Richard Cave, Elizabeth Schafer, and Brian Woolland, eds.
Ben Jonson and the Theatre: Performance, Practice and Theory
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Although arising out of a conference at University of Reading organized by Cave and Woolland in 1996, this book is "not, however, to be viewed as the proceedings of the conference" (p. xiii). Cave, Schafer, and Woolland give themselves 5, 3, and 4 chapters respectively, leaving just 3 for delegates' papers. Luckily, amongst this other 3 is Andrew Gurr's study of the character Lovewit in Jonson's The Alchemist who disrupts the 'venture tripartite' of Face, Subtle, and Doll, and draws their gains to himself. The 'venture tripartite' of Cave, Schafer, and Woolland has levelled the score with this book. Gurr's identification of Lovewit as an in-joke at Shakespeare's expense is plausible, witty, and meticulously argued. Mick Jardine's essay "Shakespeare's Other" considers the Shakespeare/Jonson binary and argues that it reduces the latter to (as Lacan would say) an 'other', or (colloquially) a stalking horse. On women and Jonson, Julie Sanders shows how The New Inn, like Jonson's earlier work, explores the causes and effects of patriarchy's silencing of women, and the theatre's complicity in it. These 3 essays would suit advanced undergraduate or postgraduate students of the drama, and their educators, but the rest of the book is ill-focussed. A number of eloquent theatre practitioners are interviewed about their experiences with Jonson but only Sam Mendes is allowed to speak for himself, the rest being merely quoted in essays by the book's editors. The book cover displays Oscar winner Geoffrey Rush and names him, together with Joan Littlewood, John Nettles, and Simon Russell-Beale as contributors, but the index discloses their input: end-to-end their reported comments would occupy fewer than 10 pages.

Gabriel Egan