DEVELOPMENT OF PROPERTIES IN DRAMA ON THE ENGLISH SPEAKING STAGE

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By Elma Elizabeth Perrigard, B. A.

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FOREWORD

Under the heading of "The Development of Properties in Drama on the English Speaking Stage" a large field lies outspread. It is my purpose to trace the development of the theatre from only one point of view, namely that of properties. Dramatic theory and scenery and costumes, although closely allied to furniture, have been thoroughly treated by Mr. Allardyce Nicoll, Mr. E. K. Chambers, Mr. Gordon Craig, and others, while the subject of properties, only mentioned at times in the course of compositions on other subjects, has not been given much individual attention or the compliment of a full paper.

In this paper I intend, by reference to theatrical account books and to the stage directions of typical plays throughout the centuries, to follow the development of properties from their first use in England to their present use in modern English and American drama.

INTRODUCTION

Nearly every man who engages in the producing or the acting of plays gives a different definition of drama, but all of them agree fairly well that drama is a term applied to those productions of art which imitate by action. Plays introduce as real the people taking part in them, and where this happens properties are necessary to the appearance of reality desired.

In old dictionaries the definition of "properties" included costumes, but the more recent dictionaries, such as "Webster's New International Dictionary", define properties as "all the adjuncts of a play except the painted scenery and the costumes of the actors". In the present time of space stages, "cubism", and such styles of staging, this definition still leaves one somewhat uncertain as to just what "properties" are; for example, curtains are not painted scenery in the strict sense of the words, but may easily be part of the scenery rather than part of the properties. So I conclude that the simplest way of defining the word is to say that properties are all the adjuncts of the play except costumes, which are placed on the stage after the surrounding walls have been put up.

The Development of Properties in Drama on the English Speaking Stage

Chapter 1 The Value of Properties

Early Use of Properties in the Western Hemisphere

As early as there was drama, there were properties; they were an inherent part of the dramatic spirit. Drama first arose at the village feasts in close relation to the ceremonial dances of the savages, which tended to be mimetic. These seeds of the stage drama nearly always required some utensil which the dancers used to help convey the meaning of their dance. In the paddle dance of one of the primitive tribes of Australia men and women took up positions in lines, armed with sticks symbolizing paddles, and as the bodies began to move, the sticks were rythmically swung in a paddle action. It is easy to understand this desire in our ancestors for realistic action, when we consider how readily the dances of the modern savages take the shape of primitive dramas of war, hunting, love, or religion.

There is extant some account of the use of properties in the early worship of the Gods. We know, for instance, that King Usertsen III sent a man named I-kher-nefert to Abydos to build a shrine to Osiris; he

regulated the ceremonies of the God and built certain of the properties used in the Passion Play, such as the sacred boat duplicating that in which Osiris had set forth on his expedition against his enemies. Also, the Phallus, fashioned in the symbolic or realistic likeness of the male generative organ, was an ordinary property of vintage processionals and earth-god ceremonials.

The Greek stage had no scenery and very few properties in its early phase, but later as it began to decay and in the Roman times, the love of spectacle led to the building of many machines, so that after a time the immense realistic battles, floods on a large scale, lengthy processions of exotic animals, and other diversified amusements, came to interrupt the flow of the action of the plays.

From Mediaeval times up to the present day there has been a continued and growing use of properties throughout the Western hemisphere.

Early Existence of Property Man

The ever-present Chinese property man would have seemed an unnatural figure to the Western nations throughout the centuries of their dramatic development, for they did not possess such an official; but although it was not thought necessary to appoint a man with the sole duty of attending to properties, there was always someone responsible for stage furniture, whether or not he bore an official title.

Such a one was the priest, who in the ordinary course of events had the task of looking after the precious relics of the church and the altar vessels, and to whom fell the privilege of placing such articles as were necessary to the dramatization of the holy scriptures.

The Case for Properties

History illustrates the fact that as long as the dramatic spirit exists, properties are necessary to its fullest development. The mimetic spirit, except in its most extreme stages of pantomime, seems to demand properties.

The Case Against Properties

Properties are not more important than the other parts of the play, however, and can be used in too great profusion if tastelessly chosen, as was the case on the Greek and the Roman and the Nineteenth century stages. When the audience begins to think of the properties rather than the play itself, one may rest assured that properties have ceased to fulfil their original purpose, and have become not only useless but menacing. Too much scenery can easily detract from dramatic characterization; and when the spectators come to a play, not to see the play or the actors, but to examine an article of furniture which though ugly is pure gold, then the finest objective of the drama has been lost; instead of giving the audience a pleasant experience of life beyond their own or

of lifting their thoughts to a higher plane or of leading them to emotional heights, the play serves only to whet their curiousity and to rouse their interest in something very undramatic and lacking in any power of cleansing by emotional experience.

Conclusion

In this phase of drama, as in all the others, we can turn to our master, Shakespeare, for an authoritative opinion. He understood the value of stage furniture used carefully and chosen to fulfil the needs of the acted play without overburdening it. He would have welcomed a very large number of properties if he could have used them (1), but his scenes and properties could not be changed as his stage had no "act curtain".

(1) cf. "Henry V", Prologue.

Chapter 2 Pre-Elizabethan Drama

The Mimetic Spirit

The drama as a living form of art disappeared completely at the break-up of the Roman world. For the men of the Middle Ages, however, spectacle had a constant attraction, and the mimetic instinct of the people remained still deep-rooted.

The beginnings of the scenic representation of the modern drama in England and the revived classical drama antecedent to the modern native drama, is veiled to us by the absence of adequate records of the early English stage. It is commonly agreed that the first appearance of dramatic dialogue was in the "Tropes" of the Ninth century; but probably because of the destruction of manuscripts during the Reformation, the Tenth century version of "Quem Quaeritis" from Winchester and the Fourteenth century version of the same play from Dublin stand alone as examples of early English drama.

Of miracle plays written in Latin none now exist of which it can be said surely that they were acted in England. Probably there were French plays produced in England in the Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries, but there is still no real evidence on the subject.

The Minstrels

Although the halls of a Mediaeval court were thronged with all types of minstrels who provided a varied program, it cannot be said that the drama received its rebirth from classical times until at least the era of folk and church drama, and it was not until these types of dramatic effort arose that properties appeared. After all, the harp of the harpist or the balls of the juggler, however entertaining they made him, were just as much a utensil of his trade as the axe which the woodman used, and they could not be called stage furniture. Some of these minstrels were artists, but they were not dramatists. Dialogue was a part of the minstrels' repertory, but dialogue by itself is not drama; the notion of drama does not necessarily imply scenery on a regulation stage, but it does imply impersonations and a distribution of roles between at least two performers.

The Morris Dancers

The Morris dancers gave more to drama than did the minstrels, since in them the mimetic spirit was more apparent; but even folk drama contributed only the smallest stream to the mighty river of dramatic development. However, wherever a little real drama was found there also were discovered some properties: for the Morris dancers, bells were needed; for the Fool, a bladder; for Maid Marion, a flower; and during many years the hobby-horse was an essential part of

the equipment of the Morris dancers. In Tollet's window, and in a Seventeenth century printing by Vinkenboom from Richmond Palace, engraved by Douce 598, there appear the lady, the fool, and the hobby-horse.

In sword dances, many of which tended to be extremely descriptive, swords were of course a very necessary property; and that was the first appearance of those articles of defense and apparel, which have so often since then been a part of the property list.

Chief Sources of Drama and Properties

The drama of the modern Western world arose chiefly from three sources: the farce of the mimes, the Classical revival of humanism, and the Ecclesiastical liturgy; and the last force was the strongest of the three.

Commencement of English Stage

In the "Quem Quaeritis", which represented the infancy of our drama, properties were mentioned. With priests, nuns, or choir boys as performers, the play always chanted and not sung, and not even completely resolved into dialogue; properties were even more important in conveying the meaning than in some of the more elaborate plays with which later generations were entertained. For the first drama, "Quem Quaeritis", the setting was simple; and there were few properties beyond those which the ornaments and vestments of

the church could supply.(1) Besides the containers for the spices, the Marys sometimes carried lights, or a palm, or an ear of corn, symbolizing the Resurrection. The Apostles, who ordinarily were priests, sometimes carried other properties to distinguish them more clearly; at Dublin St. John, in white, held a palm, and St. Peter, in red, the keys. At Coutances and at Fleury the man portraying Christ appeared in the first part of the play as "Hortulanus" indicated perhaps by a spade, and exchanged the spade for a cross in the second part.

The Theory of Necessity

As with "Quem Quaeritis" so it was with the other liturgical dramas as long as these remained in the church; the sacred plays were read in the vestments and with the accessories of the clergy. In the earlier stages of the Mystery plays the cathedral proved an appropriate setting. There was provided a manger here, a throne there, and a road to Egypt elsewhere; and with such simple arrangements the altar and the choir area were prepared for the episodes of Scripture dramatized within the holy walls, for which the altar vessels constituted the properties.

Thus, in the earliest church drama there was

(1) The Rubics of "Quem Quaeritis" as we have had them handed down to us are lacking or inexplicit in some parts.

applied to properties the theory of necessity in its purest form; only such properties were used as were absolutely necessary to the action and to the representation of character which demanded that one member of the cast be distinct from every other member.

Intrusion of the Vernacular

As we have already intimated, and as we might expect since the church services were carried on in Latin, the first church plays were acted in Latin. In many cases these were little more than parts of the Scriptures, chanted as in the ordinary church service, but with the addition of certain motions and movements and properties designed to make the story clearer. Then in the Twelfth and Thirteenth centuries (1182-1378) the church drama became secularized; the mysteries and miracles began to be composed in the vernacular, the earliest example being the mystery of the "Resurrection".(1) The intrusion of the vernacular is clearly represented in the bilingual text as printed by Professor Skeat, and in the "Plantus", of which the earliest in the Twelfth century were written in the vernacular as well as in Latin. Professor Skeat puts the commencement of the English speaking stage at the time of the playing of the "Pastores", the "Quem Quaeritis", and the

(1) cf. "Beverley Resurrection Play", 1220.

"Peregrini".(1)

Secular Influence

As the dramas came to be more and more frequently acted in the vernacular rather than in Latin, the influence of forces outside the church came to be felt in the dramatic field. In the Fourteenth century the actors and drama moved from the cathedral altar to the porch, and thence to the market-place stage, from priests' domination to secular control. Although this movement began in the early Thirteenth century, the most flourishing period of English miracle plays started later with their performance by trading companies in the towns; of this practice Chester is supposed to have set the example in 1268-1276.

At first, even in the hands of the guilds, properties were far from elaborate. Nearly all Nativity plays demanded the presence of a doll or baby; in the "Deluge" two doves were probably used; and in "Abraham, Melchisedec, and Isaac", the Chester pageant, Melchisedec offered wine and bread on a plate to Abraham. However such property lists were not very lengthy. In the Chester version of "Noah's Flood" there was no procession of animals although some attempt was made to build the Ark, and the beasts and fowls were painted on the boards at either side.

(1) cf. Professor Skeat; printed from a manuscript at Shrewsbury.

Nature of Properties

The properties used to dress a production of the Second Shepherds' play form a representative list. They are as follows:-

Sheep to bear the shepherds company or at least shepherds' staffs to show the shepherds' trade,
A sheep for Mac to steal,
A bed for the wife to lie in with the sheep,
A partition of some kind to act as a door,
A canvas to toss Mac in,
A light to represent the star in the sky,
A doll to represent the Christ child,
A bunch of cherries for the first shepherd to give the Christ child,
A bird for the second shepherd to give the Christ child,
A ball for the third shepherd to give the Christ child.

The following list of properties is of interest. It was used for the "Coventry Smiths' Pageant" of the "Trial, Condemnation, and Crucifixion of Christ", between the years 1449 and 1585; and included:-

The Cross with a Rope to draw it up, and a Curtain hanging before it,
Gilding for the Pillar and the Cross,
2 Pair of Gallows,
4 Scourges and a Pillar,
Scaffold,
Fanes to the Pageant,
Mending of Imagery (occurs 1469),
A Standard of red Buckram,
Two red Pensiles of Cloth painted, and silk Fringe,
Iron to hold up the Streamer,
2 Mitres (for Cayphas and Annas),
A Rochet for one of the Bishops,
A Staff for the Demon,
2 Spears,
Herod's Crest of Iron,
Faulchion for Herod,
Maces.

Movement Towards Creation of an Atmosphere

The feeling for simplicity was soon followed by another. Even before the miracles and mysteries were played exclusively in English, there came a new feeling into the decoration of the playing floor. Although in the late Thirteenth and Fourteenth centuries there was as yet no proper stage, there arose probably under secular influence, the desire to create an atmosphere. The simplest example of this occurred in the play "Cain and Abel", in one version of which sacrifices were offered on a great stone, and in another of which a "Chawbone" was specified for the murder of Abel. Also, in the story of Adam and Eve a "Serpens artificiose" was introduced.

Scenes set in Paradise were among the first to be further elaborated. An early liturgical secular version of the "Adam" play in its stage directions demanded such adjuncts as fruit trees and fragrant palms. The Fifteenth century "Resurrection" required a "Paradise made of paper in midst of which shall be branches of trees, some with flowers, others laden with fruit, such as cherries, pears, apples, figs, grapes, and similar things made by artifice, and other green branches of may and rose bushes, the roses and flowers of which shall exceed the height of the palings"; and this list was followed by the direction that the flowers should be cut fresh and put in vases to keep them fresh.

At the Coventry "Last Supper" the scene disclosed

Jesus and the Disciples seated at a banquet table. In the Cornish "Origo Mundi" the setting for the play of Noah was built up in front of the spectators; "tolles and tymber redy wth plankis to make the arcke, a beam a mallet a calkyn wre (n) ropes mass(t)les pyche and tarr". At Canterbury the steeds of the Magi were made of hoops and laths and painted canvas. Ropes and pulleys were employed at Mons, and no doubt elsewhere as well, to bring Christ to the top of the pinnacle.

Thus properties gathered elaborateness gradually with the years, right up to the Sixteenth and Seventeenth century, when the miracle and mystery plays had to compete with the more varied secular drama; a play at Beverley in 1391, with the scene laid in the Garden of Eden, called for a fir-spar for the tree of knowledge, a worm for the serpent, and one sword, -- rather a meagre supply of properties, but by 1511 the occupation of the property man had apparently become quite a profitable one, since the account of the Bassinbourne play included a payment to the "garnement" man for "garnements and propyrts and play books".

Mechanical Effects

Records indicate that there was a plentiful use of mechanical effects, often of a surprising nature. Items for payment of such effects are to be found in many extant accounts: " skin of parchment and gunpowder" at Kingston; "Rosyn to the resurrecyon pley" at Reading; "Gonne poudor" at Shrewsbury; and

"starche to make the storme" at Coventry. In the Doomsday scene at Coventry the hell mouth was provided with fire, a windlass, and a barrel for the earthquake.

Fire effects were very popular. Among the items in the drapers' accounts at Coventry there was written a note of four pence paid for keeping the fire at hell mouth. In the York play, during the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, Moses saw a burning bush. The representation of fire was not the only example of the use of effects and machines, for by the time the plays were well established in the hands of the guilds, the producers of plays were catering to the audiences' desires for the representation of horrors and awesome or magical spectacles. The Cornish creation contained the stage direction, "Lett hell gape when ye father nameth yt", and when the Father spoke out of Heaven "lett ye levys open". Paradise was pictured as a place where "fyne flowers suddenly spring up", and "fysch of dyvers sortis apeare and serten beastis".

Summary

It is possible to trace a growing interest in the usefulness and in the significance of properties throughout the rise and the decline of the liturgical drama. From using only hand properties in the church to denote and differentiate the actors, players of religious themes came to have properties which served not only to mark character but also to help the

action of the plays. Then the idea of adjuncts to strengthen the atmosphere and the feeling of realism became popular; and so by the time that miracles and mysteries were acted in English outside the church, although the stage floor was still comparatively bare, the costumes and hand properties had become far more elaborate, and to these had been added various stage machines and effects. However, always in the presentation of miracles, mysteries or moralities, properties were used because they added to the action or characterization, never solely because they enhanced the stage picture. In short, the Pre-Shakespearean dramatists used only the necessary properties.

Chapter 3 The Shakespearean Stage

The Transition Period

The last chapter discussed chiefly the plays presented by church and guild, and the crude symbolism expressed in their properties. In this chapter, as we examine the Elizabethan stage, we will find the properties there less crude and more extensive.

Before consideration of this period let us examine the progress of the physical stage from the simple wagon platform of the guild productions. We cannot pass straight from these floors to the "Theatre" erected in 1576, because in between there were other types of stages which might be termed transition stages; these were an adaptation of the earlier playing floors dealt with in the last chapter, and were composed of raised platforms which were usually shallow with five or more "stations" upon them:- Heaven on the right; next to it the House of the High Priest; in the centre a neutral playing space; on the other side the Palace of Herod; and on the extreme left Hell Mouth.

The complexity of properties which resulted from having several localities on the stage at once, did not last long, for during the first three quarters of the Fifteenth century the stage may be said to have lost its

"domus" in favour of its "platea".(1) This change was aided by the fact that morality plays were being replaced by interludes, some of them of an historical character. John Heywood and John Bale were followed by other writers of secular drama, and with the variety of characters thus introduced came a greater variety of properties.

"Ralph Roister Doister" by Nicholas Udall, "Gammer Gurton's Needle" by William Stevenson (?), and "Gorbuduc" by Lord Sackville, were the first works that could rightly be called comedy or tragedy; and they are the best known of the plays that bridged the gulf between John Heywood's interludes, popular towards the end of the morality era, and the Elizabethan drama.

During the first half of the Sixteenth century plays were produced in the inn yards, where the floor plan was much the same as that with which we are familiar in reconstructions of the later theatre stages; in fact the latter were the inn stages transferred to a building of their own, and only in some cases elaborated. For this reason there is no need to consider the inn stages apart from the main body of Elizabethan drama.

Spectacle and Furniture

There was one type of drama deserving of special

(1) cf. Thorndike's "Shakespeare's Theatre" and Chambers' "Mediaeval Stage"

consideration. While the public theatre was passing through the transition and the Elizabethan periods up to the middle of the Seventeenth century, the Universities were presenting plays, and the Court nobles possessed several companies of their own. The Universities on the whole adhered to Classical tradition more closely than did the Court, but both were more inclined toward it than were the public theatres. The Court plays were especially noted for their sumptuousness and the effects which they achieved. The public stage was not without these effects, but on them spectacle appeared less often; and it was not until public and private drama were merged in the Restoration period that the theatres achieved the luxury of the private houses. Thenceforth theatrical spectacle was transferred to the public theatres, and their performances established the standards of the theatrical world.

To ascertain the nature of these Court performances, and the extent to which theatres followed their wealthier neighbours it is necessary to consult the plays of the Elizabethan writers. In the Sixteenth century besides Shakespeare, John Lyly, George Peele, Marlowe, Greene, Chapman, Thomas Heywood, Beaumont, Fletcher, Webster, and Massinger were all writing. During the presentation of their plays the public stage came to resemble more nearly the Court Houses until they were almost identical in the style of their presentation.

Nature of Court Presentations

The fact that Aristotle in his "Poetics" mentioned spectacle as a means of rousing pity and terror, gave grounds for justifying the introduction into plays of thunder (1) and the tolling of bells, as well as effects of wonder and horror. The masques adopted from the Italian stage the machines and burning effects which were used there.(2 There is evidence in "The Queen's Progress", 1566, that the subterranean thunder and Charon's ladder, described by Pollux, were in use on the university stage.

From about 1565, although towns and country scenes were not painted on a curtain or flat, they were constructed in some such fashion as the Italian scenes; and these painted frames or painted cloths were used to give the necessary background to the scenes.

The decoration of the Heavens is also conclusively proved in the Revels' Accounts from 1564 onwards.(3) Some of their most extraordinary pieces of

(1) As a stage device thunder and lightning have to this day retained their usefulness in exciting pity and terror.

(2) cf. L. B. Campbell, "Scenes & Machines on the English Stage", p.51.

(3) cf. A. Feuillerat, "Documents Relating to the Office of the Revels in the Time of Queen Elizabeth".

movable scenery and properties were the machines used to portray the constellations; for instance, the sun was arranged at times so as to rise at the beginning of the play, cross the Heavens, and set at the end of the play, thus denoting the unity of the drama.

A great variety of spectacle was represented, and all kinds of properties were used, from those in the simple scene of "Palamon and Arcyte" where the Lady Amelia gathered flowers "in her garden there represented", to an elaborate out-door presentation of the Menaechmi of Plautus, in which a boat with sails and oars, and ten people aboard, moved across the stage. Usually the latter type of elaborate setting was the more favoured.

In the time of Ben Jonson there was a movement in dramatic, or literary, criticism to do away with the "deus ex machina"; but although this may have made less frequent the descent of the throne of state from the Heavens, it did not materially deter the property and spectacle makers during the Elizabethan age. If it had done so there would have been less of spectacle for the public theatres to take over a little later.

Nature of Public Theatre Presemtations

There was a definite use of spectacle in the public theatres even before the middle of the Seventeenth century, although the effects did not equal in splendour those of the richer contemporaries in the Court. Richard Flecknoe,

Prynne, Gosson and Henslowe, all mentioned, at least grudgingly, the use of machines on the public stage.

The roof of the heavens was presumably used to facilitate certain spectacular effects inherited from the miracle plays and the court stages; in many plays the action specified that there be let down from the sky a receptacle of some kind, at times even an ornate throne. In "Alphonsus" the prologue called for a chair let down from above; and there was a descending apparition in "Macbeth" and in "Cymbeline".(1)

Some people still believe that the Elizabethan stage was totally unadorned and lacked all kinds of machines; however, the dramas of that time abounded in stage directions which, if every kind of scenic effect were unknown, must have been quite meaningless. In Greene's and Lodge's "A Looking Glass for London", "The Magi beat the ground with their rods, and from under the same (rose) a brave arbour". Romeo, when forcing the tomb of all the Capulets could not have used his crowbar against a curtain; and some kind of properties must have been employed in "Macbeth", in which numerous stage directions occurred. There must also have been a definite effort at realism, for it is believed that when "Macbeth" was played at the Globe, the Thane of Cawder and Banquo made their

(1) cf. "Macbeth", IV, and
"Cymbeline", V, 4: Jupiter descends on an eagle.

entrance on horseback.(1) The stage directions to the second act of Jonson's "Bartholomew Fair" were "a number of boothe, stalls, etc., set out"; and in his "Cynthia's Revels" a significant passage read as follows, "Slid, the boy, takes me for a piece of perspective, I hold my life, or some silk curtain come to hang the stage there".

Perhaps the most significant proof of the use of some scenery and of many properties on the public playhouse floor appeared in the Revels' accounts, indicating that certain performances were only partially provided by the Revels with the necessary scenic adornments. The inference is that the public theatres possessed part of the stage equipment necessary.(2)

Many of Shakespeare's plays offered ample opportunity to insert into their production breath-taking spectacle. The banquet scene aboard Pompey's galley in "Antony and Cleopatra" must have been very elaborately furnished with a banquet table, food, wine, and musical instruments for the musicians, and must have presented an impressive appearance. The audiences regarded with superstitious awe the magical effects of "The Tempest" and "Midsummer Night's Dream". The

(1) cf. H. Barton Baker, "History of the London Stage and its Players 1576-1903", Chap. I.

(2) cf. L. B. Campbell, "Scenes and Machines on the English Stage during the Renaissance", p. 120.

blasted heath in "Macbeth" presented an opportunity to use weirdly formed trees, and the storm in "King Lear" gave an excellent chance for the machinest to portray thunder, wind and lightning; the Heavenly portents of "Julius Caesar" were undoubtedly represented in a vivid manner; and so it was with nearly all of Shakespeare's plays and those of other contemporary authors.

In many cases properties did not add to the spectacular effects, but were the effects. In Shakespeare's day there was so little actual scenery that properties were called upon to do the work which in a later age devolved upon scenery of a more advanced type. At this time properties were growing faster than scenery. There was very little advance in scenery during the Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Sixteenth centuries, but the properties used on the Shakespearean stage were greater in number and far more elaborate than those used to present the Mystery and Morality plays of an earlier century.

We may conclude that although in the time of Serlio scenes furnished as we know them today did not exist in the public theatres, yet there were a surprising number of adjuncts. It is unlikely that Shakespeare would have ridiculed the rustic "bill of properties" of Pyramus and and Thisbe (1), if the tiring-houses of the Globe and Blackfriars

(1) cf. William Shakespeare, "Midsummer Night's Dream", I, 2, 109; V, 1, 107.

had not been well furnished. It is probable that the stage was well supplied with small furniture, and although the authors had to depend on the audience's imagination for much of the scenery, there was no shortage of properties.

Nature of Properties

It is now necessary to consider what comes under the heading of properties. In Shakespeare's day, and for a quarter of a century after, the absence of painted scenery in the English theatre was largely compensated for by the use of properties; but there must have been some parts of the stage decoration called "scenery", since the records of the Revels seem to indicate that the "house" was differentiated from the "mount" or the "cave" or the "forest", the "mount" being listed as the work of the property-maker. As long as we remember that what would now be called set pieces and part of the scenery were in the Sixteenth century reckoned as part of the properties, our definition still holds good and properties may be defined as "all the portable articles necessary for the performance, whether placed on the stage beforehand or brought on in the course of the action, the component parts of the scenery excepted".

The wide variety of properties provided in the Sixteenth century was exemplified by the concluding payment to the estate of the property-maker, John Carow, in 1574/5; it covered monsters, mountains, forests, beasts, serpents, guns,

daggers (1), bows, arrows, and bills, halberdes, borespears, falchons, targets, poleaxes, club heads, headpieces, armour, counterfeit moss, holly, ivy, bays, flowers, etc.(2) In this list there was little furniture indicative of interior scenes, with the possible exception of "two forms for the Senators in the historie of Titus and Gisippus"; but there exists evidence in other places such as the plays, which indicates quite complete decoration of interior episodes. Briefly, plays were acted with whatever could reasonably be carried on by the actors, lowered from the heavens, raised by traps, or thrust on by forms and wheels.

Stuffed Animals and Figures

Serlio made mention of the mermaids, monsters, and other beasts, made by Genga, which seemed "in show as though they went and stirred". Such things were familiar to the Elizabethans, and although they were probably more often seen on the Court stages, they were not unknown to the groundlings of the pit, and the construction of these creatures must have been a constant occupation of the property-makers.(3)

(1) Henslowe mentioned a sword and a dagger in his "Diary".

(2) In "Brome's Antipodes" there is a list of properties cited by Collier, III, 356.

(3) cf. L. B. Campbell, "Scenes and Machines on the English Stage During the Renaissance", p. 112.

The amount of pasteboard used, as noted by the Revels' accounts, is entirely inexplainable unless some of it was employed to fashion the pasteboard figures, by which the scene was varied and the audience kept amused during the absence from the stage of the principals. That figures such as these were made to pass across the stage between the acts or to stand fixed on their wooden props during the play, and that they were presented before Queen Elizabeth, is proved by items of expense entered in the Revels' accounts for "Bodyes of men in timber" and for "hermytage and hermytt, Savages, Enchaunter".

Structures

Sometimes in street scenes a structure was made use of. In "Sir Thomas More", Scene XVII, when the Lords enter as More is going up the stairs of the scaffold, he jests with the "straunge woodden horsse"; apparently the block is not visible as he is told it is to the "easte side", and he leaves the stage in that direction. In "James IV", I, 2, 1, there is a command, "Enter Slipper, Nana, and Andrew, with their bills readie written in their hands"; they dispute as to whose bill shall stand highest on the post and then fasten up the bills.

Trees

Professor Reynolds has recently shown it to be probable that real trees were used on the Elizabethan stage to

indicate a forest.(1) Their use is verified by entries in the Revels' accounts of "a tree of holly for the Dutton's playe" and of holly for the forest. The trees were not used in any great numbers, and were symbolical rather than realistic.

It is the opinion of some that the wooded background was left on the stage throughout the entire play, and of others that the necessary foliage was placed on the inner stage and removed after it had served its purpose. Probably both customs prevailed at different times and in different theatres, and it is certain that whatever their usual position, for spectacular effects trees were made to rise from the earth by means of trap-doors, sometimes singly, sometimes even in a grove.(2)

These trap-doors were invaluable for stage effects. A man could be transformed into a tree or a rock or vice versa, simply by raising or lowering the tree or rock through an opening in the floor in front of the man.

Candles

At that time the few lighting effects were confined to the Court stages, and public performances were played in broad daylight. Thus was brought about the frequent use of lights as

(1) cf. G. F. Reynolds, "Trees on the Stage of Shakespeare", "Modern Philology", Volume V, pp. 153-158.

(2) cf. "A Looking Glass for London", II, 1, 495, and "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay", Sc.IX, 1171.

hand properties merely to show the time of day, so that in spite of the surrounding sunshine, if the play in hand called for a night scene, there appeared on the stage torch bearers or people carrying lamps or candles. The opening scene of "Macbeth" provides one of the many excellent examples available.

Painted Properties

There was a good deal of friendly and amused contemporary comment on the use of painted properties in the Seventeenth century. The "Rump" gives proof of the use of these in its comment, "A piece of wood set forth painted like a pile of faggots and fire"; and in Henslowe's "Diary" there is an entry on October 23rd, 1602, of a sum paid to the painter for properties in the play of "The Three Brothers".

Posts and Bills

Many of the dramas called for the posting of bills. At first the actors used for this the posts that held up the Heavens; then in the Hope contract of 1613, it was provided that the Heavens be supported without the use of poles, and after that the posts became numbered among properties, along with the bills already there.

Beds

Beds were often used during the course of plays.(1) Although these and their occupants were sometimes confined to the inner stage, they were usually brought on to the outer stage by

(1) In "Henry VI" the Folio has a note, "Bed put forth".

servants or by some member of the cast. In some, though not in all the bedroom scenes, the indications are of a bed standing on the open stage and revealing the occupant by the mere drawing of the curtains: "Selinus"; "The Battle of Alcazar"; "Richard II", first part; and possibly "Bacon and Bungay".

Chair of State

The chair of state was an often recurring property; and one about which there has been much discussion: Mr. Lawrence thinks the throne was placed on the rear stage and left there throughout the play; Mr. Chambers that it was lowered and raised from and to the Heavens as needed; and Mr. Reynolds that the "state" usually stood on the front stage throughout the play. I am inclined to agree with Mr. Lawrence and with Mr. Creizenach that the chair remained permanently on the stage, probably against the back wall; for to raise and lower it would have been difficult and slow, and to have it on the front stage all the time would argue greater incongruity than is now thought to have been allowed.

In the consideration of the place of the beds and the chair of state, it is well to remember that although during the greater part of the Seventeenth century the chair descended from the Heavens less often, nevertheless at the time of the presentation of the "Tempest" the characteristics of the mask had become more popular (1), and stage decoration

(1) cf. Queen's plays of "Golden, Silver, and Bronze Ages", by Heywood.

was tending to come out on to the front stage. Scenes such as the bedchamber one in "Othello" and that of Gertrude's Closet in "Hamlet" were played on the full stage.

Properties to Aid Action

Many extant Elizabethan plays specify no definite background, but even where there is no evidence in the stage directions, the dialogue often calls for fixed or hand properties; for example "King Leir", Scene XXIV, specifies "Enter the Gallian King and Queene, and Mumford, with a basket, disguised as country folk"; Leir meets them, and "she bringeth him to table".

Properties to Convey Location

Properties were used then as now for purposes of location, but just as the Mediaeval stage had its "platea" and its "domus", so the Elizabethan had its neutral and unlocalized main stage and its place for localization and properties in its upper and inner stage.

Some of the interior scenes were given a large number of fixed properties, especially those coming under the heading of effects. Discoveries were placed, or set out, on the rear of the stage behind the arras or in the room in front of the tiring house.(1) A scene on the outer stage was not

(1) cf. "Taming of the Shrew", V, 2.

usually set, but the properties were brought on during the course of the action; a bar could be placed there, or a banquet spread, or a sick man brought on in his chair, as part of the action. In most cases it was tables and stools that were carried on and a demand on the part of the characters rationalized the action, but in some plays properties were brought on without any orders. Usually servants did the fetching and carrying of the necessary furniture, but a hero or heroine was not above lugging on a chair or table.(1)

As examples of properties on the inner stage there stand the articles necessary to the first scene of the fourth act of "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay", and the commands in the play, "Alphonsus", (1599) I, 1255, "Let there be a brazen head set in the middle of the place behind the stage, out of which cast flames of fire - - -". As an example of properties on the outer stage there is the general direction of the "Faery Pastoral", written for Paul's in 1603.

Incongruity

It is interesting to note that there was not a large quantity of inappropriate stage furniture on the Elizabethan stage. Incongruity of properties on the English

(1) cf. "King Lear", II, 2, "stocks brought out", and "Apius and Virginia", 1568, "Doctrina and Memoria and Virginus bring in a tomb".

stage did exist during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries, but not such as could readily be avoided. Heavy properties set up on the inner stage of the inn-yards tended to stay there, but this was not always the case and certainly it is unlikely that recurring furniture was allowed to remain for long on the outer stage, when authors took so much trouble to clear the floor of dead bodies during the natural course of the action. In the private theatres, as the neo-classic stage strove to adapt itself to romantic subject matter, separate localities with inconsistent properties sometimes came to be set up at the same time on different parts of the stage, but this was not the case in the public theatre.

The Responsibility of the Dramatist

Malone in his "Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the English Stage" showed how the imagination was assisted, not only by some scenical deception but also by the lines of the dramatists. In spite of the large variety of properties used, the playwright had to do two things with his words: first, if the background was indefinite, set the scene; and second, if a detailed sense of the surroundings was necessary, describe the scene.

There are to be found among the plays extant many examples of localising by speech. In "Much Ado About Nothing" Benedict says at the beginning of the orchard scene,

"In my chamber window lies a book; bring it hither to me in the orchard". In Marlowe's "Jew of Malta", II, 3, one of the men in the slave market says, "This is the market-place; here let 'em stand".

Many dramas called heavily upon the powers of description which the author possessed. In Middleton's "Roaring Girl", Sir Alexander Wengrave's guests expressed their admiration for his stately house and furniture in such a way that the audience, who in reality gazed on an almost bare stage, must have felt themselves transported to the rooms described.

Shakespeare, the Genius

The person most able to set a scene with words was William Shakespeare. He called upon the audience to piece out the imperfections of the stage-furnishing with their thoughts, and then he proceeded to describe the scene so vividly that none could fail to visualize it. The trees and flowers of the forest of Arden (1), the mighty ship-wreck which brought mortals to consort with Caliban (2), the moonlit garden of the Capulets, contrasted with the peaceful monastery garden in which Friar Lawrence walked at sunrise among flowers

(1) cf. "As You Like It".

(2) cf. "The Tempest".

and herbs (1): all appeared vividly before the mental eyes.

Before concluding consideration of this chapter, as an illustration of the progress made, let us examine a list of properties typical of the Shakespearian stage. For the play of "Macbeth" the following articles were needed:-

Act I
Machines for thunder and lightning (Sc.1),
Trap door for entrance of witches (Sc. 1),
A drum to sound Macbeth's entrance (Sc. 3),
Trap door for entrance of witches (Sc. 3),
A letter for Lady Macbeth to read (Sc. 5),
Hautboys (Sc. 6),
Hautboys and torches (Sc. 7),
Procession of servants carrying food for the banquet, (Sc. 7),

Act II
Torch for Fleance (Sc. 1),
Dagger for Macbeth to draw (Sc. 1),
A bloody dagger for Macbeth (Sc. 1),
"Alarum" bell to ring off-stage (Sc. 1),

Act III
Bugle to sound at the entrance of Macbeth (Sc. 1),
Torch for Banquo and Fleance (Sc. 3),
Banquet table, food, wine, and glasses (Sc. 4),
Blood for the murderer's face (Sc. 4),
A trap door for the ghost to rise through (Sc. 4),
Chairs for the guests and for the ghost of Banquo to sit on (Sc. 4),
One or several traps for the entrance of the witches and of Hecate (Sc. 5),
Some illusion of a cloud and on it a sprite come to call Hecate (Sc. 5),
Music and singers for witches' scene (Sc. 5),

Act IV
A cauldron for the witches, and bits of material to put in it to represent the necessary ingredients (Sc. 1),
Scenic effect of an armed head, an apparition of a bloody child, and an apparition of a child crowned and with a tree in his hand (Sc. 1),
A glass for the last of the line of kings to carry; the glass to show a representation of a long line of kings (Sc. 1),
Daggers for the murderers (Sc. 2),

(1) cf. "Romeo and Juliet".

Act V A taper for Lady Macbeth (Sc. 1),
Drum and colours for the soldiers (Sc. 2),
Trumpets and swords for the soldiers (Scs. 4, 6, 7, & 8),
Branches for the soldiers to pick up (Sc. 6),
Macbeth's head for Macduff to bring in (Sc. 8).

Everything that could be shown was shown, and what could not be shown was conveyed imaginatively.

Summary

Shakespeare and his contemporaries used only the necessary properties and they were able to fill the gaps with their powers of description. Everything that could be placed upon the stage was placed there, however, and there was a larger variety of properties than before. Towards the middle of the Seventeenth century a love of display made the selection of properties less careful, and the theory of necessity gave way somewhat to that of spectacle.

Chapter 4 The English Stage during the Restoration and Eighteenth Century

The amount of furniture used in the late Seventeenth century was less than that used on the Elizabethan stage, because just when properties were becoming very important in the absence of scenery for purposes of locating the scene and building up atmosphere, scenery came to take their place. When the theatres were reopened after the Restoration, stages elevated toward the back came into favour, and the shortening of the apron with the gradual moving back of the stage doors was accompanied by the use of flat pieces of painted canvas, placed in grooves running crossways over the stage.(1) It was these moveable flats which "set" the scene, and on these flats was painted all the furniture implied by the setting but not necessary to the action of the play.

Magnificence

After that period when the Commonwealth forbade the presentation of drama, the reopening of the theatres brought to the public all the stupendous effects of the Court masque; plays produced by Dryden, Shadwell, and D'Urfey had

(1) cf. Wren's designs for "The Seige of Rhodes".

as their object the utilization of effects of the more spectacular kind, with many machines to produce cloud-breakings and chair-sinkings, reminiscent of the early European opera. (1) Then the splendour was gradually reduced and the spectacle created by the machines was later replaced in part by effects achieved in scenery, but it was not until the last quarter of the Eighteenth century that people really tired of the stupendous and elegantly gorgeous.

The state of stage magnificence during this period was worthy of attention. Richard Flecknoe, commenting on the settings of his time, remarked, "Ours now for cost and ornament are arrived at the height of magnificence".(2) Downes wrote of the new glories of "Macbeth": "new Cloaths, new Scenes, Machines, as flyings for the Witches, with all the Singing and Dancing".(3) Colley Cibber, in speaking of the revival of Dryden's "All for Love" in 1718, said that the "habits" of the play cost nearly six hundred pounds, a sum much greater than the producers had hitherto been accustomed to lay out, but which paved the way for the tremendous expenses of other productions of about the same date.(4)

(1) cf. Pepys' "Diary", June 13th, 1663; scenes "very fine indeed and well worth seeing"; and March 19th, 1665-66; "The Machines are fine, and the paintings very pretty".

(2) cf. "Discourse on the English Stage", 1660.

(3) cf. "Roscius Anglicanus", p. 33.

(4) cf. "Apology", II, pp. 175-176.

Wycherley and Congreve composed plays which called for spectacle and pantomime because the audiences for whom they wrote preferred to be shown surprising effects rather than realistic acting. The dramatist was forced to subordinate himself to the machines; and as the years went by scenery and properties played a very important part in the success or failure of plays, so that managers impoverished themselves to glut the eager tastes of a show-loving public. Goldsmith, in several of his essays considered that state of affairs, and at one time wrote of the "paradise of paper" prepared by the carpenter. It was a paradise that the public demanded, particularly in the late Seventeenth century.

The comments of a Chinese observer, as imagined by the same writer, informs us that he used to leave the theatre, "his whole mind being filled with a dead march, a funeral procession, a cat-call, a jig, or a tempest".(1) This quotation might easily have referred to some of the performances of Shakespeare's plays, for in the larger theatres, since the lights and the acoustics left much to be desired, only the broadest spectacles could be successful. Carefully chosen properties gave way to elaborate scenery and to spectacle with its complement of music and dancing. It was indeed an effective era though a little lacking in taste.

(1) cf. Goldsmith's "Oriental Observer".

Properties to Convey Location

We have already remarked that with the advent of scenery properties were no longer so necessary for the determination of locale, since a painted scene often took the place of a property in denoting the climate or the time of year. However, this objective of locating the scenes with properties was not entirely lost sight of. Often the introduction of table and chairs against a background previously used could alter the locality of a particular scene; and this was the case in D'Avenant's "The Man's the Master", in which the scene was at one moment Don Ferdinand's house and at another a different place, as shown by the departure of the characters and the entrance of two servants carrying five chairs and a table spread with linen and cutlery; apparently, though properties were brought on, no scenery accompanied this scene, as one of the servants was made to explain the location.

Properties to Convey Character

Scenery can help to imply the location of a scene, but it cannot take the place of properties for characterization. In the elaborate plays of the Restoration there was not the need for symbolism of properties that had appeared in the Miracle plays, because dramatists had since learned to build up character by means of action and description; but hand-properties still played an important

part, as witnessed by some of the contemporary writers. In the forty-second of the Spectator Papers Addison remarked that "another mechanical method for making great men is to accompany them with halberds and battle-axes". James Ralph said that he defied "any of our best tragick Bards so readily to give an audience a true Idea of a Queen, by the noblest Sentiments or finest language, as the Wardrobe Keeper can by half a Dozen lac'd Pages, and as many Yards of embroidered Tail".(1) Thus, properties worked along with costumes for delineation of character.

Properties to Assist Action

Addison commented upon the usefulness of the handkerchief in the registering of grief; and at that time of grandiloquent gesture, weeping, and ranting, there must have been many such articles listed among the properties.(2) One of the producers' favourite devices for arousing pity and terror was the showing of torture instruments and the remains of battles strewn around the stage. To make realistic the many battle scenes which appeared in contemporary plays there were required among the stage furnishings of the Restoration theatres innumerable representations of human torsos, legs, arms, and heads. Addison described the stage as "strewed

(1) cf. "The Taste of the Town", p. 82.

(2) Many critics complained of this ranting, among them Addison, Dryden, and Goldsmith.

with carcasses" and the wardrobe of the playhouse as containing "daggers, poniards, wheels, bowls for poison, and many other instruments of death".(1)

Remains of Elizabethan Custom

Before going on to a consideration of the novelties of the Restoration stage, let us look at its heritage from the Elizabethan stage.

Beds

The hauling around of beds became out-dated about this time, but like the chair of state they did not at once altogether disappear. "Zanti" and "Mandane", in Murphy's "The Orphan of China", were brought forward on a couch. Also in Dryden's "The Rival Ladies", Act V, there was a direction, "Bed draws in".

Lights

Although chandeliers of candles were by that time in use on the stage, lighting effects had not greatly advanced. It is possible that many of the stage lights were removed or extinguished for night scenes, but the result was far from our modern realism. Lights were still among the properties required for a large number of Restoration and Eighteenth century dramas. In Cibber's "Love Makes a Man" (1701), there is a reference to a servant --

(1) cf. "The Spectator Papers", No. 44.

"who comes in hastily" with a "Flambeau" (1), and in the next scene Elvira and her servants enter with lights.

Traps

Traps were still in use in the Eighteenth century and were among the numerous effects of Dryden's "Albon and Albanius". As long as the love for spectacle remained, so long were traps doing constant duty; the last act of Dryden's "King Arthur" included a cave rising out of the ground "to a soft tune". In many cases one trap was not sufficient for the needs of the spectacles and properties, and "The Indian Emperor", played at the Theatre Royal, seems to have used three traps all at the same time. Even the apron apparently possessed these openings, for the Prologue of Lansdowne's "Jew of Venice" (1701) is thought to have been spoken before the curtain, and the "Ghosts of Shakespeare and Dryden (arose) Crown'd with Lawrel". As in Elizabethan times, some of the traps must have been very large in order to accomodate the effects raised through them.

Cardboard Figures

Stationary figures disappeared from the properties of the Restoration theatres, and in their place there appeared the queer phenomena of stationary figures painted on the flats and contrasting with the living actors. The fire scene in "The Island Princess" showed figures which

(1) cf. Act III, Scene 2.

were painted on flats, presumably fleeing from the conflagration along with the actors.

Discoveries

On the Restoration stage there remained the apron jutting into the pit; this one might have conceived as corresponding to the outer stage of the Elizabethans, and it was on the back stage that the few necessary properties were placed. This back stage with its scenes in grooves, still made possible the discoveries so dear to the hearts of the Elizabethan audiences. A few examples will serve to prove that such was the case: in Dilke's "The Lover's Luck", III, 4, the "scene opens to Colonel Bellair's Chamber, and discovers Bellair - - - he rises and comes forward"; in Lee's "Lucius Junius Brutus", IV, 1, "The Scene draws, showing the Sacrifice"; in Dryden's "An Evening's Love", IV, 2, "The Scene opens and discovers Aurelia"; and in Gataker's "The Jealous Clown", Scene IV, the scene "opens and discovers Leonora reading".

One of the most peculiar uses which this scene drawing served was the revelation of some murdered man or some scene of torture; in Mallet's "Mustapha", V, 9, the back scene opening discovered the mutes and soldiers in attitudes of grief around the body of Mustapha; and in Rowe's "The Royal Convert", V, 3, the scene drew to reveal instruments of torture; these were only two of the many horror effects produced by means of discoveries.

Types of Properties

On his visit to the tiring rooms Pepys was moved to remark upon the mixture of things to be found in them: "here a wooden leg, there a ruff, here a hobby horse, there a crown".(1)

In other authors' writings references were made to the effects achieved by some of the presentations; in "The Adventures of Five Hours" for instance, there was a novel scenic effect of a rising moon. This type of thing, and even more ambitious efforts, was achieved by the makers of practicable properties. De Loutherbourg was the greatest genius of his time in contriving spectacle, and under his hand and guidance solid and seemingly solid hills and other such scenic properties were raised on the stage. Even the sea was vividly imitated by means of a painted cloth waved by men or by a series of cylinders rolling and turning underneath it; and the fire scenes were realistically brilliant.(2)

In 1640 "Byeplay", referring to "Peregrine" in Brome's comedy of "The Antipodes", 1640, described properties thus,

> "Our statues and our images of gods,
> Our planets and our constellations,
> Our giants, monsters, furies, beasts, and bugbears,
> Our helmets, shields and vizors, hairs and beards,
> Our pasteboard marchpanes and our wooden pies."

(1) cf. Pepys' "Diary", March 19th, 1668.

(2) cf. Pepys' "Diary", January 7th, 1668-69, "a good scene of a town on fire".

There was an amusing list of properties cited in the "Tatler". These were supposedly the possessions of Drury Lane Theatre then being turned over to Collier by Christopher Rich, as the result of a legal suit. It included:

> A sea, consisting of a Dozen large Waves, the Tenth bigger than ordinary, and a little damaged,
> A Dozen & a half of Clouds, trimm'd with Black, and well conditioned,
> A Rainbow a little faded,
> A Set of Clouds after the French Mode, streaked with lightning, and furbelow'd,
> A New-Moon, something decay'd,
> A Setting-Sun, a Pennyworth,
> A Mustard-Bowl to make Thunder with,
> Spirits of Right 'Nants' Brandy, for Lambent Flame and Apparitions,
> Three Bottles and a half of Lightning,
> One shower of Snow in the Whitest French Paper,
> Two Showers of Snow of a browner Sort,
> A Coach very finely gilt, and little used with a Pair of Dragons, to be sold cheap,
> A Basket-Hilt Sword, very convenient to carry Milk in,
> A Wild-Boar kill'd by Mrs. Tofts and Dioclesian,
> A Serpent to sting Cleopatra,
> Six Elbow-Chairs, very expert in Country-Dances, with Six Flower-Pots for their Partners,
> Modern Plots, commonly known by the Name of Trap-Doors,
> Ladders of Ropes,
> Visard-Masques,
> Tables with broad Carpets over them,
> Three Oak-Cudgels, with one of Crab-Tree, all bought for the Use of Mr. Penkethman,
> Aurengzebe's Seymeter, made by Will Brown in Piccadilly,
> Also Swords, Halberts, Sheep-Hooks, Cardinals Hats, Turbants, Drums, Gally Pots, a Gibbet, a Cradle, a Rack, a Cartwheel, an Altar, a Helmet, a Back-Piece, a Brest-Plate, a Bell, a Tub, and a Jointed Baby.

A catalogue of scenery and properties belonging to the Theatre Royal in Crow Street, Dublin, 1776, included:

> Bow, quiver, and bonnet for Douglas,
> Jobson's bed,
> Juliet's bier,
> Juliet's balcony,
> A small map for Lear,
> Tomb for the Grecian Daughter,
> One shepherd's hat,

Four small paper tarts,
Three pasteboard covers for dishes,
An old toy fiddle,
One goblet,
Twenty-eight candlesticks for dressing,
and six washing basons, one broke, and
four black pitchers,
Eleven metal thunder-bolts, sixty-seven
wood ditto, five stone ditto,
Three baskets for thunder balls,
Rack in "Venice Preserved",
Elephant in "The Enchanted Lady", very bad,
Alexander's car,
One pair of sea-horses,
Six gentlemen's helmets,
Altar piece in "Theodosius",
The statue of Osiris,
Water-fall,
Frost scene in "King Arthur",
One sedan chair for the pantomime,
The scaffold in "Venice Preserved",
Several old pantomime tricks and useless pieces
of scenes.

Stock Properties

The above list shows that stage decoration was still a matter of stock properties. Many of the set pieces, such as islands, groves, a shell, and a fountain, were properties staple enough to be kept from year to year for use in various plays; and since we know that just this was done with scenery, it is likely that elaborate properties were used as long and as often as they would hold together. Stage directions in the manuscripts tell us that the same scenery was often used for different plays. Oulton's "History of the Theatres" informs the reader that in 1790, at Covent Garden, was produced "The Crusade", an historical romance, written by Mr. Reynolds with the purpose of introducing some scenery which

had been painted for an unsuccessful play.(1)

Incongruity

In a letter signed "Dramaticus" which appeared in the "Gentleman's Magazine" for May, 1789, it was stated that anacronisms in the Eighteenth century were the result not so much of a lack of knowledge, as of a lack of attention on the part of the stage hands. However, there was one incongruity that was not brought about by such carelessness; and this was a carpet which was usually spread for the death scenes, to protect the gowns and suits of the actresses and actors. Goldsmith, in a description of the stage, mentioned this carpet: "scene shifting, trumpets sounding, mobs hallooing, carpets spreading, guards bustling from one door to another, gods, demons, daggers, racks, and ratsbane". In the first issue of the "Bee", October 6th, 1759, Goldsmith again referred to the carpet in a chiding tone, and mentioned the spreading of it punctually at the beginning of a death scene in order to prevent the actors from spoiling their clothes. This property must still have been in use in 1773, since a foot-note in Bell's edition of "Macbeth" touched on it, and Mrs. Bellamy spoke of it in connection with her quarrel with Woffington over the dresses worn by Roxana and Statira.

(1) The play was not a good one; in fact drama did not improve by these methods.

Summary

During the Eighteenth century the stage was very bare, with only such furniture as was actually demanded by the drama or needed to fulfil startling effects; the rest of the furniture, bookcases, sideboards, chairs, and tables, were frankly painted on the wings and on the back-drop, by the side of the painted mantelpieces, the painted windows, and the painted doors.(1) When however, the action required properties, they could be displayed on the back of the stage by the withdrawing of the side wings; or if the scene was on the forward stage, the properties were shoved on or brought on in view of the audience. As on the Shakespearean stage, the theory of having only necessary properties was adhered to during the Restoration period and the Eighteenth century, with the properties tending more and more to stay behind the proscenium arch.

(1) cf. Brander Matthews' "A Book About the Theatre", Chap. 9.

Chapter 5 The Nineteenth Century and Realism

To a present-day audience that knows only our modern version of the box set, replete with lighting and mechanical effects of the most recent vintage, the three-walled space depicted on the stage must seem a careful unit which could not have occurred except in its complete state, born full-grown as it were. On the contrary, the box set did not materialize in one sudden instant before the eyes of a breathlessly waiting public, but was gradually developed over the last half of the Nineteenth century from its original simple lines to the more complex ones which were necessary to the complete development of realism. Realism itself evolved gradually over the entire Nineteenth century, until it achieved its purest form in the last decade of that century.

Development of the Box Set

The box set came as the final aspect of the wing-type interior. Even as far back as the end of the Eighteenth century people had begun to feel that it was unnatural for actors to go walking through wainscoting and plaster walls, as they apparently did when leaving the stage.(1) Therefore, in 1841 the side wings were changed from a position

(1) Periodical comment of the late Eighteenth century gave expression to this opinion.

horizontal to the proscenium to one parallel to it, and Boucicault produced "London Assurance" with a box set. By this time the proscenium doors had been moved back behind the proscenium, and they were placed in the side walls of the scene so that those who entered an interior set did so naturally through these doors. For some time box sets with three walls built up and one imagined, existed side by side with sets composed of half a dozen wings horizontal to the curtain line; but eventually the older gave place to the new, and the last quarter of the Nineteenth century saw little else but box interiors, except for dramas presented in the very oldest theatres.

The box set and its development was of the same root as the realism which was expressed in scenery and properties.

Development of Realism

Advocates

At the beginning of the Nineteenth century, as in the Eighteenth, painted scenery and painted properties were the habit. The Kembles were the first of the new school which tried to introduce real things into plays; for instance, in "Ladoiska", a melodrama, Kemble triumphantly entered on a real white horse. Next, Samuel Phelps employed professional artists to plan dresses and accessories with a view to the whole stage picture; and at "Wells" he gave the "Tempest" a mimic ship

tossed on a sea. Fechtner followed with important reforms in dress, scenery, and decoration. Charles Kean was more given to elaborateness than Phelps, and so he did not do the imaginative plays as well as the historical dramas of Shakespeare, but his "Richard II" and "Henry VIII" were produced lavishly with exceeding care, and were the type of play which could not be choked with heraldic archeology, as had been the case with some of the other plays which Kean produced. Robertson forsook the timid approach to realism which had found expression in the garb and habits of Classicism and the Moyen Age, and he introduced the realism of the middle classes, the same Bohemianism that the Pre-Raphaelites fostered. Robertson elaborated every minutest detail of acting and scenery, and he scattered furniture about the stage in the greatest profusion. Barret, after a struggle, accepted the realism of the "Drama of the Dials", and produced "the real article"; he engaged the denizens of frowsy courts and alleys with their barrows and the cabbages which during their day's labour they had failed to sell, and with this scene, made low and demoralizing, he satisfied the public taste. For a time this kind of realism ran rampant, and then it was given to a few men, among them Irving by his feeling for line and colour, to lift Realism to a nobler plane. Thereafter, even the style of Irving was exchanged for a stage free of all but the necessary properties, and the drama of the Twentieth century shook off irrelevant detail.

The Public

Although pantomime instead of realistic methods of spectacle and acting was popular right up to the last quarter of the Nineteenth century, details such as properties had to be real and exact and perfect. The interest in the classic, the antique, and the humble, which was a part of art appreciation in the Nineteenth century, made the audience express an entire sympathy with realism on the stage, even in its most exaggerated phase.

The Physical Stage

At that period lighting had achieved a new brilliancy calculated to make the stage more life-like, and yet minimizing the effect of simpler scenes which had been more realistic in the dull light of a century earlier. The old lamps had been followed by gas systems, and these were replaced by electric light so that in 1890 gas was being superseded on all sides.

Efforts toward realism in flats resulted in the substitution of solid three-dimensioned units for flat painted effects. In place of such painters as Lutherbourg, David Roberts, and Clarkson Stanfield, who had treated each of their scenic pictures as individual efforts apart from the whole, house directors were called in to handle an entire scene or play; and what had formerly been an illusion of the painter's brush was built up by labourers under the direction of these managers.

Costume received its first impetus toward authenticity from Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble, and it was soon on the way to the perfect realism of the last ten years of the Nineteenth century.

With such progress in lighting, costuming, and scenery, properties could not stand still. Articles on the stage, instead of being painted on painted shelves on painted walls, were placed on shelves built out from the walls. Indeed, the chief factor of realism was the use of real objects instead of artificial ones, and stage accessories eventually became so substantial that the actors began to have a sort of shadowy look. Architectural details were solidly reproduced in heavily timbered carpenter's work; the interior scene of firm and well-built aspect was supplied with all the furniture that would normally be in a home; there appeared raised grassy banks that might deceive a geologist; and real water adorned the woodland scene. Instead of painted trees, there appeared huge poles which achieved natural form by means of tons of virgin cork smeared over with a smudge pot. An over-stuffed age required an over-stuffed stage.

Use of Antiques

Where realism was directed toward historical plays or plays of historical background, it was considered very necessary to have every detail correct, even to the use of furniture which dated from the period of the play. This

led managers to place antiques upon the stage, thereby satisfying the public's love of authenticity and antiquarianism and spectacle, all at one time. In the Eighties the property maker was not so busy as in the previous fifty years, but in his place there appeared a research worker whose business it was to produce the real thing, whether it were a real pump, real water, real cabs, real horses, or real china.

Types of Properties

Some of the properties put upon the stage during the era of realism were startling.(1) Determined to have a "run of some kind", Fitzball introduced into "Paul Clifford" a stage coach and six real horses. Matthews and Vestris produced in 1841 Boucicault's "London Assurance", using "not stage properties, but bona fide realities", including real street lamps, hansom cabs, flaming buildings and so forth. In Boucicault's "Streets of London", a real cab and a real fire engine performed the chief parts. Charles Reade's "It's Never Too Late to Mend", in 1865, presented a working tread-mill and a modern prison. The banquet scene in "As You Like It" became a regal repast; and whereas a few painted articles used to do for a whole meal, tremendous repasts of real food were obligatory to realism. For "The Seige of Gibraltar" there were real ships of one hundred, seventy-four, and sixty guns,

(1) There is an interesting list of scenery and properties given at the beginning of Peake's "Three Wives of Madrid".

built, rigged, and manoeuvered in the most correct manner. Such were the true-to-life spectacles offered the public, and described at length on play-bills and advertisements.

Use of Live Animals

The prologues to many of the plays of the Nineteenth century give ample evidence of the use of animals in the drama of that time. Not only were the adjuncts of some plays real but also living. The prologue of Dibdin's "Of Age Tomorrow" catalogued among the properties of the play: cows, camels, steeds, pigs, apes, and elephants; and for a drama, Osbaldistone hired a group of animals from the Surrey Zoological Gardens. A real elephant, "Chunee" by name, was used at Drury Lane; and a real horse and cab was one of the outstanding features in "The Road of Life", 1844.

Acting of Shakespeare

Shakespeare as it was acted after the advent of the box set was a queer mixture indeed. At times it appeared with all the art of machinists given a free hand; at other times with the pantomimic circus presentation that for a while had delighted the hearts of the Eighteenth century theatre-goers; sometimes the antiquarian instinct of the producer led him to satisfy the truth-loving public with real and historically correct scenery and furniture; and as a climax to it all, even while the audiences were just getting used to realistic production,

they were being treated to Shakespeare in the manner which at that time was accredited to the Shakespearians. H. G. Tomlins, in his "A Brief View of the English Stage" cited the presentation of Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew" in modified Elizabethan setting, the actors playing against curtains and title-boards.

Last Vestiges of Elizabethan Staging

In the Nineteenth century there remained on the stage but little of the Elizabethan custom. A new physical stage made earlier methods unsuitable.

No longer were scenes of a few lines thrown in to explain a bit of plot; and the phenomena of a few pieces of furniture changing the locale was dead for a while at least. Each scene had a definite background.

As the plays became more unified, some of the clumsy effects disappeared. Beds were not, as in older presentations, drawn on and off the stage before the eyes of the audience. The chief reason for this change lay in the fact that the front, or "Act", curtain, closing the proscenium arch, had become in the Nineteenth century a definite part of stage equipment, so that if a bed was suddenly needed it was a simple thing to lower the curtain while the piece of furniture was brought on. Since the curtain was doing steady duty discoveries could also be made by its use.

Lights were still numbered among hand properties,

but were not so necessary for an indication of the hour because the time of day could be made much more apparent by the new gas and electric lighting systems than by the property lights. The latter were used to satisfy the craving for authenticity which demanded that an interior scene be fitted up with the same means of illumination as a real house possessed.

Except for "thrillers", then coming gradually into vogue, there was very little use made of traps. They must still have existed, as they were at times used and the same theatres which had presented plays in the years of spectacle were still producing, but traps were not so apparent as theretofore, and in the "Quarterly Review" of 1854 it was stated that the passion for trap-doors and red and blue lights had much declined.

Properties to Assist Action

Where properties cluttered the stage the things which were really necessary to the action of the piece at times showed signs of being lost among the unnecessary furniture, but at least there were available all the articles which were needed to fulfil the demands of the action or to elaborate it.

Properties to Convey Character

Under the code of Realism, the old symbolism of

properties to represent character gave place somewhat to such representation by means of costume; and because of the descriptive and detailed style of costumes there was less need for very detailed stage accessories. Yet in the mass of furniture which covered the stage there still appeared some pieces which served to help characterize the members of the cast.

Properties to Convey Location

In the Nineteenth century dramatists were no longer called upon to depict the background with such vivid description as in Shakespeare's age; all this was accomplished by the scene painter and the scene setter, and as the century neared its end a most marvellous accuracy and profusion of property detail came to prevail. This helped to make the locations of the plays very clear, although it often also led to ugliness parading under the cloak of art.

Properties to Convey Atmosphere

With the greater brilliancy, accuracy, and pliability of lighting supplied by gas and electricity, the burden of properties in portraying mood was lessened, for atmosphere can be conveyed more readily with light than with the less mobile stage furniture. However, the producers thought it necessary to make properties live up to the light, rather than give up to it.

Incongruity

It is now essential to consider whether in an age of realism we can find any marks of incongruity. Properties were in themselves authentic, but an extreme artistic incongruity appeared in the Eighties and Nineties; and even during the earlier part of the Nineteenth century the producers were seeking after too many ideals to achieve pure congruity. They aimed now at spectacle, now at realism, and now at historical accuracy, so that their motives were never pure. The ideals of illusion had become buried under a load of furnishing; and the stage was so real that it ceased to seem real. Ugliness was apparent where beauty was intended.

Shakespeare's Ideal

Since Shakespeare advocated only necessary properties, it is apparent that Realism fell short of his ideal. Some of the properties used on the box sets of that time could not plead even atmosphere as their objective, since their realness destroyed dramatic belief.

Partly to gratify the passion for bric-a-brac, furniture was pushed into undue prominence; and even in historical plays, where Realism was most applicable, unfamiliar details of furnishing often distracted the audience's mind from the lines of the actor. John Hollingshead, writing for the "Fortnightly Review" in 1883, described the floor as loaded with furniture until the "drama was half buried under tons of

clumsy solidity".(1)

Certainly there was no need to piece out the imperfections with one's thoughts, but to hold the mirror up to nature as it was held in the Nineteenth century was to distort the reflection. Shadows and realities ought not to be mixed together in the same piece; scenes that are designed as representations of nature should be filled with resemblances and not with the things themselves; a stage picture wherein a pillar painted with a brush is surmounted with a capital in relief only serves to drive home the fact that the whole picture is a sham. Even animals, from sheer reality and spontaneity of action, upset the reality of the stage. Critics complained of the drama in the Nineteenth century, as Addison complained of imported Italian drama in the Eighteenth, criticising the blending of unreal with real.

Summary

Realism brought about a desire for authenticity, and in the last quarter of the Nineteenth century a profusion of properties was displayed on the box set. Details had to be the real thing or exactly perfect copies of the real thing, and the stage was crowded with a great quantity of furniture, often interesting only from an historical point of view, and lacking in any artistic value. The place of the property-man

(1) cf. "Fortnightly Review", September 1st, 1883: Vol. 40, p. 456.

was taken over by the research worker, so that drama was overburdened with too much scholarly truth and reality.

Chapter 6 The Twentieth Century and Stage Properties

Innumerable methods of production are within reach of the modern producer: through what is known of drama in the past, he may stage his play in the manner of the Sixteen, Seventeen, or Eighteen hundreds; or he may choose to adopt methods evolved in this present century, and to have at his disposal as large an assortment as was available in all the previous centuries put together. He has also a large variety of historical and contemporary plays to choose from, particularly the latter, which include many types catering to the restless and wandering interests of today's theatre-going public.

The New Spirit and Properties

To take the place of that true-to-life abundance advocated by the realists there has come, not a new kind of over-stuffing, but several methods of presenting only the most essential parts of a drama. Now we believe that illusion is not helped by the introduction of all the characteristics which we might meet with in the homes of our friends, but that our imagination is aided by the setting forth of only such characteristics as will lead us insensibly to the emotions or passions which it is the object of the drama to arouse. To do this there can no longer be the

unrelated mass of furnishing which before this we at times associated with dramatic production, and in its place there must be theatrical design. This design will not be purely scenic and pictorial, but a combination of decoration and building that by means of "theatrical architecture" will help to create one single whole. "Stylization" is the name given to the manner of executing a play with the aim of achieving artistic unity; it implies a harmony of the settings with the essential tone of the piece, of one setting with another throughout, and of each property with every other one.

The pattern used in the production of the play comes from the play itself; the stage decoration must reflect the mood, or the inner soul, of the play. From the beginning of drama we have always had at least a simple background for the words spoken, and gradually locale became more and more clearly defined until it reached its apex in the school of the Realists, but now locale as an objective gives place to mood. Among the plays which centre attention not on the beautiful stage picture, but on the interpretation of the inner meaning of the play through the medium of scenery and a few carefully selected properties is "The Hairy Ape", by Eugene O'Neill, as staged with Robert Edmond Jones' and Cleon Throckmorton's designs.

Let us consider what the effect of this new spirit is in regard to those objects called properties, and by which we may mean anything from a statue, a fountain, a

bench or a chair, down to a dish, a fan, or any article whatsoever. To the designing and making of these objects the same principles are applied and observed as in the making of the pieces of scenery, for they are part of the whole and require the same care as all the rest. They must be designed with the total stage picture in view, and carefully selected to represent the soul of the play, thus contributing to the artistic unity of the drama, and giving to the furnishings a finer beauty and quality(1)

Some centuries ago, the property-man when asked for a chair, supplied any one at hand, and the result was satisfactory; still later, under Realism, he was required to obtain a chair of a certain period, possibly even of certain dimensions; but in the Twentieth century a chair must have not only style and size but also colour and feeling, so that it will fit into the total stage picture and bear its share in representing the inner meaning of the drama.

The Designer in Place of the Property-Man

In the Nineteenth century the carpenter took over the work of the painter, but in the Twentieth century the carpenter collaborates with the artist. The property-man has disappeared from his former position as a man who could make the real out of the unreal, or as a man who with a bit of research could produce the authentic article, and he has become

(1) cf. "The Exemplary Theatre" by Harley Granville Barker.

either a workman executing orders in building and furnishing or else the designer of the stage picture.(1) Those who actually make the accessories do so under the direct supervision of a leader who, even if he does not do the work himself, must know how his properties should be made, painted, and finished.

Sponsors of the New Spirit and Properties

The new outlook in drama for a while simmered below the surface and then in the present century boiled over. As a conscious tendency the movement toward artistic stage setting goes no farther back than the beginning of the Twentieth century, but for many years preceding there were experiments of one sort or another and an expression of theories that looked forward to modern times.

Sir Herbert Tree in his ornate sets presented our last reminder of the elaborateness of the Eighteen Nineties, and on the turn of the century stage sets were on the whole artificial, realistic, and horrible.

David Belasco showed a modern conception of the value of light, but nevertheless he made sacrifices to the God of Plenty and cluttered his stage with properties in an effort to achieve realism.(2)

(1) cf. "Design in the Theatre" by George Sheringham.

(2) cf. Illustrations of Belasco's sets in Sheldon Cheney's "The New Movement in the Theatre".

While the advocates of realism were still presenting their conception of drama some men were evolving new theories. In the last decade of the Nineteenth century the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen and Adolphe Appia were presenting some novel ideas of a three-dimensioned drama, as opposed to the old two-dimensioned form.

The Duke of Saxe-Meiningen established the dramatic value of the stage picture as an indispensable factor in interpreting the script, and he demonstrated that scenic effects must be fundamentally related to the actor. He anticipated the connection between the physical properties of a stage setting and the kind of acting that was to take place within it, and relating the two was to him an essential part of the director's duty. Instead of first making a picture and letting the actors wander about in it as best they could, he planned his settings so as to fit their movements. He was accustomed to set the lines of the scene only after the movements of the actors had been decided upon, and these in turn were based on the position of those properties essential to the action of the play. This producer also integrated the entire production, designing every detail down to hand properties, such as swords, canes, pikes, and so forth.(1)

Under his direction properties became very important; for example, in his "The Maid of Orleans", an

(1) "The Stage is Set", by Lee Simonson, includes a good history of the development of modern dramatic thought.

abandoned wagon, piled high with military paraphernalia, was dragged on the stage, not only for its value in the picture, but also to hide the approach of the French troops whose attack was the dramatic apex of the scene.

Adolphe Appia was the first to feel that the painted illusion of the third dimension was negatived when set on a stage where the third dimension was real. He conceived the stage area as one modelled in the form of a balance of asymmetrical, spatial forms, a composition in three dimensions that merged imperceptibly with the conflicting planes which bound the setting as a whole.(1) In his settings Appia does not disregard properties; and he uses them because, like good lighting, they contrast and bring out the plasticity and movement of the human body.

Antoine, in France, passed on to others the idea that scenery and properties can be made to reinforce the mood of the play.(2) According to Antoine's theories properties are a valuable asset to drama, and can themselves act, in that they can be made to reflect the mood which the actors express.

England has been behind the Continent in experimentation and is still pretty well absorbed by representationalism, but Appia's theories are coming more and more to the fore, and meanwhile there are signs of reaction in the work

(1) cf. Adolphe Appia's designs for "Tristan und Isolde", by Wagner, 1896.

(2) cf. Andre Antoine's designs for Shakespeare's "King Lear", as presented at the "Theatre Antoine", Paris, France.

of Gordon Craig and in the influence exerted on the English-speaking nations by Reinhardt and by Russia's experiments.(1)

Arthur Symons and others have spread Gordon Craig's ideas (2); and working along the same lines as Gordon Craig are: Granvill Barker, Norman Wilkinson, Albert Rutherson Nash, and Fraser; and in America, Geddes, Jones, Urban, Simons, and Helvenston.

With both Reinhardt and Craig fewer properties than before are used, but there is more ingenuity in their construction.(3) Properties not only fit into Craig's ideas, but he places them before the actor. In the course of describing his conception of the "regisseur", he pictures the director as drawing his stage plan, not with the actors in mind but with a view to the artistic placing of the necessary properties, so that the inanimate components are put into the picture before the living parts.(4)

New Styles and their Relation to Properties

One can divide stage settings roughly into three

(1) cf. The design by Ludwig von Hoffmann, (working under Reinhardt) for "Aglavaine et Selysette", by Maeterlinck, as presented at the "Kammerspiele", Berlin, Germany, in 1907.

(2) cf. "Studies in Seven Arts", Chapter entitled "The New Art of the Stage".

(3) cf. Hume and Fuerst's "Twentieth Century Stage Decoration".

(4) For an example of a design including properties see that drawn by Gordon Craig for "The Pretenders", 1926.

sections. Those that are merely a simplification of the old realism are the most numerous, and are often accompanied by the greatly enhanced beauty which simplicity lends. In a second section will be found settings which have no apparent relation to realism, but which have an unmistakable inner form and harmony, so that in a rather mysterious way they convey the true feeling of the scene or situation without pinning that scene down to the particular details of any one time or place.(1) In the third group will be found the same complete departure from realism without any evidence of inner harmony and design; there is a complete negation of the inner or mystical form.(2)

There are several new styles of scene design which have been evolved to produce the above three groups. Among these are Stylization, Simplified Realism, Applied Symbolism, Expressionism, Formalism, Space Stage, and Constructivism.(3)

Simplified Realism is the avoidance of unreality where unreality might be distracting, and it achieves avoidance through the elimination of unconvincing detail rather than by the addition of convincing detail. It tries to keep the stage

(1) The summit of achievement in one such group was the model for the Dante project by Norman Bel Geddes.

(2) cf. "Our Changing Theatre", by R. Dana Skinner, p. 292.

(3) cf. Page 65, Par. 1, of this thesis, for definition of "Stylization".

free of unnecessary items and obvious properties.(1)

Symbolism is a representation by conventions. It is applied to properties rather than to scenery, and is usually used in a modified form, as for example, a tree to denote a wood.(2)

Expressionism is the expression of the artist's self rather than what he sees. His reaction is expressed both in scenery and properties, and the properties are often very far from lifelike, since the artist does not strive to paint the objects themselves but the emotions aroused in his mind by those objects.(3)

Under the sway of Formalism the background belongs to the stage rather than to the play. It usually consists of a skeleton setting which depends on the draperies and properties to give it locale, colour, and atmosphere. With the same background throughout the play, a greater variety of furnishing is needed to depict the varying aspects of the

(1) cf. Woodman Thompson's design for "The Firebrand" by Mayer, as presented at the "Morosco Theatre", New York, U.S.A., in 1924.

(2) cf. Madame Parr's design for "L'homme et son Desir" by Claudel, as presented at the Swedish Ballet, Paris, France.

(3) cf. Design for Werfel's "Bocksgesang" by Lee Simonson, as presented by The Theatre Guild, New York, U.S.A., in 1926, and
Design for Hasenclever's "Beyond", by Robert Edmond Jones, as produced by The Provincetown Playhouse, New York, U.S.A., in 1925.

theme presented throughout the acts, so properties are an important part of this style of staging. Sometimes this Formalism is linked with Plasticism, a theory based on the belief that everything should be represented in the round.(1)

The Space Stage advocates an equal accent upon each of the three dimensions. It consists of levels in space with here an intimation of architecture or there the furnishings of a room. The Space Stage reveals only the significant parts of the play, but it does not eliminate properties completely; on the contrary it uses accessories cleverly so as to bring out the inner meaning of the drama by stressing its significant parts.(2) In Appia's symphony of light and shadow as conceived for Act Two of "Tristan and Isolda" a bench, placed in the stage front, served to weld and accent the action of the play in keeping with the shifting mood of the scene.

Constructivism often neglects quite intentionally all expression of environment and of mood. It aims at giving the maximum of intensity to the stage movements by establishing different planes for the action, these planes being created by platforms of such height and such depth that the movements of the human body can be fully developed. The stage must not only be stripped of all pretense of presenting a picture, but

(1) cf. Terence Gray's model for a system of luminous screens: Cambridge, England, 1926.

(2) cf. Scenes by J. Hofman for K. H. Hilar's production of "Hamlet", at the Prague National Theatre.

the set must be conceived anti-decoratively. It is usually an agglomeration of stairs, platforms, and runways, held together by plain scaffolding. This, of all the styles of production, makes the least use of properties, for the levels usually presented by chairs and tables can be built right into the structure and thus become scenery; however, if the chair or table must be moveable it still remains a property, and so furniture does not disappear entirely from this stage arrangement.(1)a & b

In Tchekov's "Marriage Proposal" as produced by Hallie Flanagan, in an interesting experiment at Vassar, the same play was produced in the three styles of Realism, Expressionism, and Constructivism, and in each case properties were used.(3)

Light, Colour, and Properties

With all kinds of new discoveries in the field of light facing us, we are apt to wonder if lights could not take the place of properties, at least of those pieces of

(1)a cf. "Theatre Arts Monthly", 11:857-65, November 1927; Sheldon Cheney's "Constructivism". The set for "Desire Under the Elms" made use of only the properties most necessary to the action.

b cf. Boris Aranson's design for "The Bronx Express", by Dymov, as produced at the "Astor Theatre", New York, U.S.A., 1922, and Donald Oenslager's design for "Pinwheel", by Faragoh, as presented at the "Neighbourhood Playhouse", New York, U.S.A., 1927.

(3) cf. "Theatre Arts Monthly", January 1928, Vol. 12, pp.70-1.

furniture that do not serve for action but purely for mood or atmosphere. Could coloured light projected through stencils take their place? Perhaps in the future, but at the present time the only method we know for obtaining a controlled colour scheme of any complexity and subtlety is by painting or dyeing materials, fabrics, properties, and what not. So far light serves only to make movement, form, and colour visible.(1)

Twenty years ago the colours used on the stage were such as would represent the colour of the thing portrayed and that was the end of it. But just as modern art is demanding that the design of the stage picture be satisfactory in itself, so also is it demanding that the colours used be satisfactory as colours. Therefore properties must combine correct and beautiful colouring with dramatic fitness. Their colours must be complex and subtle.

We are nearer now to the colour symbolism of the Middle Ages than we have been for four hundred years. The numerous colours made possible by modern lighting systems have led us to re-develop this ancient method with the object of expressing our present ideas, and so symbolism once more is apparent in properties.

Shakespeare and the Elizabethans

The plays of the Twentieth century are produced

(1) cf. Major Klein's "Colour Music" for a good discussion of light.

quite differently from those staged in the time of Shakespeare. Except in the works of this dramatist presented in the original manner there remain only the smallest remnants of the Elizabethan type of staging.(1) The structural settings used in some theatres are reminiscent of the Seventeenth century during which the placing of a few properties on the stage, chairs, tables, trees in tubs, and screens, served to indicate to the audience the surroundings of the actors and a change of scenery; but on the whole, Elizabethan custom has disappeared from the stage.

Machines

Modern drama makes great use of machines and many of the new styles of stages show a miracle of theatrical device. Our technical age is reflected in stage properties: sometimes the scene is a room decorated as it would be in a home, containing the comfortable appurtenances to be found therein; sometimes it is an expressionistic set with pieces of mechanical furniture moving in time to the rhythm of the play by means of revolving stages or other inventions; and sometimes it is a constructivist setting with machine-made, machine-like stage accessories. A great deal of the scientific thought of the age has been absorbed by the theatre, and is being used (finances permitting) in every department of play production.

(1) William Poel attempted an exact reconstruction of Shakespeare's stage.

Incongruity

In spite of all the ideas of artistic unity which have been advanced in the last few years and of all the technical and mechanical perfection which has been achieved, incongruity is still apparent in drama. The greatest fault, a heritage from the Nineteenth century which still persists in some places, is the overshadowing of the play and the actors with scenery and properties. This habit of decoration now, as in the last century, obscures the meaning of the drama.

Many producers are guilty of mixing their motives so that their objectives contradict each other. However, there is to be seen among the ranks of those who follow the path of the drama and work towards its ultimate perfection, a spirit of progress that is most gratifying, accompanied by a real effort to avoid incongruity of any kind.

Purpose of Properties

Properties are used now, as always, for the purpose of clarifying and adding meaning to action.

Now that nuances of character are important and symbolism in furniture may be employed to an extreme degree working along with costumes, properties have achieved an important position in the matter of painting character. A play, which demands the building up of a very complicated character, will call for many hand properties to aid the costume in portraying the individual and also for many properties to enhance

the action characteristic of the individual. Symbolism has always made the greatest use of properties in presenting its ideas, and now that symbolism is enjoying a period of prosperity, properties are being used more frequently than ever to convey character.(1)

Since carefully localized plays are not as often produced as heretofore, properties are not so much needed to portray locale. In place of depicting nationality and geographical situation, stage adjuncts are doing double duty in the development of mood. Since unity and the expression of correct atmosphere are the cardinal points of the new artistry, it is very important to find furniture which presents the inner value of the play.(2)

Properties help the scenery and lights and costumes and actors to express the soul of the drama. This means that furniture has gained a new dramatic power; contributing

(1) cf. "The Truth About Blayds", as presented in New York, U.S.A., in 1922, in which the picture of Oliver Blayds played an important part. This man was the central figure of the satire, yet he appeared on the stage only once for a few minutes in the first act; it was his portrait that symbolized his overpowering influence upon the lives of his offspring, for the portrait was so skilfully placed by Mr. Norman Bel-Geddes that its importance was never for a moment lost sight of.

(2) As a good example of catching the mood of the play we have the scene built for the pirate ship in "Captain Applejack"; this ship has no reality except in the fevered dream of the central character, and therefore literalism is banished and an excellent effect is achieved.

essentially to the dramatic and theatrical values, it has come into its own as never before.

Shakespeare and his Goal

Shakespeare, when he employed only necessary properties, was aware of the potential dramatic value of those adjuncts, and the fact that he wanted no extraneous matter in his plays showed a desire for dramatic unity. Therefore the careful selection of properties employed in the present day is as Shakespeare advocated.

Summary

The new sets have "a something"; the setting may consist of walls, tables, and chairs, but there is something in the arrangement and order of it all which gives at once stimulation and repose. The "something" is purpose; the scenery and properties are designed with some artistic end in view; our eye centres on this or that spot, while the other parts contrast or lead up to it. Furniture is chosen because it is artistically and dramatically necessary.(1) The scene gives beauty, drama, dramatic emphasis, and subjective meaning, by way of the properties.

(1) cf. "The Theatre of Today", by Hiram Kelly Moderwell, pp. 64-65.

Note - The designs referred to in the foot-notes of this chapter may nearly all be found in "Twentieth Century Stage Decoration", by Samuel J. Hume and Walter Rene Fuerst.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Properties are all the adjuncts of the play except costumes, which are placed on the stage after the surrounding walls have been set up. Plays imitate by action and introduce as real the people taking part in them, and properties are necessary for the appearance of reality desired.

Descriptive articles were carried by the first savages in the mimetic dances which held the primary seeds of the drama; their use can be traced throughout the Greek and Roman eras; and from Mediaeval times up to the present day there has been a continued and growing use of properties throughout the English-speaking nations.

For the earliest religious plays there were used few properties beyond those which the ornaments and vestments of the Church could supply, and these included only such adjuncts as were absolutely necessary to the action and to the representation of character which demanded that one member of the cast be distinct from every other member. Only a scant half dozen articles or so were used for the dramas of the "Nativity" and the "Resurrection".

At first the Miracle and Mystery plays, dramatized on the church porch or in the market-place, were produced with a minimum of properties, as in the "Second Shepherd's Play", but little by little the guilds augmented these, and contributed

furnishing designed to build up an atmosphere and machines invented to add a new glamour to production, as in the rain storm of the Noah's Ark tale, and in the scenes of the beginning of the world depicting Paradise. In Pre-Shakespearean drama properties were used because they added to the action or characterization, never solely because they enhanced the stage picture. Symbolism was extensively employed but it was a crude symbolism.

During the Elizabethan era the Court Theatres were presenting very elaborate masques with a great variety of properties. For a time the Public Theatres were less elaborate but by the middle of the Seventeenth century spectacle was taken over by them and the private theatres became submerged in the public. At that time properties were coming into wider and wider use whereas scenery was improving but little and was used in no greater quantity than before. There was so little actual scenery available that properties were called on to do almost all the work of furnishing the drama, and therefore a large number were in use. Not only were they greater in number but they were much less simple than those used to present the plays of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth centuries; compare the properties in "Antony and Cleopatra" or "The Tempest" with those used in the "York Cycle" of Mystery Plays. Plays were produced with whatever could reasonably be carried on by the actors, lowered from the heavens, raised by traps, or thrust on by forms and wheels; and the inner, or upper stage, served the needs of scenes

which had to be localized or to appear before the audience completely set. In short, everything that could be shown was shown and what could not be shown was conveyed imaginatively.

During the latter part of the Seventeenth century and the Eighteenth century carefully chosen properties gave way to scenery, elaborate machines, and extraordinary effects. There was only a small quantity of every-day furniture, but the stage abounded in properties depicting scenes of torture, death, war, and destruction. The audience took a keen delight in the presentation of the most horrible phases of war, and to satisfy that taste the stage was frequently heaped with seemingly real bits of the human body. Pepys, Addison, and Goldsmith remarked upon this style of stage decoration, expressing disapproval of it. Dramatic furnishing was still a matter of stock properties and in spite of very elaborate spectacle only enough furniture was used as was needed to fulfil the demands of the action. Stage furniture was tending more and more to recede from the apron to a position behind the Proscenium arch. There it amplified the action, leaving it to the stage machines to create whatever atmosphere was thought necessary.

During the Nineteenth century a desire for realism gained a hold on the public until by the last decade of this century it held full sway. Under Realism, details such as properties had to be real, exact, and, in the case of animals, living. Belasco and Irving advocated genuine objects in place of artificial ones whenever possible, and stage accessories

eventually became so substantial that the actors began to seem somewhat shadowy by comparison. Where realism was directed toward historical plays it was thought necessary to have every detail correct even to the use of antiques and museum pieces. Towards the end of the century a marvellous accuracy and profusion of properties came to prevail, and thus furniture was pushed into undue prominence. Properties were fitted into drama not so much to satisfy the demands of the action as to create an atmosphere of authenticity.

In the Twentieth century plays are put upon the stage with the object of bringing out the central meaning of the drama. Scenery and properties reflect the inner feeling and mood of the play, and they are considered a part of the production deserving of as much care as any other part. Stage furniture is carefully selected, and no matter what style of production is favoured properties appear on the stage; Simplified Realism, Applied Symbolism, Space Staging, Expressionism, and Constructivism all make use of at least a few carefully chosen articles of stage furnishing. Such adjuncts are used realistically or symbolically to add meaning to action, to portray place and character, and to develop atmosphere and mood. Two good examples of the correct use of properties were the recent presentations of "Volpone" and "Doctor Faustus" by the English Department of McGill University; for these the accessories were chosen with the greatest care to convey place, character, atmosphere and mood, and so they helped to bring out

all the meaning of the plays. Moving pictures have done this for the drama; their insistence upon accuracy of detail on the screen has brought about accuracy on the legitimate stage; not the verity which prevailed in the last decade of the Nineteenth century, but a selection calculated not to burden the play unduly or quell the imagination. The audience must be entertained with an authentic reproduction of life, but its imagination must be allowed to remain free, and it should not be led to feel itself in a museum.

In conclusion, to present a drama in a satisfactory manner the surroundings must be in keeping with the character of the actors and the mood of the play. To accomplish this properties are most necessary. They are selected with a two-fold object, use and atmosphere, and for this they are invaluable.

From the crude symbolism of properties used for liturgical and guild plays there has been a gradual approach to reality with stage furnishings becoming far more elaborate. In the present day stage accessories are carefully chosen even though sometimes used in large quantities; and indeed, properties cannot be used in too great profusion if wisely selected.

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