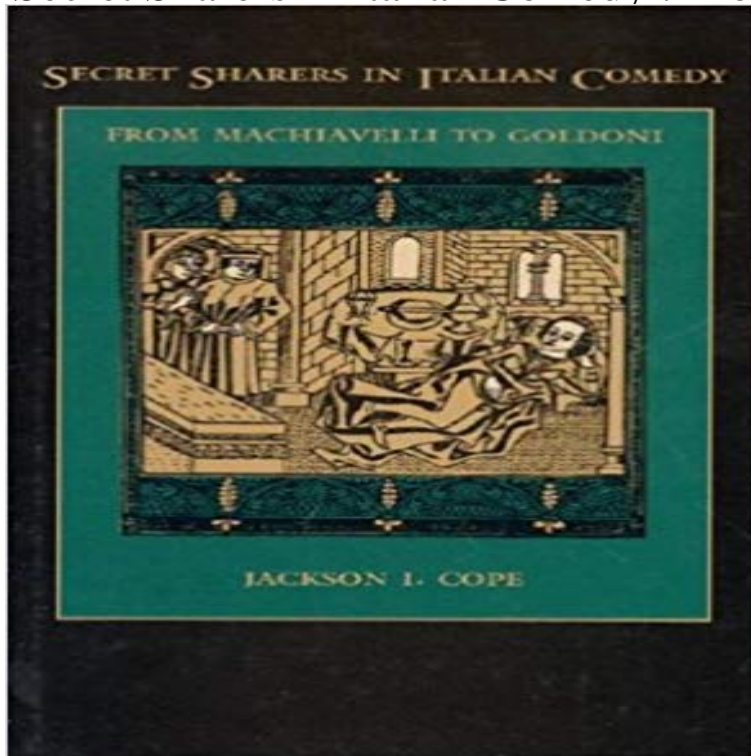


Secret Sharers in Italian Comedy : From Machiavelli to Goldoni



Modern vernacular comedy took shape in early sixteenth-century Italy with the many plays adapted from and modeled on Plautine New Comedy. As Jackson I. Cope demonstrates in this study, some Italian dramatists reacted to the widespread success of this genre with a counterparadigm, a comedy that exploits secrecy as form. In both historically and critically engaging fashion, Cope identifies and examines this major development in Italian theater. Though outwardly similar to New Comedy with its characteristically harmonious closure, this essentially anti-Plautine form employs a secret known by the audience but unequally shared among the players to introduce a radical discrepancy between simultaneous stories unfolding in a single action doubly understood. The result is a plot that is misleading at the surface, contingent and unfinished at its end. The audience, in a position of enforced collusion with regard to the secret, becomes a formal ingredient in the production. The play, more cynical than carnivalesque, opens onto vistas of disruption and deception rather than closing on a note of renewed social harmony. Cope's close and original readings of both classic and lesser-known plays by Machiavelli, Ruzante, Cecchi, Grazzini, Fagiuoli, Maggi, and others follow this peculiarly Italian, anti-Plautine paradigm through variations across three centuries to its masterful and complex culmination in Carlo Goldoni's villeggiatura trilogy. Establishing a new comedic canon that demands a revision of Italian dramatic history and the history of European dramatic theory, *Secret Sharers in Italian Comedy* makes an important contribution to Italian studies and will also attract readers among theater scholars in English, comparative literature, and drama.

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Jackson Irving Cope (1 September 1925 - 6 August 1999) was Leo S. Bing professor emeritus Theater from Ruzante to Grimaldi Joseph Glanvill: Anglican Apologist Secret sharers in Italian comedy: from Machiavelli to Goldoni.