "[...] in the full enjoyment of liberty, mirth and ease, having all things in common and nothing wanting of nature's whole provision within the reach of their desires" (2.1.4–7).

As the play progresses and the crew leave Oldrents's house, the daughters and their suitors follow Springlove, Oldrents's steward, who likes to journey with beggars in the spring, joining the company just for the experience. Brome "focuses on the reactions of the runaways to beggarly existence and explores, with humour, the nature and significance of the myth of an idyllic beggar's world."⁵¹ The spaces that they tread are the roads, i.e., spaces, that exist between the private and the public domain. The road, through hedgerows and pitches, is a fluid and dynamic social space that is more than an interval between one point and another. Moreover, its fluidity establishes the condition of being itinerant and thus serves as the beggars' *representational space*. It also becomes the temporary social space for the non-beggar characters. Their understanding passes from an abstract conception to a concrete reality, and as they discover later, it proves to be a completely different understanding aesthetically and physically. Their momentary immersion in the world of beggars contrasts with the fanciful portrayals of those ill-fated and poor people who had to face the "transition from good subject to idle wanderer [which] articulates a major anxiety"⁵² in the early modern period, as we saw in book 1 of *Utopia*.

Before spectators and readers reach the turning point in the play, in a scene that, according to Stern, might be an addition written for publication and therefore after the Civil War, Brome establishes a relevant connection to More's work by referring to its title.⁵³ Springlove, the daughters, their suitors, and the beggars prepare a masque called "Utopia." Each character will have a specific place in this. A selection of special mendicants, such as those identified as the courtier and the soldier, will play the part they originally used to play in society.⁵⁴ However, inside the imaginary social space of their utopian masque, every major character, including Springlove, the daughters, the suitors, and the five distinct mendicants, will have their own place; the rest of the crew are again

51. Gaby, 408.

52. Scott, 84.

53. Stern, 49.

54. Stern, 49–50.

cast as beggars. While Brome gives every character a role in the masque, he is also implying that homelessness and mendicancy might be an irreversible symptom of the times in which they were living and must be accounted for in any reformation of the commonwealth. If this utopian masque is a later addition, written in the English interregnum, Brome might have been thinking about the future of his own society, beggars included. The masque, however, is never staged and remains in the abstract *representational space*: the authorities arrive to arrest the beggars, and they disperse. Moreover, when Brome gives each person a defined role or place within the social space, it might not be a retrospective action, as in a medieval socioeconomic ordering. It is, in an idealistic reading, a prospective action, as it is looking forward to a future that encompasses everyone. The problem in giving each person an essentializing role, as *Jovial* does through different characters, is that the traditional lifestyle and *defined* places such as those in Utopia are at odds with the fundamental ideas of the Renaissance, such as liberty (a feature often misleadingly associated with beggars in the play) and the possibility of mobility and self-fashioning.

The play engages with the implicit generative question in *Utopia*: how does society produce beggars? Answers are provided only in terms of personal experience, as in the case of the five distinct mendicants and their specific stories. However, Brome also fashions beggary as an ideal state of communal life, only to depict how cruel the *representational space*, shaped erroneously by the imagination, actually is. The dramatist goes beyond asking his audience and reader to have sympathy for those found in miserable conditions. He points out that the world of beggary is far from ideal and that people do not join the world of beggards voluntarily as his protagonists did. This is where the background to the story, mainly how the social space in which the action is disclosed came to be what it is, plays an important role; indeed, the history of the land, detailed below, is important in understanding why Oldrents is disquieted by the prophecy. Like *Arden*, it is a play that reflects on the redefinition of the social space (even as a utopian masque), but in *Jovial* the ways in which it is recomposed and how the characters are established as part of a whole system of relationships is reserved for a turning point at the end of the plot. The play contrasts the enormous amount spent yearly by Oldrents for the sake of extending brief hospitality to the vagrants with the insignificant amount that his household labourers receive from him during a lifetime of service. Later in the play, in a convoluted tale, we learn from a beggar that Oldrents's grandparents attained their lands by

pushing their old neighbour into the pitiable condition of a mendicant and that his descendants were still in that position when Oldrents inherited the lands by right. The turning point occurs when we learn that Oldrents had an illegitimate son with a homeless woman, who was a descendant of that family: his son turns out to be his steward Springlove, who in the past was relieved from a life of poverty by Oldrents before becoming his steward. When the truth is revealed, landowner and beggar are reunited as part of the same family. However, Oldrents does not give Springlove a share in the inheritance, leaving his lands to his two daughters instead.⁵⁵ Past and present, as well as wealth and beggary, are part of the same historical process, and landowners and vagrants are ultimately the same family. This process defines the individual life story of Oldrents and frames the social space that they ultimately share through their different experiences.

By the end of the play, the reasons for Oldrents's initial concerns become clear. The ending also highlights how theatre "provides a *telemesic* rendition of geographic space: a transmission of the sense of distant locations as if being in the middle of things, from the Greek *τελος* (end, result, or outcome) and *μεσος* (middle, centre)."⁵⁶ *Jovial's* telemesic rendition relies on the fact that we are not aware of the past, either related to family or to the land that they occupy; what was in Oldrents's past reappears as a possible future if his daughters were to be abused; indeed, one of them miraculously escapes being raped while wandering with the crew, as Springlove's mother once was. As readers or spectators, we find ourselves in the middle of the action. Moreover, the same applies to the beggars and Springlove, as we first meet them at Oldrents's house only to learn how their past put them in the situations we see in the play. The situation faced through the social space of Oldrents's farm is not isolated as it is inevitably related to a larger group of tenants, employees, and beggars. The mendicants in Brome's England stand in the place of the Abraxians in More's *Utopia*: they were there before large changes happened around them, but they were not completely absorbed in the reconstitution of the land. Likewise, their origin is also briefly accounted for in that they were pushed to the margins of their fictional worlds and their voices were silenced. The vagrants do not become

55. Springlove is, after all, Oldrents's bastard.

56. Monica Matei-Chesnoiu, *Geoparsing Early Modern English Drama* (New York: Palgrave, 2015), 9–10.

citizens of Utopia, either in the masque or in the fictional world of the play, yet they are, as *The Jovial Crew* insists, part of the social space.

A connection with *Arden* is also evident as Reed, the angler who does not join Alice and Mosby (remarked in the quote above), could easily be put out of his specific place in the social space. As noted in *Jovial*, liberty is a concept that depends on the eye of the beholder. We do not get to see what happened to the Abraxians or to Reed, but we do see what happens (in the present sense) to Brome's beggars, who are publicly misunderstood, treated with alms instead of relocation. Any opportunity to balance the scale turns out in favour of the status quo rather than the other way around. Taken together, these aspects show different experiences and perceptions of agrarian redistribution, involving tensions related to anxiety, displacement, and the maintenance of newly developed rights over the space. These three works not only represent depictions of the consequences of enclosure in a period covering more than a century, but also provide an insight into different representations of the problems brought about by the (commercial) redefinition of the social space in which not everyone is accounted for. Exclusion, marginalization, and peripheries are mentioned in *Utopia*, but even when considered at considerable length and visible on the stage, as in *Arden* and in *Jovial*, they remain either unresolved or the same.

Coda

Jean Howard, in *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England*, points out that anti-theatre pamphlets, among other things, argued that theatregoers were not in the place they were supposed to be, such as working in the fields or attending church.⁵⁷ I wish to explore this insight, as it proves relevant to my point as a coda. Those who stood against theatrical practice were realizing that a different composition of the social space was taking place in early modern England. The rigid and traditional disposition of roles was no longer a reality in the late 1580s due to several factors, from socio-economic and religious transformations to the self-fashioning of individuals who moved geographically and vertically through the space. Both the theatre and its enemies were reacting to the same process of redefinition of the social space, but by different

57. Jean Howard, *The Stage and Social Struggle in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2005), 27.

means. While pamphlets complained that theatres were corrupting traditional divisions, topographical plays such as *Arden of Faversham* and *The Jovial Crew*, like *Utopia* before them, portrayed the causes and the consequences of the same process. Moreover, these plays did not make any clear moral judgment. Both, therefore, had their own *representational spaces* as starting points. While some of the circumstances therein might have been an “unknown country” for some urban-bred spectators, certain similar conceptions, perceptions, and experiences could be recognized by a great number of theatregoers with social spaces set in the city or in the recomposed country.

Therefore, the plays indicate that nearly a century after the dissolution of the monasteries, the relationship with the land and the social and economic bonds associated with its ownership had already reached a point at which the customs of feudal times were irreconcilable with the current uses of land, and that generations had passed consolidating the new customs. While Oldrents is depicted partly as a benevolent medieval householder, we are nevertheless confronted with a world in which the hospitality that one individual can extend is contradictory and selective, while vagrancy is constantly increasing. Even if the idea that life used to be easier or better in the past is ubiquitous in the literature, this does not mean that *Utopia* and the plays are purposefully nostalgic or that what preceded the early modern period was somehow a better period for living. The conflicts within a space emerge for reasons that compel it to operate competitively, thus creating all forms of inequalities. Beggary, therefore, rather than being an enormous problem (as portrayed by Morus and his friends), is treated, at least initially in *Jovial*, as an alternative and surprisingly “Utopic” world, an illusion that Brome gradually dismantles as the problem of displacement is one to which society has yet to find a solution.

Reading the landscape involves analysis of its surroundings and customs, especially when opposing cultural values are competing within the same period. Book 1 of *Utopia* may be our earliest and most critical literary work devoted to this sort of theoretical framing of the land. This brief examination of works spanning more than a century (1517–1641) demonstrates that More’s *Utopia* set the stage for a continuing examination of early modern associations between humanity and the social spaces. Nashe indicates how these new worlds and customs might be profitable for the quick-witted observer of social/spatial change. The anonymous writer of *Arden* depicts the changing customs as the locus of conflict and subversion. Finally, Brome shows that the consequences

are spread through both time and space, involving nearly everyone, despite individuals' lack of awareness. Taken together, the emergent profitability of the reconfiguration of social spaces appeared in *Traveller* and its initial consequences were disclosed in *Arden* only to spread through generations of displacement in *Jovial Utopia*'s concerns with the ambivalence of enclosure had already pointed to the complexity of such depictions of space and its inhabitants. The variety of perspectives and concerns adopted and prioritized by these topographical plays shows how social space was constantly being produced and recomposed in early modern England, as well as how dramatists, writing for different periods over a span of half a century,⁵⁸ reacted to the aesthetic experience of those involved. The voices of the marginal characters are not as docile as the bleating of the sheep as they speak for their real counterparts, men and women who were put out of their places as they were put out of the fields.

58. It is worth remembering that *Arden* was reprinted in 1633 during the Carolinian period.