Chapter 7: Henry Caldwell Cook (1886-1939): Play, Performance and the Perse

Introduction

LIKE his better-known contemporaries A.S Neill of Summerhill and Susan Isaacs of the Malting House, Henry Caldwell Cook (1886-1939) is indelibly associated with one place - the Perse School in Cambridge. It was here, from 1911 to just before his untimely death, that Cook served as a teacher of both English and Drama, and where he was to develop a range of inventive and highly novel teaching methods and techniques that attracted international attention. These were described in detail in his most significant published work *The Play Way*, *an Essay in Educational Method* (1917) which combined Cook's own rich illustrated descriptions of the activities in the classroom alongside explications of his idiosyncratic teaching philosophy. Widely read and reprinted, this book was to serve as an important early twentieth-century progressive educational text and was to also act, as Manami Yoda (2012) has suggested, as a precursor to the post-World War Two Theatre in Education (TIE) movement. David Hornbrook has gone even further in claiming that Cook was the, 'first [person] to describe a comprehensive programme for what we now might recognise as drama-in-education.' (Hornbrook 1998: 7)

Cook was the son of a wealthy Liverpool merchant, and was educated at Highgate School and Lincoln College, Oxford where he obtained second-class honours in English as well as the Oxford diploma in education. Following this quite traditional education, he approached the then headmaster of the Perse School W.H.D. Rouse in search of employment. Since his appointment in 1902 Rouse had shown enthusiasm for innovation in the classroom particularly in relation to his own specialism – languages – in which he was keen to promote the *direct-method* of language learning of Wilhelm Viëtor which taught children solely via immersion in the target language. It was such novel ideas which interested Cook and – aside

from an interlude of three years beginning in 1915 when he served in the Artists' Rifles in France – he was to form part of a cohort of forward-thinking staff supported by Rouse who were keen to promote innovation and experiment. On his time at the Perse, and under the tutelage of Cook in particular, the composer Spike Hughes was to write of his 'love of England…and a supreme patience with his less imaginative pupils…which endeared him to all who worked with him and assured him a place as one of the great pedagogues of our age.' (Hughes 1946: 57) Although as this quotation suggests he therefore remained continually popular with his pupils, following Rouse's departure, Cook's methods were not to the taste of the new more conservative regime and he left in 1933 disillusioned, dependent on alcohol, and shortly to die of 'a broken heart.' (Rouse, quoted in Mitchell 1976: 166)

Whilst however his life may have been comparatively short and his written output relatively meagre, Cook can still be understood as being part of a much wider development in relation to the growth of progressive education and arts education in particular. As Peter Cunningham explains this opposition to more didactic and orthodox teaching methods had been, 'sharpened by disillusionment with world war on his own part and on the part of his readers.' (Cunningham 2004) Cook's experiences in the trenches had indeed been traumatic and the shell-shock he suffered may well have been a contributory factor in his early death. Perhaps in recognition of this, the Preface to the *Play Way* talked of the need for, 'A social revolution…after the declaration of peace on the Continent; for, even supporting some fair principle established by force of arms, it has still to be wrought into a living practice by right education…' (Cook 1917: vii-viii) This belief in the redemptive and healing power of education – prominent in Cook - was to be a theme found too in the writings of other inter-war progressives. As one noted example, the New Ideals in Education gatherings – an annual series of conferences held initially in the interwar period and including policy-makers, teachers and writers – held dear to the principle of 'work[ing] [together] upon the basis of a

common conviction that a new spirit, full of hope for the world, is stirring in education.' (New Ideals 1916: vi) Although 'they [the reformers] were often as eager to criticise each other as to condemn the traditional educationalists' (Selleck 1972: 23) much of their determination stemmed nevertheless from a conviction that, 'it was the 'old' system of education which was seen as culpable for the sorts of events currently scarring the globe.' (Howlett 2017: 472) This 'belief in the value for civilization' (Cunningham, 2004) of new types of schooling was also to be found in varying forms in other progressive works of the time including those by A.S. Neill, Susan Isaacs and Margaret McMillan.

If Cook's educational thinking can then at one level be understood as providing a critical response and commentary upon more global events there remained still an element of *insularity* and *parochialism* to his practice. All of his teaching took place within the Perse School which was (and remains) an independent fee-paying institution catering for the aspirant middle class, often children of the staff of the nearby university in Cambridge. Whilst it was hardly alone in that, and other schools within the New Education Fellowship were similarly elite in their intakes, this amenable demographic provided ideal conditions by which Cook and his colleagues could innovate in practice and encourage imaginative activity in their pupils. Tellingly, an unpublished reminiscence from a former pupil spoke of Cook as the, 'epitome of the gentleman we aspired to become' (Lacey 1996: 5) and it is therefore necessary to bear in mind this specific context when considering his thinking and the apparent willingness of the children to engage fully in his inventive schemes. Stemming from that, also significant is the contradiction within Cook which sought, on the one hand, to dynamically engage pupils in creative and experiential practice yet, on the other, betrayed a strong streak of social and intellectual conservatism. This latter factor was exemplified both through his staunch commitment to the works of Shakespeare as opposed to contemporary realist plays – 'the deeds of detectives and bushrangers, and the goings-on of bullies and fags

will not pass muster as material for drama' (Cook 1917: 271) - but, as well, through classes in folk dancing and scouting and inspired by his friend Cecil Sharp. Sharp, who has been previously discussed in Chapter Two, served as an honorary member of the Perse Players (the school's theatre group) and worked to influence Cook towards a particular form of rustic Englishness which drew heavily upon the idea of national tradition and the great outdoors.

These apparent incongruities mean therefore that Cook does not fit easily into what one could refer to broadly as the progressive tradition; personally diffident yet gregarious when in the classroom; radical in his practices yet apparently conservative in his political views; keen to advocate a particular method of teaching but reluctant to engage in wider public debates he appears as a man of contradiction. But, as the following chapter will show, when stripped of these difficulties, it is possible to once more reappraise Cook as, fundamentally, a dynamic classroom practitioner yet one who used equally his flights of fancy as the basis for articulating an important line of thinking which has proven influential in the fields of creativity and arts/drama education.

Cook's Educational Philosophy and Practices at the Perse

At its core, Cook's method, which he employed within both English and Drama classes, involved the use of the *imagination*, a quality which he saw as best developed, cultivated and refreshed through engaging young boys constantly in original creative activity and methods. In this he was not of course alone; the dominant psychologist Percy Nunn in his seminal book *Education: its Data and First Principles* was to similarly talk of the need to encourage individuality and of the growing child as being in some sense comparable to an artist when allowed to foster his imaginative faculties. In referring to the concept of play for example, Nunn was to write that, 'It is hardly extravagant to say that in the understanding of play lies the key to most of the practical problems of education, for play taken in the narrower

sense as a phenomenon belonging especially to childhood, shows the creative impulses in their clearest, most vigorous and most typical form.' (Nunn 1920: 89) Nunn was one of the key protagonists in the development of the field coming to be known as 'educational psychology', a movement which, as Adrian Wooldrich (1994) and John Howlett (2013) have signposted, was beginning to have wider impacts on both policy makers and, crucially, progressive educators. The latter group in particular were especially drawn to the concept of 'fantasy' (or 'phantasy') which, in the works of thinkers as diverse as Susan Isaacs and A.S. Neill both writing in the 1930s, represented an externalising of the latent sub-conscious of the child through activity in the classroom and elsewhere in the school.

This wider framework is important to understand and Cook himself was likewise aware of psychologically-driven experimental schools such as that of Homer Lane's Little Commonwealth in Dorset. Nevertheless, he had little time or interest for abstruse theorising or the finer points of psychological theory and what marks out his work as particularly distinctive from many of his contemporaries was his development of a practical, workable classroom method, descriptions of which form the bulk of the *Play Way*. At its heart lay the guiding principle that, 'with young boys *the method of study is quite as important as the matter studied*' (Cook 1917: 24) and this concern with *process* rather than some indistinct or esoteric end further emphasises his uniqueness. What mattered for Cook was, rather, the development of individual self-expression amongst what he termed his 'Littlemen' – a child-like word for his pupils which was characteristic of Cook's writing and betrayed his deep affection for those whom he taught. A cornerstone of this strategy was the regular 'Lectures' which were given periodically by each boy to the class in which they discussed and presented on a topic of their choosing and which included subjects as diverse as military tactics to different ways of fishing to musical instruments to foreign postage stamps. Such lectures and debates involved the whole group adopting particular roles such as timekeeper, discussant,

chairman and opposition. Within this, the teacher's role was that of passive observer and whose best practice was to simply 'Let well alone.' (Cook 1917: 108) These activities were significant in that they showed the creative potentials of the young when they were guided into researching topics of their own interest, often encouraged by impromptu discussions with their peers or the teacher. More importantly – and echoing the words of his illustrious forebear Robert Owen - they emphasized Cook's disdain for the written word and a need for children to, 'rid themselves of the classroom obsession with the tyranny of the book.' (Cook 1917: 83)

Whilst this condemnation appears clear and its meaning unambiguous, one should nevertheless be wary of viewing Cook as straightforwardly *anti*-intellectual. As we shall later see, he had a deep appreciation of 'the Canon' and Elizabethan theatre in particular and was to pass on and foster this love amongst his pupils. Rather then, we should today read such a critique as emphasising a contempt for what he viewed as the 'gigantic humbug' (Cook 1917: 55) of mainstream education and the rote and repetition ('Spoon feeding') which accompanied it. Although perhaps too simplistic a juxtaposition, few schools of the time (at these those most likely known to Cook) would have placed such a considerable emphasis upon un-fettered imaginative activity as was happening at the Perse. Even at the simplest level of architecture, there was a marked difference in the physical layout of the respective classroom spaces with many state elementary and secondary institutions reflecting in their designs an implicit philosophy that sought to, 'institutionalise[d] the separation of children from society. School was a universalised space specifically designed to hold children.' (Burke and Grosvenor 2008: 65)

In contrast, Cook was to use his own term *ilond* in reference to that space which was designated for imaginative activity and that was reserved solely for each pupil's own personal expression and experimentation. Play, after all, 'require[d] no audience.' (Cook 1917: 69)

These *ilonds* were seen as a manifestation and embodiment of the child's natural desire to be creative, to want to draw, to be expressive and dramatic and thus they corresponded with comparable instincts delineated by another key contemporary Edmond Holmes in *What Is and What Might Be* (referred to earlier in the chapter pertaining to Harriet Finlay-Johnson). To emphasise this point, various illustrations in the *Play Way* show these *ilonds* and the way in which the classroom itself was turned into a physical, tactile and experimental space with the teacher adopting the Cookian position of being present by appearing to be absent or 'an influence continuously operative, though not constantly asserted.' (Cook 1917: 31)

Nor were these *ilonds* merely physical areas in which children were given free rein to create stories, draw maps and fantasy images or write poetry; it also referred after that fashion to the *mental* spaces where these processes took place. Indeed, one of the drivers for Cook's own vibrant experimentation was the constant stimulation of this imaginative space. In referring for example to the case of poetry he was to write that, 'it is the outcome of play and not of work. You cannot produce poetry by direct instruction, but only induce it by creating the conditions by which poetry is born.' (Cook 1921: vi) Such conditions were rooted in allowing the pupil free-rein to devise their own imaginative world which was subsequently encouraged by the teacher to be extended in any direction which the child wished. In some cases, as in Cook's concept of Playtown which was another of his made-up terms for a deliberately-chosen piece of land to be worked and developed by the pupils, such fantasies became physical reality with places being recreated in sandpits with logs and earth mounds acting as the essential features of the imagined world. Even the very term *ilond* was itself suggestive of an 'island' or 'I land' which could be populated with the products of the individual imagination.

One of the other notable things about Cook's work however was that far from it being only confined to the classroom or other equivalent physical spaces, the results of his creative

endeavours were frequently collected in *chap-books*, another of his inventions designed to show-case the work of the children. Particularly significant in this regard were the pamphlet series known as the *Perse Playbooks* - six editions of which appeared between 1912 and 1921 - with each small book boasting a particular theme (play, poems, essays and the like) and a characteristically rambunctious introduction by Cook in which he sought to justify his unique approach to teaching and learning. Although it was and remains common for pupil work to be compiled and showcased by schools, these books were obviously different in that they were printed by a local publisher (Heffers of Cambridge) and sold on the open market which, as David Shayer (1972) intimates, gave added legitimacy to their contents and foregrounded the significance of the creative youthful imagination. Whilst much of the work produced by the boys - who included not just Spike Hughes but also the filmmakers Humphrey Jennings and Marius Goring as well as the critic F.R. Leavis - was highly formal in terms of metre and subject and peppered with anachronisms (O, Thou, wilt, doth) and therefore indicative of the juvenile pen it nevertheless gave credence to Cook's own belief that 'Quite seventy per cent of our secondary schoolboys…can write credible poetry, and all you have to give them is permission.' (Cook 1912: 4) Similarly with prose or play composition, alongside being keen to promote the sorts of subjects young children would find stimulating such as shipwrecks, witches, castles and general high adventure, ultimately Cook's interest was once again with the *process* of writing and how it was constitutive of a full and proper education. For him, real education, which included the shaping of the personality, 'demands freedom of expression and every opportunity for the exercise of originality.' (Cook 1912: 3) Notwithstanding that the work of the boys was clearly indicative of an emphasis upon both the classical and more 'literary' aspects of literature with little recourse to modern or Modernist thinking, the *Playbooks* remain extraordinary testimonies to the success of Cook's faith in the youthful imagination and the ways in which it could be stimulated and developed.

Such a desire to publicise and showcase the work of his activities can be found too in Cook's other great lasting achievement - the Mummery Theatre. Plans for the design of this theatrical space within the Perse School archives indicate that his original intentions had been somewhat lavish and had hoped to include a large permanent theatre alongside a number of workshops which would allow for carpentry, metal-work and a printing press. These were to be used for the building of stage sets, the design of props and costumes and the production of playscripts and programmes. One of Cook's students Christopher Parry was to later speak fulsomely of a typical Drama class as a, 'happening in which we were all involved…Some of us acted, some stage-managed; some looked after the lighting, some provided music; some coped with costumes, and one boy in each group was elected leader.' (Parry 1972: 3) Limited finances were to ultimately reduce the scale of ambition - and Cook and his students often resorted to doing the basic maintenance themselves – however a number of productions put on by the boys towards the end of Cook's tenure at the school nevertheless indicate the success of his work and brought the Perse, as shall be made clear, to a more global audience. Characteristically, and thereby emphasising the dual (and arguably contradictory) aspects of his thinking, it was frequently Shakespeare and the plays devised by the students themselves which were to be featured most regularly in these performances. In encouraging such activity, Cook has thus been seen as seminal in introducing the theatrical method into English education with the entire production of the pupils being autotelic. As with his condemnation of learning the rules of grammar without ever having engaged in story-writing, so too did he see little point in studying Drama for academic or didactic purposes. Plays were meant, ultimately, to be produced and performed and in both fields (plays and prose) a complete *immersion* in the field of creative endeavour was necessary.

The fullest understanding of Cook's approaches toward the dramatic can be best gleaned by reading a chapter in the *Play Way* entitled 'Acting Shakespeare in the classroom'.

In it he offered a pointed attack on the *status quo* as represented by his fellow professionals. One key example saw him taking to task a master at Rugby School whose teaching of Shakespeare involved an insistence on a dramatic reading of the play aloud as a class before any assigning of parts. Despite Cook's criticism betraying a desire to purposely shock his readers and therefore ultimately veering somewhat into caricature, it nevertheless served to render visible the contrast with his own approaches which were not solely methodological (although that was important) but which he saw too as a superior way toward understanding textual meaning. As he put it, '*a true feeling for art values may be expected to arise out of the trial practice of the arts*' (Cook 1917: 197-198) and this dictum he was to apply to both Shakespeare and, when permitted, the more prosaic forms of ballads and romances. In either case, meaning could best therefore be understood when a child was, literally, inside the action and *performing* the text under scrutiny. Unlike however the ideas of Finlay-Johnson (previously discussed in Chapter Five), Cook did not see such performances as a way to simply apprehend curricular material but as artistic constructions *in their own right*. Quite aside from the unintended learning that often accompanied 'playmaking' there was also a strong emphasis upon stage-craft, developing an architectural as much as a literary understanding which involved consideration of how plays of the past had been staged, with what constraints and how this aided in decoding authorial intention.

The Mummery theatre can therefore be seen as encapsulating many aspects of Cook's approach to creative learning notably a desire to encourage active experience, to give free reign to the child's imagination and to understand that process as an end in itself. However, it also brings into sharp relief another key element to his thinking notably that of the *interaction* of various forms of creativity which he saw as serving the highest educational aims of play and self-expression. This interactivity can be seen when viewing the fully working theatre with attached workshops as a kind of *Gesamtkundstwerk* which in itself was suggestive of a

total fusion of various artistic skills. Seeking to develop such a world, which could include as many pupils as possible, indicated therefore something more than just the interests of the individual child; rather, it postulated an awareness of the need to conceive of the classroom as a 'body of workers collaborating.' (Cook 1917: 37)

Although the principle of the school as a community went far back to Johann Pestalozzi and his pauper establishment at Stans and was underpinned by a belief that the habits, practices and mores of schools should mirror those of wider communities, such an idea was also becoming prevalent within more contemporary educational theory. In that respect, as it did with Harriet Finlay-Johnson, the work of the American John Dewey provides a clear point of ideological overlap with Cook and any understanding of his practices at the Perse has to be made with an acknowledgment of the effect that the influential American was beginning to have on English child-centredness in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Whilst we cannot know the extent – if at all - to which Cook was to read Dewey, such seminal and widely-disseminated works including *The School and Society* (1899) and *Democracy and Education* (1916) were starting to popularise the idea of the school as a democratic entity which was based upon the lived, dynamic experiences of the students. Under this aspect, 'the school was not merely seen as preparation for life but that it was a representation of life itself.' (Howlett 2013: 187) Coincidental or not, many facets of the Perse seemed however well attenuated to that particular understanding of democracy and democratic living and whilst this was most obvious in the Mummery productions with all boys having roles to play (even down to being stage-hands) democratic sentiments were to percolate other school activity too. As Gavin Bolton tells us, 'Any classroom dramatization [of Cook's] had to submit to rules of procedure, election of officials, a system of rewards and punishments, and the right of free- speech.' (Bolton 1998: 32) More prosaically, the last chapter of the *Play Way* found Cook musing on the importance of linking education to the

wider world: ‘We appeal to….schools to consider that education must recognize a closer connexion between the life and work of the Littlemen at their desks and the life and work of their fathers in offices and behind counters, and in fields, factories and workshops.’ (Cook 1917: 356) Although in itself this is an unremarkable claim, albeit slightly curious when set against the types of professions many of his boys’ (middle-class) fathers would have been involved in, when allied to a vision of the school as representing ‘a little State in itself’ (Cook 1917: 357) and set away from the noxious effects of urban living there are clear associations to be made with the comparable ideas being promoted in Dewey’s writing which advocated for schools to connect with the wider values and virtues of the emerging American nation.

This important idea of schools-as-democracy was found too in Cook’s emphasis upon the sorts of *moral* and *personal* values he sought to inculcate into his students through creative practice. In much the same way that Dewey was keen in his work to equate education with integration into a future society, so too was Cook’s Play Way to serve the twin aim of, ‘making pleasurable pursuits valuable’ (Cook 1917: 8) and ‘endeavour[ing] to achieve *right conduct.*’ (Cook 1917: 15) This desire to pay heed to the *personal* attributes of the pupils can also be found in Cook’s other full-length sole-authored publication, the *Littleman’s Book of Courtesy* of 1920 which consisted of a series of illustrated rhyming verses designed to promote to his boys, ‘good grace in all manners becoming a demeanour of Civility, nice in the handsome fashion of his bearing, and perfect in all comely ways.’ (Cook 1920: 7) Although seemingly an imitation of the gentile conduct-book – and the values and manners he discusses clearly reflect something of the *haute bourgeois* – it is nevertheless worth considering as it once more reminds us that as much as Cook’s educational progressivism and thinking around the creative arts was about the intrinsic process and not necessarily the outcome, it was never to be totally divorced from the wider world. Many schools under the umbrella of the New Education Fellowship, as Robert Skidelsky (1969) has

mentioned, had, after all, a clear *political* purpose and a belief that their pupils should be actively influencing society for the better and there are clearly echoes of this in Cook's instructions to his Littlemen.

Cook's political views – stemming perhaps from his well-healed social background - may well therefore have been those of the patrician conservative, a position he seemed happy to advocate: 'Your true revolutionary is only a conservative endowed with insight.' (Cook 1917: 12) Yet, it remains telling that he nevertheless saw the promotion of 'good virtue' as stemming from original and imaginative experiment in both literature but, more pertinently, Drama. Fostered through the general principle of the classroom-as-community and drawing upon what he understood as the innate impulses of the child to be both an *imaginative* and *performing* being, Cook's Play Way was one fully appreciative of an 'aesthetically focussed approach to drama…[offering]…students plentiful opportunities for creativity by giving them problems of stage craft to solve.' (McGuinn 2014: 23) Such an approach was motivated by his belief in the essential wisdom of the child and so it became a point of honour for Cook to not in any way try and direct the creative activity of the students. Although by the age of fourteen children were seen as ready to move on from such play – 'we must leave our playboy at this point to become a student' (Cook 1917: 301) – as a scheme of education for the younger child Cook's was not only highly original and innovative but also capable of being enacted in the classroom. Such practicality, an early example of what today is termed *praxis*, further acts as a justification for its importance in this discussion of the development of arts education.

The Influence of Cook

If the measure of an educator's influence and importance can be traced through the level of critical and scholarly debate they excite then Cook's standing would have to be

considered comparatively modest, certainly in his own time and even in the years immediately after his death. Since David Beacock's (1943) lively and discursive account, and aside from general official histories of the Perse School, there have been few major pieces of published recent scholarship explicitly addressing him and none of his ancillary writings (the *Play Way* has been a notable exception) have been quoted in wider academic texts. Today, few extant copies of the complete *Playbooks* exist. Even those mainstream accounts detailing the history of drama and dramatic education and aimed broadly at practitioners – notably those of John Allen (1979) and Richard Courtney (1968) – give Cook only brief mention. His premature death aside, one reason for this neglect may have been the misunderstanding Cook's title created in prospective readers, with the 'play way' being seen as a simple avoidance of hard work and a singular lack of engagement with the real world. A contemporary review for example wrote that, 'there is no guarantee that all play and no work is…a desirable formula.' (*The Saturday Review*, 12th January, 1918) As we have seen, such accusations represented a grave misunderstanding of Cook's intentions and his aspirations for his boys was anything other than world-renouncing. Nevertheless, this point, equally strongly articulated by Sir John Adams (1922), strikes hard at the debates around child-centredness and has remained a persistent criticism of this school of progressive thought ever since.

Even amongst those scholars who have been sympathetic to progressive methods and their practitioners such as R.J.W. Selleck (1972) and W.A.C. Stewart and W.P. McCann (1967), the focus in their work has tended to be on conceptualising the field as deriving from an *individualised* form of education rather than as being about group collaboration. Seeing progressive education as stemming from the explicit child-centredness of Froebel and Pestalozzi means, as Gavin Bolton points out, that, 'the key notion of 'collaboration within a group' of a class as a 'body of workers' and of inter-dependence in learning has not, it seems, been given much practical attention.' (Bolton 1998: 31) Correspondingly, significant

philosophical works in the field such as those by Peter Gordon and John White (1979) have had as their focus the importance of idealism upon the development of progressivism in the United Kingdom, esoteric concerns very distant from the 'hands-on' nature of a man such as Cook. Indeed, this cleavage between philosophy and practicality was apparent too in his own time with Cook's classroom attempts at creativity distinct from those more mysterious flights of fancy such as Theosophy which, as Kevin Brehony (2004) amongst others has suggested, impelled the New Education Fellowship and their shamanic leader Beatrice Ensor. To further reinforce the point, it is worth noting that Cook did not publish in the influential *New Era* journal or attend any of the periodic conferences of the various progressive groups – his sole engagement was to communicate briefly to the New Ideals conferences in writing – so he remained by choice isolated from wider abstract networks of thought. At times he was also highly critical of his more well-known contemporaries. In referring to the work of Maria Montessori for example he was to write that, 'the Montessori system is far more injurious than the old repressive methods of the classroom, because it pretends that educational practice is a science, whereas it can never be successful save as an art…it represents a grosser form of spoon-feeding than all the Latin Grammars ever printed.' (Cook 1914: 51)

Perhaps for these reasons to some of his contemporaries Cook's ideas seemed anathema. Responding to headmaster Rouse's request for government support for the Perse's innovative teaching methods, HMI T.W. Phillips, in an unpublished note to the Board of Education, made it clear that, 'it would be very dangerous for teachers to be encouraged to visit the [Perse] School with the idea that they will find there something that they might and should imitate. That being so, it seems clear that if an application is ever made for an Art 39 grant for this experimental work, it would be well for the Board not to entertain it.' (Phillips 1913) This type of rhetoric was seemingly reflected in a more widespread reluctance amongst the profession at large to embrace his ideas. Indeed, and as Gavin Bolton has pointed out,

'Using this [Cook's] approach remained isolated [with] many teachers experiencing failure.' (Bolton 2007: 48) Such professional scepticism may have been derived from reading the published opinions of those unconvinced contemporaries of Cook. W.S. Tomkinson for instance, himself a distinguished teacher of English, was equally critical of what was by now being called the 'Dramatic Method' of learning being moved to lament that, 'There were brave men before Agamemnon; and brave speech reformers before Mr. Caldwell Cook.' (Tomkinson 1921: 19) This cynicism stemmed from what Tomkinson saw as the inadequacy of using specifically *Drama* as a medium by which to teach other subjects. Whilst this had been at the core of Harriet Finlay-Johnson's thinking, it was prevalent too within Cook and exemplified by the use of the Mummery as an outlet for exploring other forms of literature, design, art and so on. In citing his own attempts at trying to get his class to learn History through Drama, Tomkinson referred negatively to the 'undisguised amusement' (Tomkinson 1921: 46) of the pupils as imagination of the past was seen to be overtaken with crude and amateurish recreation to the extent that any form of intellectual substance was lost.

And yet it would be incorrect to suggest, following from the criticisms raised above, that Cook's work was completely overlooked or ignored. For one thing, the archive housed within the Perse School contains a number of newspaper reviews and cuttings indicating the interest that Cook's teaching and the Mummery theatre had begun to generate. These included international outlets; the *San Francisco Chronicle* as one example remarked, 'Can you imagine the boys in the "1", "2" and "3" classes of an American secondary school…writing plays in blank verse, rehearsing them, making the costumes and finally acting their dramas with so much success so as to attract the attention of the whole country?' (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 13th April, 1913) Closer to home, *The Times* newspaper was similarly moved to comment on the, 'educative possibilities of the intelligent and human teaching of English composition.' (*The Times*, 20th June, 1912) Quite aside from the striking

productions being put on in both the Mummery and his own classes which were the focus of these particular reviews, Cook's writings too were beginning to generate notice. Contemporary pieces spoke positively of Cook's small output demonstrating, 'an active hatred of the mechanical, deadening elements of modern existence' (*The AthenÆum*, 13th July, 1912) as well as being, 'a design such as must appeal to all who care to look into the matter.' (*The English Review*, June 1913, 505) Perhaps therefore there was a tacit recognition amongst such critics of that more popular opposition toward didactic learning which was emerging within groups such as the New Education Fellowship who were, as Kevin Brehony (2004) has also indicated, attracting support from across the political spectrum and whose diktats were being echoed in Cook's practical work.

In addition - and notwithstanding the damning words of the Inspector Philips previously quoted - one can equally identify overlaps between the ideas of Cook and those found within official policy. Robert Jeffcoate (1992) and Louise Poulson (1998) are amongst the authors who have drawn particular attention to the 1921 Newbolt Report as an example of a government-commissioned document which not only referenced the 'interesting experiments' (Board of Education 1921: 103) of the sort taking place at the Perse but which also called upon Cook as an expert witness. Although his exact testimony is not recorded, it was perhaps a result of his and others, such as E. Sharwood Smith's, enthusiasm that led to the Report claiming effusively that, 'literature is not just a subject for academic study, but one of the chief temples of the human spirit, in which all should worship.' (Board of Education 1921: 259) Similarly, in referring to the primacy of performance over mere study, the authors of the Report were to write that, 'Class performances are joyous and instructive adventures. They may range from happy improvisation to a formal show on a special occasion. In their Elizabethan inadequacy of equipment they make an excellent introduction to the conditions of Shakespearian drama.' (Board of Education 1921: 317) This latter point in particular

relates demonstrably to Cook's own Mummery designs which, as we have seen, sought to replicate as far as possible the look and feel of an Elizabethan theatre. Shakespeare too was a prominent point of reference in both whilst Cook's appeals to an English spirit found echo in the stress placed on the relationship between the study of English and the acquisition of a sense of 'national heritage' (Board of Education 1921: 112) which would be both morally and aesthetically educational.

Whilst one may perhaps have expected a committee chaired by the distinguished poet Sir Henry Newbolt to be sensitive to the need for creative activity in the classroom, other publications were equally concomitant. For example, the Hadow Reports - themselves early benchmarks of progressivism - advocated for, 'a position of seeing literature as having a wider role in developing creativity and self-expression.' (Poulson 1998: 28) By so doing they were clearly equating language acquisition with the opportunity for personal expression as opposed to just being a means to learn the rules of grammar for more formal academic and examination purposes. The 1931 Report, entitled *The Primary School*, was to state hopefully that, 'Dramatization of poetry and other forms of literature should have a prominent place in the primary school. Even among the younger children, simple play production…will develop the beginning of critical and interpretative power, and will provide a more complete and intensive experience than reading only.' (Board of Education 1931: 163) In making such bold claims, the Reports were clearly providing encouragement for the creative arts but doing so by drawing upon the language and expertise of the psychologist and it is therefore possible to plot and intersect the ideas of Cook against developments in that wider field. The aforementioned Percy Nunn for one has been seen by Richard Courtney (1968) as being an influential figure in legitimising classroom Drama as a subject and, in calling play an 'intangible and elusive sprite, whose influence is to be found in corners of life where it might least be expected' (Nunn 1920: 68), can be seen to be imitating something of the ephemeral

language of Cook. Indeed, Nunn was to publicly acknowledge Cook's 'clear appreciation' (Nunn 1920: 92) of the psychological discipline even titling one of the chapters in his seminal book 'the play way' in recognition of this fact.

Alongside Nunn, Susan Isaacs – whose Malting House school was located only a mile from the Perse – was likewise registering the value of imaginative play in lessening internal anxiety and developing hypothetical thinking amongst children. Isaacs was also called upon to write the introduction to a book published by the Drama and Theatre Sub-Committee of the Under-Fourteens Council in which she acknowledged drama and dramatic work as something that, 'can and should be done' (Isaacs, 1948) with children from the ages of five to fourteen. It can therefore be argued that, despite his stated antipathy to scientific psychology, the ideas of Cook were being not only acknowledged but also consciously channelled in new directions and filtered through the lens of this emerging discipline. As David Hornbrook puts it, 'By the outbreak of the Second World War all the guiding principles of drama-in-education were in circulation. Endorsed by the child-psychologists…drama was now in a position to make its mark on the school curriculum.' (Hornbrook 1998: 8) Such optimism was further aided by the creation of the Educational Drama Association in 1943 which meant that that by the end of the Second World War, 'the historical climate was set fair for the ideas of…Henry Caldwell Cook to advance from the educational fringes into legitimacy.' (Hornbrook 1998: 9)

Following the conflict and under the rigid tri-partite system wrought by the 1944 Education Act, key figures like Peter Slade and his widely cited text *Child Drama* (1954) were to also prove powerful in giving primacy to children's dramatic activity as well as seeing the by now fully-recognized subject of Drama as a way to promote common social and moral values. Marjorie Hourd - another advocate of writing-centered approaches to learning literature - was moved to comment that, 'It would be difficult to overestimate the

emancipating work which [Mr.] Cook did at the Perse School.' (Hourd 1949: 92) Even as late as the era of the Plowden Report – dubbed the 'semi-official ideology of primary education' (Bernstein and Davies 1969: 56) – one can observe a healthy desire to promote play, creativity and self-expression within schools. Although the many teachers trained under its banner would perhaps have been unaware of the provenance of the ideas they were imbibing, it is surely possible to trace parallels with its liberating spirit and desire to do wider social good with those earlier ideas of Cook.

Why however does the former Cambridge schoolmaster not occupy a more prominent place in the progressive narrative? Notwithstanding the recent decline in the 'creative' subjects in a more marketized educational world, Cook's ideas and general philosophy can perhaps be seen as out of kilter in the modern educational climate. We have noted for example his lack of tolerance towards any form of realism in the classroom and his belief that, 'the incidents of everyday life, before they can become fit stuff for drama, have to undergo a process of refinement or sifting' (Cook 1917: 271) was increasingly challenged in the post-war years. It was during this time that thinking around Drama begun to privilege forms of unstructured play (particularly in nurseries) whilst more sympathetic attitudes toward both 'realism' and 'naturalism' became more prevalent. As Gavin Bolton points out although Cook '[was] not dismissing the dramatic potential of inferior material' (Bolton 1998: 98) he was nevertheless 'placing it beyond the skill and maturity of his pupils.' (Bolton 1998: 98) The casual and unstructured approaches to Drama so scorned by Cook had become almost *de rigueur* by the end of the century.

Following from that, as Nicholas McGuinn has described, there is an argument to suggest that Cook's approach represented a form of *conservatism* rather than innovation hankering as it did after a form of Englishness embodying 'an organic community united by shared values and untainted by the Industrial Revolution.' (McGuinn 2014: 25) Part of this

involved Cook shielding his boys from the more arduous and difficult elements of everyday life; McGuinn contrasts this view of seeing the child as in need of protection (as afforded partly by the Mummery) with the increasingly influential work of the psychologist Jean Piaget who saw playful activity as an important stage on the way to adulthood through its function of developing accommodation with new and challenging ideas. Cook's thinking therefore seemed redolent of an earlier age which, through his insistence on accuracy in relation to the Elizabethan theatre and his canonization of all things traditional, meant that it came to be superseded by the ideas of those such as the aforementioned Marjorie Hourd. Whilst valuing the importance of the theatre, Hourd did not do so for the same reasons as Cook (appreciation of the aesthetic) but more as a way for children to understand their own place within the world at large. Such a world – even that of his own time - was one that Cook appeared, at best, ambivalent about engaging with.

Yet, whilst these criticisms remain valid, in two key respects Cook's work demands re-interrogation. First, is the increasing academic importance given to play. The centenary of the publication of the *Play Way* for example saw a Professor of Play appointed within the Faculty of Education at Cambridge University, ironically located in the same spot (Hills Road) as the school in which Cook had undertaken so much of his work. This appointment perhaps reflected the need for academic dissent toward recent education policy which has been seen by many commentators as inherently instrumental and neglectful of the childish playful spirit of the sort advocated by Cook. Second, as Robert Jeffcoate has noted, 'Cook's work seems of particular relevance now that Shakespeare's plays are firmly reinstalled where he believed they should be, at the heart of the English curriculum.' (Jeffcoate 2000: 129) Indeed, given recent Coalition and Conservative Government curriculum reforms which saw the former Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove speak broadly of every child's entitlement to being exposed to classic canonical literature, understanding Cook's thinking

and approaches to teaching seems ever more relevant. The very fact that his work can be seen to contend with, and yet also validate, statements made by Michael Gove but also the protestations of the academy indicates not simply some of the contradictions inherent within Cook but also gives support to his own concluding assertion that, 'The spirit which makes images and the spirit which breaks them is one and the same.' (Cook 1917: 367)

In conclusion then it is possible to locate Cook on a continuum of drama education which begun at the start of the twentieth century with acting out playscripts to, later on and particularly after the Second World War, more improvised forms of activity. The extent to which Cook was influential in these changes has been explored above. It is not, of course, straightforward to chart his direct influence. In particular, his efforts seem a world away from that of another later pioneer Peter Slade whose work had elements of the therapeutic and the physical about it as children were encouraged in their classes both to improvise actions to stories which the teacher read out as well as doing so in a space such as a school hall which was large enough to allow for free movement. As a result, 'Teachers of theatre, in particular, found themselves pushed aside. The school stage became virtually redundant…' (Bolton 2007: 50) Both the concept of the formal stage (a key part of the Mummery) and the *content* of the play were therefore in danger of becoming otiose. Nevertheless, whilst this would suggest a lessening of his importance, this is to ignore Cook's appeals to the childish imagination and the spaces – both literal and metaphorical - he created in his classes for that to be put to use. In heartily declaiming that children 'must themselves come forth as poets' (Cook 1917: 16) Cook was pithily surmising his child-centred credentials which spoke to his belief in the innate creativity of the young. It was in this, as well as his less well charted focus on the personal and developmental aspects of the subject, that has meant all subsequent practitioners and theorists in both Drama and the creative arts more generally owe Cook a large intellectual debt.

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