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**Review of Henry S. Turner, *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts, 1580–1630***

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Henry S. Turner. *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts, 1580–1630*.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. xvi + 326 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$99. ISBN: 0–19–928738–4.

In *The English Renaissance Stage: Geometry, Poetics, and the Practical Spatial Arts*, Henry Turner argues that English stage practice emerged out of practical geometry and related mechanical arts. The book is part of a new critical attention to the interconnections between literature and science, one that depends on the recognition that art involved the creation not just of aesthetic objects but also of knowledge itself. Stage practice drew from geometry to develop the concepts of *plat-plot* and to define its use of scenes as both spatial divisions and dramatic structures. Drama also provided audiences with forms of practical knowledge and prospective intelligence that came to be associated with the mechanical arts. The concepts of geometry were developed and used by surveyors, navigators, mapmakers, engineers, builders, and, most importantly for Turner, playwrights.

The first part of the book explores how geometry became a component of poetic theory. Chapter 2 begins with a discussion of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and focuses on two of Aristotle's five modes of truthful knowing: art (*technē, ars*) and practical wisdom (*phronēsis, prudentia*). This focus signals the book's critical trajectory: it does not concern itself with the categories of *sapientia* or *scientia* that are at the heart of other projects on early modern natural philosophy. Turner explains that *technē* was understood as a form of *poiēsis* (the act of making; the object made) while *phronēsis* was a type of *praxis* (doing, acting; practices, habits).

Sixteenth-century readers of Aristotle, though, tended to collapse distinctions between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, defining art as both doing and making. This confounding of Aristotle's categories was important because it provided a means by which geometry became, as it did in the theater, a model for "solving" social questions that depended on prudential decision-making.

Chapters 3 and 4 follow the intersection of these knowledge categories by examining how Philip Sidney and George Puttenham integrate geometric knowledge into their theories of poetry. Turner situates Sidney's Aristotelianism in the *Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*, rather than in the *Poetics*. Turner notes that Sidney defines the art of poetry in productive terms that align it with saddle-making, ship-building, and carpentry, but also argues that for Sidney *poesy* constituted a form of "prudential Aristotelianism" (89). Puttenham imports the term *plat*, used in geometry tracts and surveying manuals, to describe the conceit upon which a work of poetry is built: this meaning informs Puttenham's schematic illustrations as well as his attitude toward readers. Breaking with Aristotelian distinctions between art and nature, Sidney and Puttenham understand poesy as the source of iconic models that can create knowledge.

The second half of the book examines how this larger "history of spatial thinking" becomes important to stage practice (183). Turner tracks a transition from older, emblematic modes of dramatic iconicity (allegorical, moral reference) to a newer "referential, empirical" iconicity that Turner sees drama sharing with "modern scientific inquiry" (164). The two-dimensional schematic that describes a geometric object reappears in the theater as a three-dimensional space onto which a temporal fiction can be projected. In Turner's fascinating recovery of a geometric origin to one of the most basic of stage concepts, the groundplat of geometry becomes both the platform of the stage as well as the plot enacted in the imagined place created by that theatrical space.

As the son of a bricklayer whose life reflected the successes of the practical arts in the economic and social culture of early modern England, Ben Jonson is the figure who emblemized how this understanding of geometric art was brought into the theater, and yet who ultimately most distanced himself from its implications. In the concluding chapters Turner argues that Jonson's embrace of neoclassical dramatic theory is largely a movement away from his earlier engagement with the practical arts. Of particular interest are Turner's analysis of Jonson's annotations to Vitruvius and his reading of *The Alchemist* in terms of the instrumental knowledge associated with the mechanical arts.

Turner's argument is sweeping; the scholarship and analysis that support it are of a very high caliber. *The English Renaissance Stage* impressively brings a range of scientific and philosophical resources to bear on its account of the knowledge arts of the early modern theater. Some readers may ask how necessary geometry was to the creation of the imagined spaces of the Renaissance stage. Since Sidney did not pursue his proposed studies in geometry, how significant are his evocations of geometry? Is it only Jonson's highly self-conscious stage that depends on the geometric arts? Can the theory (whether Aristotle, Vitruvius, or Robert Recorde)

make sense of an often improvisational set of practices? Turner's work ultimately suggests that when making, doing, and knowing become entangled with one another, even those who do not know geometry take part in its lessons. Perhaps the most important conclusion to be taken from this book is not the argument that early modern theater is a product of new knowledge practices, but the corollary conclusion that theater became valued as a site of knowledge production. Turner's work offers a powerful revision to how we understand early modern stage practice. At its best, *The English Renaissance Stage* allows us to see into the intellectual toolkit that created the "golden world" of Renaissance drama.

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