

of English Renaissance contexts... [T]he *placement* of these epitaphs matters and is almost invariably significant" (169).

In sum, to echo the voice of epitaph, "Here lies" a grave text, for it intelligently and imaginatively retextualizes the early modern period's memorialization of death. Pause a while, gentle reader, and examine it.

Richard Dutton. *Ben Jonson, Volpone, and the Gunpowder Plot*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xiii + 179 pp. 19 illus. Review by ROBERT C. EVANS, AUBURN UNIVERSITY MONTGOMERY.

Richard Dutton's new book on Ben Jonson's *Volpone* instantly becomes one of the very first volumes that any serious student of the play must immediately consult. Dutton's long and extraordinarily productive career as a scholar of Jonson (and indeed of much else) makes this much-anticipated book especially important, particularly since he is writing about one of the most significant non-Shakespearean plays of the period. As Dutton himself notes early in the volume, *Volpone* "has, to the best of my knowledge, been included in every anthology of English Renaissance drama ever compiled" (1). Effective both on the page and on the stage, the play deserves the kind of close, probing attention Dutton gives it in this book, which is the product of many years of thought and research.

Dutton's basic argument is that Jonson's play reflects directly (if obliquely) on the events of the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, and that in particular the playwright seems to have taken subtle but satiric aim at the role of Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury and James I's chief minister, in that nearly explosive affair. Dutton gives special emphasis to the 1607 printing of the play and particularly to the prefatory matter to that edition—matter which is, indeed, completely reprinted in photographic reproduction in this book. Dutton shows that Cecil was widely disliked, particularly by Catholics (of whom Jonson was one), and he patiently builds his case that the play was probably meant to be taken (and certainly *could* have been taken) as theatrical mockery of Cecil. He shows why Jonson may have had various reasons, in addition to religious ones, to satirize such a powerful and influential man—a man, indeed, who often figured as one of Jonson's own patrons. Indeed,

Dutton even makes the intriguing argument that Cecil “had a track record of not deigning to respond to the great majority of personal abuse that he inevitably attracted” (9). In 1606 (Dutton suggests), Cecil and Jonson both needed each other to one degree or another, and so Jonson may have been able to get away with mocking such an undeniably powerful figure.

One of the most useful sections of Dutton’s book is its opening chapter, “Jonson’s life and the Epistle to *Volpone*,” which quickly and clearly lays out the relevant biographical background. In this chapter and elsewhere, Dutton demonstrates his wide and careful reading of previous scholarship and also explains where, why, and how he either agrees or disagrees with others’ conclusions. Here and throughout the book his tone is both judicious and generous, with often a touch of humor (as when he says of Jonson’s drama *Poetaster* that the “play has uncomplimentary things to say about lawyers, soldiers, and actors, as well as transparent lampoons of Marston and Dekker, so people were probably lining up to complain”). One is never at a loss to understand, in this book, why Dutton thinks as he does, nor is his prose style anything less than lucid. This is historical scholarship, and scholarly writing, the way they should be done.

Dutton always makes strong circumstantial cases to support his suggestions, as when he discusses the probable period of the composition of *Volpone* and how that composition may have been affected by current events and by contemporary texts, including one important text by Cecil himself. Particularly interesting is his discussion of the fact that passages from a letter Jonson wrote to Cecil “reappear verbatim in the Epistle to *Volpone*” (27). Meanwhile, his patient decoding of the commendatory poems that preface the play is typical of his painstaking methods of interpretation. Not only readers of Jonson will profit from consulting this book, so will readers of Donne, author of one of those commendatory poems; indeed, Dutton shows himself quite familiar with recent (and sometimes neglected) scholarship on any subject he touches. Inevitably, many of Dutton’s arguments must be highly speculative, given the nature of the surviving evidence, but his speculations never seem irresponsible.

One of the most interesting sections of the volume, for instance, concern Dutton’s suggestion that Sir Politic Would-be in the play is

modeled, at least in part, on the famous diplomat Sir Henry Wotton. As usual, Dutton makes his case with care, assembling all the relevant evidence and responding to any actual or potential objections. Meanwhile, the chapter on *Volpone* as a beast fable will interest even readers skeptical of topical interpretations of the play. As usual, Dutton concludes this chapter of the book with a clear summary of his arguments as well as an open acknowledgment of the difficulties those arguments present. This is his method throughout the book: he never simply takes his claims for granted. Indeed, whether or not one ultimately finds his arguments about the topical satire of the play convincing, the book is still worth reading for the many insights it provides about Jonson's life, his cultural circumstances, and his relations with other people, as in Dutton's discussion of Jonson's relations with John Florio. In the course of making his case, Dutton comments on practically every play by Jonson that preceded *Volpone*, and he also pays special attention to another play (*Catiline*) that was written later.

Dutton believes that *Volpone* reflects Jonson's distaste for what he probably perceived as "Cecil's exploitation of English society, undermining the law, alienating fathers and sons, and coming between husbands and wives, in (as it might be seen) the remorseless pursuit of his own wealth and gratification" (110). He argues that "the shady basis of *Volpone*'s position as a 'magnifico' chimes with the doubts contemporaries harboured about the authenticity" of Cecil's status as an aristocrat (113). Likewise, Dutton reports that contemporary "gossip credited" Cecil, like *Volpone* "with a voracious sexual appetite" (117). Dutton finds evidence for linking the religious elements of the play with Cecil's own religious positions (127), and he also finds evidence to suggest that Cecil's status as Jonson's patron may have affected the drama, as "Mosca's presence alongside *Volpone* for so much of the play serves to heap humiliation upon humiliation upon the grand and usually complacent patron" (132).

In a typically measured conclusion, Dutton concedes that he has "no smoking gun which convicts Jonson of writing an anti-Cecil play in *Volpone*, and specifically of doing so in response to what he judged to be Cecil's role in the Gunpowder Plot.... There is no narrative parallel to be deciphered, and where characters seem to cry out to be identified—as Sir Pol does, or even *Volpone* himself—the issue

turns out to be more complex and multifaceted than we might have wished” (133). Nevertheless, Dutton brings as much of the available evidence for his case together as is presently possible to assemble, and he makes as much of that evidence as the data will allow. Other scholars have already begun to weigh in with arguments and counter-arguments of their own, and so Dutton’s book has already begun to serve its primary and most important purpose: directing us back to the play, back to the archives, back to the available data so that we can consider and test the plausible—if unproven and perhaps unprovable—claims made in a volume that is the characteristic product of a very fine scholar.

Michael J. Redmond. *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage*. Farnham, Surrey, UK and Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2009. x + 242pp. \$99.95. Review by HUGH F. WILSON, GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY.

In “Of Studies,” Lord Bacon remarks that some books are to be tasted, some books devoured whole, and some books need to be digested more slowly; this one takes time for digestion. *Shakespeare, Politics, and Italy: Intertextuality on the Jacobean Stage* does not so much “conclude,” as end—abruptly—on an apparent sarcasm. Having re-read his study, I have come to understand Professor Redmond’s ideas much better now. The five chapters offer thoughtful discussions of three of Shakespeare’s plays—*Measure for Measure*, *The Tempest*, and *Cymbeline*—with a few incidental references to several others, but this is, from my perspective, a rather cynical book. At one level, the entire discussion takes place within the context of debates over Italy and proper English identity; at another level, this book seems to make very disturbing, very worldly claims about politics as such. I am not disturbed by the perennial cynical claims per se—I am surprised that they seemed to be given credence. Within the several competing discourses of national identity, Redmond argues that Italy (or sometimes ancient Rome) often serves as an equivocal touchstone for Jacobean drama.

Despite the first word of the title of this study, other Jacobean plays and playwrights, essayists and political writers often relegate