

Andrew Bozio, *Thinking Through Place on the Early Modern English Stage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp 240. Hardback £60. ISBN: 9780198846567. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198846567.001.0001>

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In this deeply thoughtful and layered book, Andrew Bozio argues that early modern drama reveals important insights into the complex human process of turning natural spaces into meaningful sites of place-thought and -being. In the widest sense, space consists of all matter and lifeforms in any earthly location at a given time, at scales ranging from the microscopic to the atmospheric. Humans cannot, of course, think on all these levels at once. The manifold phenomena of space remain latent until the sentient mind filters some of them as place markers — that is, as semiotically ordered perceptions. Repeating the experience forms knowledge of places as familiar time-space continuums with ontological identities.

Bozio calls this process of ‘arresting’ space as place ‘ecological thinking’ (2). His term combines ideas of environmentally distributed cognition and topographic orientation drawn from early modern and contemporary scientific scholarship. Its leading premise is that places are not only objects but also mediums of thought. (Ecology in this book usually refers to human perceptions and relations, not to animal and inorganic interactions). Historically, this epistemology of place precedes Descartes’s idea of disembodied thought projecting itself into physical surroundings to give them human names and subjectivities.

By contrast, premodern and post-Cartesian place is constituted from reciprocal relations among concepts, historical artefacts, memories, and sensory phenomena and impressions. All these serve as environmental affordances for interactive thinking. Early modern playhouses likewise offered material and discursive affordances to actors and spectators, allowing them to situate themselves imaginatively in specific locations. Theatre thus functions as a discovery tool for illuminating environmental consciousness of place as active conceptual and physical assemblages.

Having outlined such approaches in his introduction, Bozio unpacks their distinctions under two broad categories: *emplacement*, corresponding to epistemologies; and *embodiment*, referring to corporeal ways of knowing. At all times in his analysis of selected play-scenes, Bozio is at pains to show that these modes of place-thinking are never discrete but deeply entangled and often seemingly at odds.

Chapter one, 'Forms of Emplacement: The Arts of Memory, Chorography, and Theatrical Performance', begins with the player William Sly, in John Marston's *The Malcontent*, posing as a spectator on the stage of Blackfriars theatre. Sly protests he is there to give advice to the actors based on performances he has seen in other playhouses and notes jotted down in his writing tables. Commonplace books typically relied on spatially mediated mnemonic practices: eg, architectural (associating memories with streetscapes and buildings); and chorographic (topographic and antiquarian descriptions of sites). Metadramatic moments like Sly's re-present these means of affording memories of place theatrically. By combining maps with chorography, John Norden's *Speculum Britanniae* (1593) also illustrates cartography's displacement of spatial uniqueness in abstract representations. Bozio argues that Norden's hybrid topography diversified conventional chronicles of place, and that theatre, using diverse visual and sensory cues of location such as scene-boards, props, and costumes, imparted similar liveliness to spectators' familiarity with London or other environments.

'Marlowe and the Ecology of Remembrance' sets up a conceptual dialogue with the previous chapter. In *Dido Queen of Carthage*, ecological memory functions as a procedure of *reculer pour mieux sauter*: Aeneas's daydream of Troy (2.1) shows historical memory and affective cognition weakening his place-recognition of Carthage. Yet paradoxically, while the effect of this 'reverse phenomenology' (71) is self-estrangement, the accompanying affect of melancholy stirs his intellect to embrace the future-forward *translatio imperii* to Italy. Similarly, Tamburlaine's scorched-earth expansionism enables ecological memory by foregrounding the personal affects of particular sites. When in *Part Two* Tamburlaine destroys Zenocrates's birthplace, Larissa, in the wake of her death, he seems to reverse this 'spatialized catharsis' by installing her portrait in the town. Yet he then cancels that gesture by removing her image. This strange action reveals ecological memory as an environmentally situated form of repeated absence (94).

Such paradoxes are a recurring strategic concern of Bozio's study. Chapter three, 'The Perception of Place in *King Lear*', which marks the book's shift to bodily ways of knowing, begins by focusing on 'seeing' a place 'feelingly', ie, as synaesthetic cognition. When Edgar leads his blinded father Gloucester to Dover Cliff, they feel their way differently. The former's ekphrasis of the beach 'below' creates a vividly imagined place in a dual void: the physical absence of Dover and the non-mimetic space of the stage. Its poetic concreteness, however, competes with Gloucester's sense perceptions that he is not walking uphill, smelling the sea-side, etc. Yet Gloucester's scepticism is overcome because he imagines his blindness has weakened his other senses. He thus leaps to an expected death that feels

more 'real' than it actually is. Edgar's topographic recreation refutes in advance Descartes's denial that space and sense perception are prior to thinking. So does Lear's rushing out to the 'heath' in the storm, where he becomes numbed by cold and enters a kind of sensory 'nothing'. Yet his heightened awareness of his exposed body enables Lear to incorporate the environment into his imagination (115). This somatic transfer supports Bozio's overarching thesis that sentient 'emplacement, rather than space as such, [is] a more operative category for thinking about how location is understood' in the period (114). Poor Tom's bodily suffering and cognitive disorientation likewise demonstrate that emplacement, constituting an attenuation of perceptions, can actually increase consciousness of place through defamiliarization (121-2).

The next and most socially expansive chapter, 'Staging Failure: Disorientation in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*', extends this counterintuitive phenomenon that the fragmentation of remembered perceptions can generate new thinking about place. In Beaumont's source-text, *Don Quixote*, the sad knight's misrecognition of places like windmills and rural inns is owing to the unconscious effects of reading too many prose romances and 'bending' external affordances into imagined worlds. Rafe seems to do the same thing when he misrecognizes Waltham Forest — a London pleasure site — as a 'desert' and mistakes the Bell Inn for a castle. Rafe's misrecognition is intentional, however, assisted by the Citizen and his Wife and the grudgingly co-operative players. Waltham thus becomes a hybrid place of collective fantasy and a kind of theatre-game. This experience replicates the contagious 'madness' which enables dramatic fictions to become acceptable as plausible mimesis.

Bozio goes on to link Rafe's glorious failure to disability studies. Its social model critiques physical environments that reflect normative ideas of bodily ability, but which impair disabled persons. By enabling Rafe's misrecognition of place, the citizens demonstrate their familiarity with the repertoire of London playhouses, including *The Knight's* Blackfriars. Their play-world subverts snobbish assumptions that the citizens are ignorant of theatrical conventions and genres. It likewise exposes the privileged purchasing power of the gallants sitting on the stage whom the citizens overreach in their 'distractions'. This brilliant analysis may explain why the original audience disliked the 'privy mark of irony about' Beaumont's social satire.

The fifth chapter, '*Bartholomew Fair* and the Performativity of Place', analyzes Jonson's play from the perspective of two competing ideas of Smithfield, where the fair takes place: theatrical representation and (drawing on Judith Butler) performative repetition. Jonson's Induction draws attention to tensions between these

modes. The Stagekeeper's critique of the play's omissions of typical Bartholomew sights addresses the audience's experiential expectations of place, which the Scrivener's contract attempts to foreclose. Yet the Scrivener also remarks that the Hope theatre, where the play was originally staged, is as dirty and smelly as the animal markets and slaughterhouses of Smithfield. This is because the Hope doubled as a bear-baiting pit, with olfactory and excremental crossovers.

The staging of *Bartholomew Fair* is therefore another conceptually and phenomenally contested domain of place constituted by repression and memory. Bozio argues that Jonson's Smithfield disrupts spectators' familiarity with the site through its bustling spatial movements, thereby producing a 'negative ecology'. The way the play limits experiential memory is exemplified by two characters: Cokes, who becomes 'captivated' in an 'almost aleatoric' yet disorienting way by the fair's thick dialogue and motions (including Hero and Leander ones); and Busy, whose ideological militancy leads him repeatedly to confront the fair, culminating in the trashing of Trash's 'idolatrous' gingerbread. His puritan identity is traversed by the fair's staggering sensual impressions and drained of personal will. Both he and Cokes involuntarily abet Smithfield's subjectively assertive phenomenology of place.

In this concluding chapter, Bozio takes tentative steps towards a revised conception of space and place as more than human-centred. For most of his book, Bozio leans heavily on older theorists who posit that space is constructed by human labours and uses. These ideas would benefit from consideration of co-evolved space-making and -thinking, such as human collaboration with animal *Umwelten* (which Bozio separates from human worldviews, citing older claims that animal thought is merely captive to its environments) and with ontologically vibrant objects. Their omission inadvertently undermines the anti-Cartesian thrust of his fine-grained attention to generative tensions and paradoxes of place-thinking. The otherwise impressive intellectual work of this illuminating book makes me want to read Bozio's thoughts about co-evolved embodiment and emplacement in his future research.