

Chapter 11, "Four-Part Fugue," deploys a number of theoretical "gaps" (labelled Ingarden's, Iser's, Derrida's, and the White Gap) to show again how various indeterminate and undecidable elements of sonnet sequences incite further activity on the part of the reader. One of the curious effects of this chapter is that the more Kuin urges the unique status of sonnet sequences as "open works" in which the reader is an essential co-creator of meaning, the less generalizable this readerly engagement becomes to other early modern texts, even though that is the challenge I take him to be holding out in the final chapter, "Encore."

I am not sure, finally, that *Chamber Music* offers very much that could be called new knowledge about or a new interpretation of the three primary sonnet sequences, but that is not Kuin's primary goal. The real accomplishments of this study are two. The first lies in showing how modern semiotic and hermeneutic methods can be used to theorize a form that has proved so difficult to define and characterize. What Kuin consistently demonstrates is that the sonnet sequence is a poetic form uniquely suited to both the intellectual rigors and the mental gymnastics of modern critical theory. The second accomplishment is freeing the study of this genre from the constraining discourse of traditional critical practice (what Kuin calls "Neo-German Expository") and recalling us to the usefulness *and* the pleasures that attend the interpenetration of theory and practice, one text and another, one voice and another. Even where this *process* of critical reading doesn't quite work—and for me this is in Chapters 6, 8, and 11—the issues it allows Kuin to take up are central and serious to any full appreciation of the Elizabethan texts in question. Where it does work—in Chapters 3, 4, 5, 9, and 10—Kuin's study is challenging, provocative, and great fun. It should remind us that effective criticism, like great literature, aims to instruct, delight, and move us.

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**99.50** Martin, Catherine Gimelli. *The Ruins of Allegory*. Durham: Duke UP, 1998. 385 pp. ISBN 0-8223-1980-2. \$69.95 cloth; ISBN 0-8223-1989-6. \$23.95 paper.

Catherine Gimelli Martin has written a study of *Paradise Lost* as a moment in intellectual history, a poem reassessing the grounds of knowledge amidst the upheavals of Descartes' century. Her Milton writes as the new science is sweeping away an old order of cosmic hierarchy and ritual sanction. This threshold, as Angus Fletcher might say, is a propitious site for prophecy, and Martin credits her poet with an especially long view. She not only compares him to his philosophical contemporaries (especially Descartes and Pascal), but probes his affinities with twentieth century theorists of what she broadly defines as "uncertainty," from Wittgenstein to Gödel and Heisenberg. The epic "proleptically foreshadows the mysterious dynamism inherent in uncertainty itself, a potential that seemed to be foreclosed both by Cartesian thought and by the more 'certain' allegorical tradition then drawing to a close" (7). Allegory, then, is the backdrop to this prophecy of postmodernity;

but she is also concerned to describe how Milton transforms, rather than simply abandoning, Spenser's mode in defining the poetics of *Paradise Lost*.

Martin's account of Miltonic allegory faces two challenges: Coleridge's influential praise of Milton's turn from allegory to symbol, and the emphasis in recent criticism on the monism of *Paradise Lost*, which would seem to defy allegorical polyvalence. In making her answer she turns to Walter Benjamin's concept of baroque allegory from *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Benjamin treats the allegories of the seventeenth century as partial survivals, no longer either comprehensive or quite believed in; "Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things" (45). Martin locates these ruins primarily in Milton's hierarchical cosmography and epic machinery. They are not ruins so much because they are broken as because they are challenged or qualified by other developments in the poem: the universe redescribed by Galileo, Satanic and then human self-making, and the evolving terms of domestic relations in Eden. Milton's monism and vitalism argue that the old orders in fact rest on a substratum of chaos, and among Martin's most interesting claims is that his baroque allegory is turned upside down. Instead of pointing up to the top of the ladder of being, *Paradise Lost* derives energy and authority from an inspirited matter fundamental to all things and governed by a generative indeterminacy (here she draws on recent writing about Milton's chaos by Rumrich and others). In privileging such uncertainty in time over eternal order, Martin follows Benjamin by describing a kind of allegory that deserts myth for history.

The book has seven chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion, arranged to reflect *Paradise Lost*'s "descending structure and the ways in which it inverts the traditional allegorical ascent" (28). It moves from questions of cosmological order down to the bower of our first parents. Along the way Martin poses questions about the relation between magical and naturalistic causality (Chapter 4) and allegory and history (Chapter 7) that will be of particular interest to students of allegory. Her range of reference is wide, and takes in not only a number of twentieth century literary theorists and philosophers, but authorities in the fields of physics and mathematics as well. The highly generalized notion of indeterminacy that this syncretism creates may be the book's greatest weakness. To call Milton a prophet of intellectual developments from ordinary language philosophy to chaos theory is not always helpful in explaining either side of the equation. There is also some danger to the proclamation that Milton grasps the postmodern credo, "contradiction, not consistency, seems to lie at the basis of human systems of thought" (324). Milton's chronic self-contradiction cannot always be resolved into a philosophical position; it must remain a thorny problem for rhetorical and psychological criticism as well.

Spenserians who take up this book *qua* Spenserians will have two principal interests here: its contributions to the theory of allegory and its treatment of *FQ*. Among recent theorists of the mode Martin relies primarily on Fletcher and Gordon Teskey. One of her

services to early modernists is to bring Benjamin back within reach of the sixteenth century, and she develops out of his work a useful notion of meta-allegory: the ruined allegory which, no longer dominant, comes to stand both for itself and for its lost authority. Her thoughts about the orientation of allegory in a vitalist context are also provocative, and her meditation on ruins might open interesting avenues in recent discussions about allegory and iconoclasm. There are many other stimulating ideas in a book that is nothing if not intellectually well-traveled. It must be said, however, that they are often locked in a relentlessly demanding style. The diction does not discriminate between striking insights and familiar ones: the reader has to work equally hard for both. This difficulty is likely to hamper the reception of the book's best ideas.

The treatment of Spenser's poetry is glancing and in another context would hardly merit mention. It does, however, make for a cautionary tale about the sort of epistemic criticism Martin has assayed. Arguments for sweeping historical change often flatten the background from which the innovations they cherish must emerge. Spenser, with Dante and Augustine, ends up standing for the "mystically 'numinous' mode" (30) of old-style allegory. Martin takes it for granted, for example, that the Garden of Adonis is "conceived in terms of an Augustinian theology" (51) and that Redcrosse receives a ritually effective "symbolic purification" (67) in the House of Holiness. Fair enough as far as it goes, but there is no acknowledgment of the myriad ways in which *FQ*'s allegory questions itself and the cultivation of its own meta-allegorical practice. Spenser is treated as a true believer for maximum contrast with the revolutionary Milton. If Spenser—a better teacher than Scotus and Aquinas, in Milton's own words—had only this lesson to convey, it seems unlikely that his student could have written the poem that Martin describes.

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**99.51** McEachern, Claire. *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612*. Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 13. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. xii + 239 pp. ISBN 0-521-57031-X. \$57.95.

The ambitious claim of this slim though densely argued book, in Claire McEachern's own words, is that

English nationhood is a sixteenth-century phenomenon, and not, contrary to the claims of many political theorists and historians, a nineteenth-century one. Further, this nation is founded in and by the religious culture and ideology of Elizabethan England. . . . The Tudor-Sutart nation . . . is a performative ideal of social unity founded in the ideological affiliation of crown, church, and land, imagined not in opposition to state power, but rather as a projection of the state's own ideality. [It] is not a "proto"