Alison Findlay’s *Playing Spaces in Early Modern Women’s Drama* investigates the multivalent concept of space in a wide-ranging survey of plays, masques, and liturgical dramas written and performed by women from 1376 to 1705. Examined are dramatic works of the Abbess of Barking, Elizabeth I, Mary Sidney Herbert, Henrietta Maria, Rachel Fane, Margaret Cavendish, Aphra Behn, and many others. Informing Findlay’s study are the social and spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre and Michel De Certeau. (See, for instance, Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* and De Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*.) In *Playing Spaces*, space is figured as “the product or result of a given cultural practice” that contains moments where change may or may not take place, depending upon the forces at work in the moments of production (1). A key component of this analysis is the study of the interplay of boundaries both physical and cultural. Utilizing Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on creative chronotopes, Findlay interrogates the relationships of such boundaries by examining the ways venue and setting respond to and inform one another.

This study of venue and setting as it relates to dramatic writing by women provides an important approach to understanding ways in which early modern women articulated and negotiated social and political positions. Dramatic composition and performance, Findlay argues, afforded women a “vehicle through which their own spatial experiences could be translated into play, and through which they could lament, reject, criticise, celebrate and, most importantly, renegotiate their place in the world” (3). Although little to no material evidence regarding specific performances exists outside of the texts of this study, Findlay shows that textual evidence internal to these pieces addresses questions of performance and illuminates moments of production. The notion that many dramatic pieces were designed to be acted or performed in some way is emphasized at multiple points throughout this work and is drawn from projects including the Women and Dramatic Production 1570-1670 project directed by Findlay, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, and Gweno Williams.
The chapters of *Playing Spaces* are organized thematically around the five spaces most important to the study of dramatic composition by women: homes, gardens, courts, sororities, and cities. Each chapter is organized chronologically, and the movement from chapter to chapter provides a logical progression that begins with a study of drama composed prior to 1660 and that culminates with professional dramas staged in London.

Chapter 1, “Homes,” provides a discussion of the relationship of noblewomen to the great houses they occupied by asking how “the fictional zone created by the script” rearticulates the domestic household controlled by men (18). Mary Sidney Herbert’s *The Tragedie of Antonie* is analyzed in the cultural and material context of Herbert’s Wilton estate, concluding with the image of house as tomb and the necessity of “self-annihilation” (30). A similar approach is made to examinations of Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam*, Lady Jane Cavendish’s and Elizabeth Brackley’s *The Concealed Fancies*, and Margaret Cavendish’s *Plays*, investigations revealing further how the dramas were used by their authors to imagine the possibility of a home created and managed by women.

“Gardens,” the second chapter, leads readers into the world of the pastoral by examining the spaces and freedoms of gardens, heterotopic places resembling the living art form of the theater that offered women opportunities to participate in green worlds. Female-authored entertainments for Elizabeth I, such as Lady Jane Lumley’s translation of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, are discussed. Also included here are investigations into Lady Mary Wroth’s *Love’s Victory* and the venue of Penshurst, Rachel Fane’s entertainments and the house of Apethorpe, and Lady Jane Cavendish’s and Lady Elizabeth Brackley’s *Pastoral* and the fountain garden at Bolsover Castle.

The third chapter, “Courts,” presents the mercurial world of the court and the elaborate masques designed for Mary Queen of Scots, Elizabeth I, and Anna of Denmark. Especially interesting is Findlay’s discussion of *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, a masque performed at Hampton Court. Anna requested the performers utilize the clothes of Elizabeth I as a means to invest herself with the authority once held by Elizabeth. Also illuminating is the section “Framing Beauty and Planting Voices: Henrietta Maria’s Court Drama,” which incorporates an analysis of English versions of French scripts as well as English texts that “struggle against the confinement of the mirror or picture frame” and embrace “the spectacular possibilities of court theatre” (133).
Chapter 4, “Sororities,” focuses upon sororal chronotopes by discussing the communities of convents and academies that provided women utopian worlds. Examination of liturgical chronotopes produced by nuns and priests at Wilton and Barking Abbeys is followed by a study of Antonia Pulci’s *Play of Saint Domitilla* and *Play of Saint Guglielma*, a move that accounts for the religious displacement taking place in England in the period. The sororal tradition in women’s drama is shown to reemerge in England in secularized form with the performance of *Cupid’s Banishment* and to persist with the production of plays by Margaret Cavendish, including *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*.

In the final chapter of *Playing Spaces*, “Cities,” women’s drama meets city stages. Findlay examines the ways that women playwrights and actors interrogate traditional contrasting attitudes toward the city—the masculine *polis* and the feminine, “mysterious city, full of secret passageways and unexpected openings” (182). Women’s drama, especially post-Restoration theatre, is shown to take new risks as it questions and seeks to reform boundaries between the city and court, the city and town, and the public and private realms. In these spaces women playwrights and actors “change the way female identity is constituted” (183). As with the discussions in earlier chapters, numerous plays are surveyed. Here, analyses of Elizabeth Polwhele’s *The Frolicks*, Susannah Centlivre’s *The Basset-Table*, and Aphra Behn’s *The Rover* and *Sir Patient Fancy* are especially noteworthy.

*Playing Spaces in Early Modern Women’s Drama* is a remarkable study for its depth, density, and range. The treatments of arguments about the spaces of composition and performance that are made by Findlay are sophisticated and complex. This book provides highly stimulating and rewarding reading for students and scholars of women’s drama.


Somewhere between old-style bibliographical studies that focus on the physicality of the printed book and post-modern inquires into material culture lies a new balanced, sophisticated class of research that looks into what