
In this stimulatingly erudite work Professor Cope explores the epistemological foundations of Renaissance drama by analysing chiefly English, but also Italian and Spanish plays, and he does so by tracing the influence of Florentine Neoplatonic thought about the dual metaphors of life as a dream and the world as a theater on "Renaissance criticism and practice of the drama" (p. 13). Cope's speculations start with the perceptions of Ortega y Gasset and Antonin Artaud, who postulated an ideal theater "of highly formalized spaces self-consciously aware of its own theatricality, and engulfing the spectator until he is aware that he stands both before and behind the mirror which the theater holds up to the *theatrum mundi*" (p. 11). This ideal theater is also "the dramatist's objective correlative to a deeply subjective dream world" (ib.), and is itself the outcome of responses to the Renaissance drama and, implicitly, an extension of Florentine concern with dream reality and drama.

Cope begins his substantive argument by pointing to the interest in perspective and contemplation in the writings of Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino. Subsequently Cope outlines the dispute between Francesco Buonamici and Lodovico Castelvetro over illusionism. Castelvetro had insisted that drama should aspire to verisimilitude, while Buonamici rejected this view and held that in the transactional relation among audience, actor and play there were raised epistemological problems which could not be settled by assuming that in the act of watching a play there was the separation of the knower from the known. Rather the play is known through participation which is the basis of self-reflective theater and as such is related to dreams whereby one penetrates reality. In Ficinian thought, dreams, for those who can transcend the body, are means of divine inspiration, an access to truth. Issues raised in this dispute had affinity with other sixteenth-century debates which raged over Dante's *Divine Comedy* and centred in the question, was the dream-poem a legitimate form? Professor Cope leads us expertly through these Florentine debates in preparation for his readings of individual plays. In view of the large number of plays he refers to, my remarks, limited to a selection of the English plays, are necessarily selective.

The first writer he considers is George Chapman, who was immersed in Ficino's philosophy, and who had some knowledge of Italian drama. The discussion of *The Gentleman Usher*, a careful *explication de texte*, illuminates much in this play, such as the relation between the masque and anti-masque and the central significance of
the several dreams. Most rewarding, however, is his discussion of the role of Strozza who, after he is wounded, must learn to suffer with patience until he is translated “to a state of divine vision and prophecy” (p. 46). Cope convincingly argues that Strozza is conceived by Chapman as a Platonic Hercules who reflects Ficino’s association of “transcendent rapture with suffering” (p. 43), and this view seems to me more persuasive than the generally held one that Strozza is an embodiment of Christian Stoicism.

Less rewarding is the discussion of The Widow’s Tears. Cope rightly stresses that it is about the “destructive search for certainty” (p. 56), and later makes many perceptive observations, notably on the self-consciously theatrical nature of the Governor’s scene. But I remain unconvinced that in the end Tharsalio “reveals himself as master and chief victim of a hell of his invention” (p. 73). One of the problems with Chapman is his eclecticism and it is dangerous to try to force all his works into a Neoplatonic mold, and, when treating the story of the Widow of Ephesus one should, perhaps, be alert to an aspect of Renaissance thought more neglected than even that of Florentine Neoplatonism: Renaissance naturalism. If there is any sense of hell in The Widow’s Tears it arises because people look for certainly in romanticised notions about human behaviour. Tharsalio appears more as a naturalist, even if not as that other kind of Florentine, a Machiavel who sees things as they are.

Exclusive preoccupation with one strand in the complexity of a play can lead to distorted readings. This seems the case when Cope avers that The Tempest reveals a “vision of the Fortunate Fall as man’s quintessential destiny” (p. 242). This is too optimistic a claim for the play and ignores the irony which arises out of the cumulation of events. Nor does Cope allow sufficiently for the melancholic tone in Prospero’s great speech beginning “Our revels now are ended”. It may imply that “man is a dreamer and life is death” (p. 240) and that our awakening must be into the life after death; but by self-reference to the illusory nature of art and life, the speech forces awareness that life is all that is offered to man to know himself. Self-reference generates thought about the nature of art as well as about the complexity of human behaviour, about the knowledge of one’s self. In its paradoxes The Tempest begins a continual debate on the irony inherent in trying to come to a vision certain of the world and of human happiness.

Paradoxical wit also lies behind the theatrical self-consciousness of Henry Medwall’s Fulgens and Lucrece which learnedly extends practices already inherent in the native tradition of English drama. The transitions of A and B from being members of the audience to actors in the play have an antecedent in Mankind where entry of the vices from the audience establishes an ambiguous relationship between actor and audience. In Medwall’s learned hands transition of role is designed to entertain with a witty exploration of what is real and what is illusory. Fulgens and Lucrece, as Professor Cope says in his enlightening reading of the play, is “a play about the origin of a play” (p. 101) which “argues the power of illusion” (p. 105); yet it is not illusory and herein is the paradox of Medwall’s play.

It is also paradox which informs the theatrical self-consciousness of the anonymous Jack Juggler. In an excellent and perceptive analysis of this unjustly neglected play Cope has done dramatic studies a great service in showing that the nothing of the play is in fact a “metaphoric vehicle for a tenor which may be defined as theo-
logical, epistemological, or ontological” (pp. 110-111). Careaway’s loss of name and hence of his identity, a loss on which the comedy is sustained, points firmly to the paradoxical relation between the subjective self and the externalised self or role, a relationship which is central to the nature of play and drama itself.

Paradoxical wit in the Renaissance was for the learned (perhaps even school boys) or aristocratic coterie who responded also to the mysteries of Neo-Platonism. In England as much as in Italy it was such an audience which perceived the meaning beyond the immediate mimesis. This was especially true in the masque and it is therefore disappointing that Cope could give so little attention (pp. 111-120) to this form which he (I think rightly) sees as an extension of the “hall” drama which we have in Fulgens and Jack Juggler, but brought in the Stuart Court almost to perfection by Inigo Jones and Ben Jonson. The latter held the masque to be “the mirror of man’s life” as well as “remov’d mysteries”; and it is in the Jonsonian masque more clearly than in plays for the public theater that we have the fullest realisation of Cope’s contention that the drama is made permanent “in and through the imaginative growth of the spectator, who shares the creative act” (p. 116). While Jonson emphasised the poetic function of the masque and of its mysteries, I am not so sure that Jones did not in fact hold similar views, despite his remarks that they were “nothing else but pictures with Light and Motion”. He was, after all, influenced by the great Dr. John Dee whose preface to Billingsley’s translation of Euclid’s The Elements of Geometrie (1570) was an influential, and even popular, source of some Neo-Platonic ideas. I suspect Jones and Jonson were not as far apart as their quarrel might suggest.

One may have reservations about how far writers for a less learned audience than the Court were attracted to Neo-Platonic aesthetics. Yet plays not apparently in this tradition take on new illumination when set against it. This is particularly so of Cope’s excellent reading of Beaumont’s The Knight of the Burning Pestle, which is usually taken to be “a delightful parody of domesticated romantic comedy” (The Revels History of English Drama, III, 303) or a satire on citizen values. Cope convincingly brings out meanings that transcend these views and shows that its seeming lack of structure is a mirror of social incoherence which must be exorcised in search of renewal, and that the play has its origins and mythic power in the festive comedy of “rites of renewal” (p. 210). Likewise, Cope’s observation that Brome’s The Jovial Crew is centred in generation, generations and regeneration (p. 164) should provide a stimulus for further evaluation of this work.

Nevertheless, when all is considered, participation in the illuminatory, mythopoetic dream-quality of drama, in the fluidity of anti-form (all, I take it, aspects of the ‘ideal’ theatre), paradoxically demands that there be a prior “self-contained structure” (p. 2) which Cope would reject. His own fine readings depend on the priority of that structure. There is, moreover, one curious feature about The Theater and the Dream. Although it is subtitled “From metaphor to form in Renaissance drama”, and the book is offered as “a critical history of dramatic form in the Renaissance” (p. 13), I am left with the belief that behind Professor Cope’s searches is actually another and perhaps more important, even Herculean, endeavour: to articulate a coherent theory of the comic in Renaissance drama.

There is variation in Cope’s responses to many plays: he can at times be cranky (Ford’s Perkin Warbeck), provocative (A Midsummer Night’s Dream) and informative
(Grazzini’s *La strega*). Yet, whatever his stance, by his mozaic of juxtaposition he always emphasises the profound intellectual and philosophical foundation of Renaissance drama, and even when one disagrees with his reading, disagreement itself forces new understanding on the reader. *The Theater and the Dream* is a seminal book in Renaissance drama. Notwithstanding Professor Cope’s difficult latinate style, he enables us to transcend received paradigms of criticism.

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When a performance of *Twelfth Night* was given in the Middle Temple as a feature of the Templars’ post-Christmas festivities in 1602, it was witnessed by a law student in his twenties from Kent via Cambridge who had been keeping a casual diary and commonplace book for a year or so, and now jotted down approvingly the “good practice” of setting up Malvolio in folly, and identified Olivia, in a fascinating error, as “his Lady widdowe.”

Some months later, on Sunday June 20, the Diarist recorded the gist of a sermon at St. Paul’s by Robert Wakeman of Oxford. Wakeman’s text was Jonah 3: 4-5, and when he published this sermon a few years later, he observed that it had been interrupted by a sudden cloudburst — at precisely the point in the text where our Diarist broke off, fleeing, no doubt, an equinoctial drenching! And in March of the next year, the same recorder described in detail the final decline and death of Queen Elizabeth, as reported to him by an eyewitness, his friend the Queen’s chaplain Dr. Henry Parry. “This morning about 3 at clocke her Majestie departed from this life, mildly like a lambe, easily like a ripe apple from the tree . . .”

Who else but John Manningham, and what else but his universally-quoted but rarely-consulted *Diary*, perhaps the most valuable personal document we have from the end of the Elizabethan era? It is precisely Manningham’s ordinary, orthodox, “grass-roots” perspective that makes his observations so important: in them, we are vividly reminded (among other things) how compact and interrelated the Elizabethan establishment was, wherein a young man from the country with no special connections could know from a friend’s first-hand account how Gloriana languished and died, and could know, when it was still worth knowing, gossip about the new King, Lord Francis Bacon, Sir Walter Ralegh, the Earl of Sussex, John Donne . . . A mathematician has estimated that any individual is no more than five or six “mutual friendships” away from any other individual, anywhere in America; in the case of Manningham’s *Diary*, one gets the impression that in the world of Elizabeth’s England, the mutual friendship factor is more like two.

If the notorious John Payne Collier had not discovered the *Diary* in the British Museum and established its importance in his *Annals of the Stage* (1831), one wonders if scholars would not have been forced to invent it, as the saying goes. Indeed, one small defect in Robert P. Sorlien’s sumptuous new edition — the first complete printing of Manningham’s text — is that he does not take up and dispel for good the lingering suspicion amongst some scholars that the notorious Collier