Richard Cave, Elizabeth Schafer, and Brian Woolland, eds. *Ben Jonson and Theatre: Performance, Practice, and Theory*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Pp. xiv, 223.

Richard Cave, author of an exceptionally lively introduction to Ben Jonson published a decade ago, now returns with several colleagues to offer the first book-length consideration of Jonson's current theatrical potential. Performance histories have been published before, but no book prior to this one has attempted to explore the possibilities of Jonson's living presence on the stage today. We can only hope that the work of Cave and his co-authors will lead to more frequent and varied stagings of Jonson's plays and to fuller appreciation of his works as pieces of theatre.

The present volume, inspired by a conference at Reading University in January 1996, offers an eclectic mixture of short papers, longer articles, brief inductions and interludes, and substantive interviews, so that some of the energy of the original event is conveyed by the text itself. The volume opens with a traditional academic essay by Andrew Gurr, who explores the relevance of the Blackfriars setting of *The Alchemist* and offers the somewhat startling suggestion that the character of Lovewit may have been based on a colleague of Jonson's named William Shakespeare. Gurr's argument is, of course, necessarily speculative, but it is buttressed by strong evidence elsewhere of Jonson's interest in Shakespeare as both an artist and a man.

Meanwhile, Richard Cave opens the heart of the book with a series of chapters on such matters as "script and performance," "visualizing Jonson's text," "designing for Jonson's plays," "directing Jonson," and "acting in Jonson's plays." The last-named section consists of a conversation with John Nettles and Simon Russell-Beale. During the course of these sections Cave comments on the practical usefulness of Jonson's stage directions; on the theatrical significance of the complex typographical layout of the original printings; and on the subtle theatrical clues embedded in the text of *The Alchemist*. Cave also discusses Jonson's use of the physical aspects of his contemporary stage; the ways such stagings affect our responses to particular plays; the ways Jonson uses the sheer size of the stage; how he dealt with dramatic transformations; and the relevance of dramatic staging to thematic "meaning." Here as in Cave's earlier book, one senses a scholar with a real appreciation of Jonson as a living (or potentially living) force.

Cave also discusses the history of recent productions of Jonson, arguing that the most successful stagings have been those with a clear focus, uncluttered designs, and the maximum amount of contact between actors and audience. Matthew Warchus's productions are particularly praised, and one can easily imagine how reading this book would benefit future directors, actors, and designers, especially since the publishers have generously included a large number of helpful photographs.

Brian Woolland's contributions have, if anything, a more immediately theatrical feel to them even than Cave's, especially in their chatty tone, improvisational

formats, and experiential observations. Mick Jardine, on the other hand, offers a more theoretical (but nonetheless thankfully clear) overview of the stereotypical contrasts between Jonson and Shakespeare, and suggests how the contrastive pairing of the two authors has worked to the former's disadvantage. Jardine has much of interest to say about how Jonson's image has been "constructed" in certain negative ways and how we might escape from such constricting constructions, although he tends to beg the question of why Jonson was originally "constructed" in one fashion and Shakespeare in another. (Perhaps social responses are not, after all, merely matters of social construction or ideological convention.)

One real strength of this book is the sense it conveys of genuine give-and-take, of dialogue, even disagreement, among its contributors. A reader no sooner finishes one piece than he finds another author explicitly questioning a point or points just previously made. This "dialogical" approach not only reflects, but also genuinely stimulates, divergent responses and thoughts. Even more diversity is produced by the final section of the volume, which focuses on "Marginalised Jonsons," including such topics as women actors and directors, female characters and audience members, Australian productions of the plays, and even stagings by disabled actors. This is, in short, a book which cannot be easily pinned down or pigeon-holed, and which is all the more provocative as a result. It should appeal strongly to actors, directors, and theatre-goers, as well as to students and teachers of dramatic production, and with luck it will help contribute to a renaissance of Jonsonian stagings.

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Catherine Gimelli Martin. *The Ruins of Allegory: Paradise Lost and the Metamorphosis of Epic Convention*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998. Pp. xiii, 385.

The title of Catherine Gimelli Martin's book can be mildly surprising. *Paradise Lost* is not allegorically written as Spenser's and Dante's poems are. Nevertheless, it can be allegorically read, and the reading can be particularly instructive if we treat the poem not as "normative" allegory, but as an allegory emerging from the twilight zone of the baroque.

"Baroque" is a term which Martin tends to invoke rather than to analyze. It has been associated with an excess testifying to an endeavour of the mind which is compulsively called for yet impossible to execute. "Imperious impulse held all together," as Yeats puts it, after Unity of Being fell apart. An allegory held together by a will to order which anxiety makes imperious recalls the haunting of allegory by violence with which Gordon Teskey's book has made us familiar. Such an allegory will be disruptive in proportion to its integrative zeal. It will ruin itself in articulating itself.