*The Academic Drama*

Robert S. Knapp

* Tudor academic drama has become its own topic.
  + The Latin language and ordinary venues make it very different from what is typically studied as English drama.
* Academic drama holds a spot in late Tudor culture.
* By the late sixteenth century, academic drama was set apart from Kempe and Burbage.
* Academic plays were acted out on special occasions, by inexperienced actors, in the contexts where educational, ceremonial, and festive occasions all intermingled.
* The masters of grammar school were to produce Latin plays.
* The masters of the associated choir were to produce and English play.
* The Latin and English plays could be a comedy or tragedy, but they had to be acted out during the twelve days of Christmas, or after.
* The acting of out Latin, English, and sometimes, Greek plays became common practice.
  + There was a steady rise of dramatic activity during the first two-thirds of the sixteenth century.
* Participation in academic theatrical performances was not an option.
  + College authorities began expelling or fining any undergraduate students who did not participate in the performances.
* Students were forbidden from going to taverns, shows, or other places that may be seen as shameful.
* Colleges established “Christmas lords” that were responsible for the festival plays and speeches
  + This was done to keep student scholars out of trouble.
* In the sixteenth century, the development of academic drama became of international interest.
* Ralph Radcliffe was known as the more determined of the mid-century academic playwrights.
  + He established a short-lived school for theater.

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*Progresses and Court Entertainments*

R. Malcolm Smuts

**General Characteristics of Court Theater**

* By the 17th century theatrical performances included masques, the French *ballet de cour*, and the north Italian opera.
  + These performances incorporated acoustic and visual effects that surpassed ordinary plays.
* Proscenium arches were an invention of the Italian court theaters. These arches defined a boundary between the stage and the audience.
  + The proscenium in the court setting was much more permeable than in a public setting.
* The entire hall always had some light, so that the audience could remain in view with their richly dressed clothing.
* A court entertainment had 2 stages, one for the actor and one for the king.
* These performances were geared towards the ruler.
  + Often times the rules and his companions were show in a mythical way and he was always addressed from the stage as a divine source of order.
* Royalty often participated in masques.
  + An invitation to perform in a masque was an invitation the showed favor.
  + The actors had special access to royalty.
* At the end of the performances, masquers would select partners from the audience for a final dance.
* The plots of masques were much more unrealistic from traditional plays.
  + Masques were a reflection of the actual court.
    - There was no separation between reality and the theater.

**Settings and Occasions**

* Court life often spilled into the city streets.
  + Examples: coronations, royal weddings, military victories, openings of Parliament, etc.
* Royal trips and outings provided the commoners with entertainment.
  + Example: Elizabeth went to supper at the earl of Penbroke’s London home and then took a boat trip on the Thames. This event attracted thousands of people that were excited to see her.
* Inside the palace was divided into different regions and riles of access.
  + Anyone dressed as a gentleman might enter the outside precincts (service rooms, and the hall).
  + Halls lost their function in the Middle Ages, as many of the events moved to the king’s chambers.
* The king’s chambers consisted of several rooms.
  + An ornately decorated great chamber was at the top of the stairs.
  + The presence chamber was adjacent throne room.
  + From these two rooms a guard would stand by the door the led into the ruler’s private quarters, known as the privy chamber.
  + In 1603 James I created a further division by creating a separate bed chamber.
* The structure of the chambers was important. Basically, the farther away from the bedchamber an event was the more heterogeneous the event became.
* Most indoor entertainments took place in large halls that held 800-1,200 people.
* The more private performances took place in the great chamber that held around 300 people.
* Theatrical entertainments were also shaped by the occasion that they were preformed for.
  + Dramatic productions were normally for coronations, visits from foreign monarch, royal weddings.
  + Most court masques and plays took place during Christmas.
* Masques were always associated with royal hospitality and magnificence.
* There was a different set of theatrical performances that displayed military exercises and showed the monarch as leader of warriors.
  + These performances included mock battles framed by a plot and were staged by militia companies in London.
  + There were also court tournaments.
    - These tournaments would begin with disguises and knights would act out love stories dresses in fancy costumes. These stories would lead up to challenges in combat.
    - Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Prince Henry liked these tournaments since they used them to display their skills and military aspirations.
    - These tournaments were also used to show courtly love, which allowed them to be used for royal weddings and courtships.
    - Elizabeth made the romance element even more important.
      * A tradition was born of honoring her accession on November 17th by having knights from all over England approach her in costumes, deliver speeches, and give her a wooden shield which bared a picture or motto that paid homage to her.
* From an early date London guilds had produced pageants along processional routes which exemplifying moral and religious ideals that lead to a good ruler.
  + Many of the pageants for coronations dealt with Biblical stories.
* The early history of progress entertainment remains a mystery since most documents didn’t survive before 1575.

**Interpretations**

* Performances witnessed only by the court were very rare.
* On one hand, entertainments spoke very highly of the monarchy.
* On the other hand, court theater did not blatantly attack the monarchy, but did try to present advice and criticism.
* Scholars have believed that court theater was a way to voice multiple viewpoints.
* Research since the 1960’s has stated the monarchies were not absolute power entities. Instead king’s worked out negotiations to share power with royal ministers, nobles, and other powerful subjects.
* From the 1570’s forward there were more published texts of court entertainments.
  + There was a growing interest of poetry and drama.
  + The court was becoming more reliant on professional writers.
* Court theatrics have been heavily studied in the past, but there is still a good deal that is unknown about them.