

from one to another. The topic of conversation is hope, hope's loss and potential retrieval, as explored through the literary genre of tragedy, the sociological notion of identity and the theological theme of providence. Each is sustained by firm historical-political judgments orientated towards the Society of Friends and within the changing world of English life. Indeed, this is a book that will, I suspect, prompt much discussion amongst members of that movement, given the interwoven strands of Quaker origins, development, thought and applied ethics running throughout the book.

Yet, and perhaps because of that, this is a book about English identity, its past imperial strength, its demise, and its potential renewal. It is tempting, though ultimately misguided, to say that the book takes that rise and fall as a template for its historical discussion of the Society of Friends. Certainly there is a sense of a birth of a strong, even heroic, identity followed by periods of folly, with a subsequent need to reconsider how to progress in the world. I am reminded of John Henry Newman's hymn, 'Lead kindly light', with its question and voiced prayer: 'O whence for me shall my salvation come, Lead Thou me on'. That sense of a need for salvation and of a search for its source haunts this book too.

One of the greatest theoretical questions that sparks in the conversational domain between literature, theology and sociology is how 'meaning' may become 'salvation' or be secularised from it. How does a tale that is told either sustain or depress us? Why might an account become a gospel? And how, amidst that process of insightful discovery and communal sustenance, may providence become a word capable of utterance? For this theme of providence also runs through the book, giving rise to the question of the nature of a group or community in which the language of providence can be so spoken as to be a shared commitment. In particular, I wondered whether the Religious Society of Friends could be such a group today, as it sees itself as having once been in the past? This is partly answered by interesting historical analyses of Quaker history and belief that, to a non-member, reveal a highly self-aware and self-critical mentality as with Douglas Gwyn's 'The Early Quaker Lamb's War: Secularization and the death of Tragedy in Early Modern England', that sketches something of earliest Quaker commitment. His affirmation of the necessity of 'consistent ... human action' in response to 'divine faithfulness' may, itself, begin to show that a community more interested in action than creed may be the fertile ground for a new order of things. But, as Brian Phillips demonstrates, even the established and influential Friends of the Victorian-Edwardian era could live in 'hubris and folly'. Behavioural 'truth' can be as problematic as its intellectual-prepositional complement.

Dandelion's chapters on 'The Loss of Hope: England and its Establishment in the Twentieth Century' and 'The Loss of Providence' take up the classical issue of tragedy as 'distress, reflection and hope' under some overall sense of providence to argue, by contrast, that the English 'establishment' came to lose its sense of that providentially generating hope. This reads as a growing case of distressed middle and upper classes losing their place in the world and their feel for the world, especially amidst a developing secularisation, a humanised Christology, and the world wars and post-colonialism. His note of optimism, and it is echoed elsewhere in the book, is

DANDELION, Pink, Douglas Gwyn, Rachel Muers, Brian Phillips and Richard E. Sturm, with a Foreword by Richard K. Fenn, *Towards Tragedy/Reclaiming Hope: literature, theology and sociology in conversation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. xxvii + 157, ISBN 0-7546-0765-8, Cloth, £50.

This book is not unlike a dream sustained throughout a disturbed night's sleep – a fascinatingly enjoyable one. Its complex themes of tragedy, hope and identity, assume different manifestations in each chapter as time transports us to and from Ancient Greece (with Richard Sturm), Early Modern England (with Douglas Gwyn), Victorian-Edwardian England and modern Bosnia (with Brian Phillips). Associated mood shifts include frustration, despair and loss (in Pink Dandelion) alongside optimistic resurgence (in Rachel Muers), all drawing us to that brink of insight at which all will be revealed if only one doesn't wake up too soon.

Its subtitle indicates the complexity necessarily involved in anything like a 'conversation' between 'Literature, Theology and Sociology', a venture I much applaud, even if the distinctive methods of each discipline sometimes make it hard to transfer

that the new, multi-faith Britain is 'a critical player in the return of the notion of providence back into English life' (p. 106). From one perspective I want to say that there is a kind of dialectical fideism in Dandelion's acknowledged 'paradoxical' suggestion that the 'transcendent, interventionist' deities of Islam and Hinduism will help reconstruct an arena for interpreting tragedy and, thereby, renewing hope amongst the secularised English. From another perspective I think this is simply wishful thinking. Dandelion's line is pursued further by Rachel Muers in her 'New Voices, New Hopes', a much more intentionally theological chapter, but one whose method or bases I found hard to identify. She wants to distinguish between 'hope as divine gift' and as 'optimism' in reading the events of history (p. 109). She, too, rehearses the need to practise hope amidst suffering and loss: indeed, Bonhoeffer is important for her chapter. She makes a telling comment when arguing that any new identity requires 'the vocal presence of those on whose silence the old certainties were based' (p. 112). She then ends her chapter by presenting the optional bases of hope as lying in human nature or in some theological propositions: she avoids both. Her proposal is, once more, practical engagement. Instead of a theodicy answering a problem of evil, including the loss of hope, we are called to act amidst problems and loss. She takes the resurrection of Christ to be 'a given reality that remains in a fundamental way hidden or mysterious' (p. 121). I am not sure what that means, or whether it introduces a theological 'juggle'.

Just as it is impossible to convey one's grasp of a dream to another, so with this book. I read it in three different Scandinavian towns, in sharp light reflected from snow and in the drizzle of mist. Its diverse interpretations of myth, British political and religious history and theology and, most especially, of aspects of Quaker life and thought, engaged me. I commend it as an intellectual exercise in the applied engagement of religion and life framed by a culture and working from one religious tradition. Richard Fenn's Foreword sets the book off into life's religious and existential quandaries, prompting many points of fascination over tragedy and the use of myth and psychology as a means of grasping the nature of being human in and through the passage of time and the experience of suffering and guilt. It is a worthwhile essay in itself even if one does not accept the analytical psychology that drives his argument. The book itself ends, intentionally, as inconclusive. Whether or not it will achieve its goal of fostering contexts of hope in my or your worldview may depend on when you wake up.

Douglas J. Davies  
Durham University, England