

Julie Sanders. *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama, 1620–1650*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. xii + 242 pp. \$90. ISBN: 978–1–107–00334–7.

That drama has been central to the recent spatial turn in early modern studies is not surprising — it could be said to be the preeminent spatial art of the age — but what marks the contribution of Julie Sanders’s new book, *The Cultural Geography of Early Modern Drama, 1620–1650*, is its expansiveness (both geographical and intellectual), its embrace of diverse dramatic forms, and its archival depth. The book’s first chapter starts in London, but Sanders doesn’t stay there for long: while many of the plays explored here were first performed in England’s capital, Sanders’s selection includes drama that engages in the political landscapes of Gloucester (Milton’s *Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*) and Nottingham (Jonson’s *The Sad Shepherd* and Brome’s *A Jovial Crew*), thus acknowledging and contributing towards recent scholarship on regional drama in early modern England. Even the book’s engagement with London drama avoids reducing the city to a monolithic totality, a tendency in much London-centric criticism and theater history, by focusing on neighborhoods such as the Strand and Covent Garden and on the networks connecting the city and the rest of the country. Sanders’s definition of drama is refreshingly broad too: in addition to professional playhouse drama by Jonson, Brome, Shirley, Nabbes, Heywood, and Massinger (most selections are lesser-known works), we find household theater, school drama, “site specific” entertainments, and “running” masques. Moreover, Sanders embraces the inherent and self-conscious theatricality of other spatial arts: architecture, landscape gardening, estate management, urban planning, even ship design are among the sites of inquiry.

In keeping with these expansive and interdisciplinary engagements, Sanders moves chapter by chapter through different kinds of space, tracing out the country at large. The first chapter follows the Thames and the Trent Rivers to show how both are articulated and employed in the playhouse and in mayoral pageants. The second camps in woodlands, placing the imagined “green spaces” of drama in the context of their real-world counterparts and examining the geopolitics of forest habitation and labor, in marked contrast to much prior criticism which has often regarded them simply as places of escape and exile. A chapter on households reinvestigates our understanding of aristocratic estates like Wentworth, Bolsover, and Knowsley, recasting them as places of “site specific performance,” both in terms of actual performances and in terms of how their design was experienced

“performatively.” A similarly impressive chapter on mobility links together vagrancy, leisurely “urbane walking,” and coach travel through Jonson’s *The New Inn*, Brome’s *The Sparagus Garden*, and others. The last two chapters take us back to London, exploring neighborhoods marked by certain urban practices and occupations — in particular, medicine — and by recent developments in urban planning and the construction of new, fashionable districts in the Caroline era.

The effect of these movements can be giddy. Although written in accessible prose, this is not a book to skip through lightly, not least because Sanders returns to plays (in particular Brome’s and Jonson’s) in multiple chapters. This ebb-and-flow structure befits Sanders’s investment in flow theory, which understands “sites [as] mutable, porous, and covered in flows” (12) rather than as discrete: by enacting this theory the book charts and re-charts associations and underlying structures, so as to generate a rich sense of England’s shifting cultural and social landscapes (and waterscapes) in the years leading up to the Civil War. Perhaps Sanders might have engaged more explicitly with the Personal Rule, which ghosts its way through most of the chapters without reaching full apparition. Perhaps, however, this is appropriate for a book that encourages its readers to adhere to “the potential of cultural geography as a series of ideas and practices to unlock early modern understandings of space, place, and landscape in productive and challenging ways and to reaffirm the agency and cultural centrality of drama as a social and aesthetic form in the process” (17). In addition to her acknowledgement of critics and theorists who have come before, Sanders generously opens up new avenues-paths-waterways for future enquiry. One can imagine a raft of scholarship that will draw on her insights and apply them elsewhere.

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