A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SAMUEL JAMES HUME'S STAGING THEORIES AND THEATRICAL PRACTICES AT THE ARTS AND CRAFTS THEATRE IN DETROIT, MICHIGAN, FROM 1916 TO 1918

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Speech

Kansas State Teachers College

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

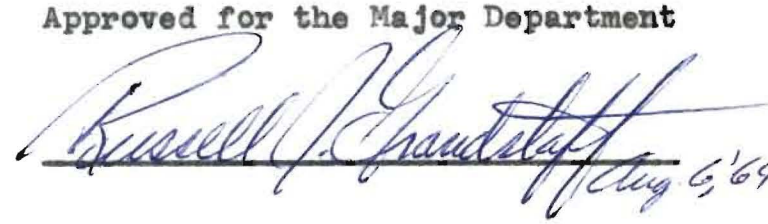
---

by

Ralph E. Miller

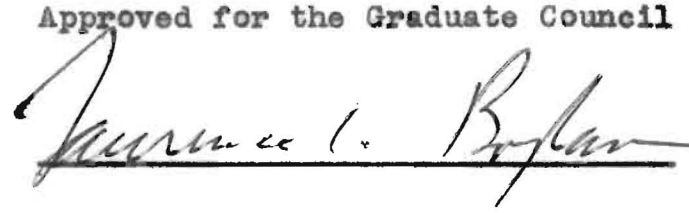
August 1964

Approved for the Major Department



Aug 6, '64

Approved for the Graduate Council



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer is indebted to many wonderful people who made this paper a reality. To Dr. James McTeague for the topic; to Doctors Boylan and Bruder for their time; and a special thanks to Dr. Russell Grandstaff, my advisor, for the guidance, astute criticism, and time he so unselfishly gave me. Also a very special thanks to friends Mr. and Mrs. John N. Botens, and finally to Mr. Gary Mason for the fine photographic work and moral support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER PAGE

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

SAMUEL HUME'S EXPERIENCE LEADS TO A NEW APPROACH TO SCENE DESIGN

I. THE PROBLEM IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There have been many efforts throughout theatre history to build functional and practical stage scenery which is also aesthetically pleasing. From the era of the ancient Greeks to modern times, scene designers have faced limitations of facilities, finances, and other practical considerations when designing scenery for plays. In the first two decades of the twentieth century a faction in the American theatre was battling against the entrenched naturalistic form of drama and scene design. One reason for this revolt is indicated by Mordicai Gorelik in New Theatres for Old:

> The fact was that the post-war, World War I American audience, essentially middle and upper class, were inclined to agree with Maeterlinck. Only the conflicts of the inner life seemed really worthy to be portrayed on the stage. The crass issues of the naturalistic drama were outmoded, even in Belasco's romanticized form. The theater must look for eternal values in these more lofty regions where serenity merges with art. The object of production was no longer primarily to bring "life itself" to the stage but to create style, atmosphere, pace, dramatic intensity. The main objective of

the majority of the new directors was the creation of dramatic mood and atmosphere on the stage.[1]

Samuel J. Hume, whose ideas and designs are the subject of this thesis, helped to realize the new movement's objectives. Ronald Kenney's study of Hume's contributions to the American theatre emphasized Hume's place in these formative times. According to Kenney, Hume's more noteworthy contributions were his theories and practices in community and educational theatre, and the art of scene design.[2] Although this study examined the art of scene design as envisioned by Hume, his contributions in the other areas can scarcely be ignored.

Hume as influential innovator. Sam Hume's contributions to the theatre are numerous. As an example he organized and promoted the First Exhibition of Continental Stagecraft in America in 1914. At the Arts and Crafts Theatre in Detroit from 1916 to 1918, he proved to be the first successful practitioner of the new stage craft in this country. Sheldon Cheney and Hume together were instrumental in drafting and forming Theatre Arts Magazine, which first appeared in November 1916. The first Drama Teachers

---

[1]Mordicai Gorelik, New Theatres for Old (New York: Samuel French, 1941), pp. 207-209.

[2]Ronald L. Kenney, "A Study of Samuel Hume's Contributions to American Theater" (unpublished M. A. Thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961), p. 82.

Association of California was founded by Hume in 1920. In 1932, at the age of 47, he published one of the first books, Theatre and School, for teachers in high school educational theatre. As a well-traveled pioneer in the field of art theatre, he was one of the first to develop a summer workshop in theatre. In collaboration with William R. Fuerst, Hume published a treatise of stage decor, XXth Century Stage Decoration.[3] As Mr. Kenney observed in his thesis,

> He [Hume] is a giant in the annals of American theater. Devoted, energetic, prophetic, he gave twenty of his most productive years to changing an art that, in the United States, was super-sweet, sentimental and shallow.[4]

Kenneth Macgowan further remarks on the importance of Hume in the book, Footlights Across America: "Sam Hume branched . . . into work that has left his mark on the whole amateur and educational theater."[5]

Hume's three-fold solution. Many handbooks on the current market propound to answer questions about scene design which are raised by workers in educational and community theatre. These handbooks often attempt to solve a three-fold problem: scenery design which will effectively

---

[3]Ibid., p. 84.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Kenneth Macgowan, Footlights Across America (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929), p. 55.

convey the atmosphere of a particular play; usefulness on a physically smaller stage; and economy in the face of budget limitations. Sam Hume applied his design theories at the Arts and Crafts Theatre from 1916 to 1918 under such circumstances. His solutions are therefore of special value to directors and scene designers in community and educational theatre today.

II. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Samuel J. Hume's accomplishments in the American theatre have been conspicuously neglected by theatre historians. Merely superficial attempts have been made by these historians to analyze Hume's method of design and determine the effectiveness of his finished works. A close examination of Hume's techniques reveals Hume's solutions to some of the problems facing contemporary scene designers who are handicapped by limited budgets.

The problem. The study relates Samuel James Hume's staging theories with his theatrical practices at the Arts and Crafts Theatre in Detroit, Michigan, from 1916 to 1918. The term staging theory should be understood to mean the principle ideas of the purpose of scenery. Theatrical practices is limited in meaning to the physical design, structure, and arrangement of stage scenery.

The hypothesis. Samuel James Hume's staging theories proved practical for the physical stage; its success was demonstrated in the actual theatrical practices which he employed at the Arts and Crafts Theatre in Detroit, Michigan, from 1916 to 1918.

CHAPTER II

HUME'S TRAINING IN A CHANGING DECADE LEADS HIM TO ART THEATRE PRINCIPLES

I. COMMERCIALISM IN THE 1910 THEATRE

A survey of the American Theatre of 1910, discloses a commercial theatre, organized as an all-embracing interlocking system with its first object, the making of profits. Cheney, writing in his book, The Art Theatre, gives insight into the conditions which prevailed in the theatre. He observed:

> It was the crass commercialism of the American theatre and its desire for large profits that was pulling down its standards. . . . It would be idle to say that it has nothing to do with art, since that is in one sense the sole commodity in which it deals; but its art is the art of commerce, the art that will please the greatest number of average people, the art that seeks its appeal in sentiments and pettiness and sexual emotion and situations begetting uncontrolled laughter. . . . In so far as it touches within the boundaries of the art that is both true to life and spiritual, it does so by chance inspiration and accidental co-ordination. . . . The art that goes beyond the obvious is discouraged, and the art that reaches down to deeper truth goes unrecognized.[6]

The theatre was monopolized by a handful of business men interested in profits and not artistic endeavors. Such a system stifled creative effort, discouraged originality and

---

[6]Sheldon Cheney, The Art Theatre (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), 1st ed., pp. 15-17.

drove the true artist from the theatre. According to Cheney the effects were:

> . . . loss of freedom of the artist; destruction of the training grounds in which both actor and playwright has gained experience; and control by New York over the important theatres in the country.[7]

Cheney also blames the audience for allowing, or demanding, such a theatre in the United States.[8] The theatre in America was ready for reform.

II. HUME'S EARLY TRAINING

In the middle of such a theatre atmosphere Sam Hume began his theatrical career. He received his formal education at the University of California in Berkeley. While there, he began to develop deep interest for the theatre and the new movement in art theatre in particular, but after three years at the University of California his adventuresome spirit led him fortune hunting in Alaska, where he

---

[7] Ibid., p. 23.

[8] Ibid., p. 28. Cheney continues: "The people of this country have lost all respect for the theatre. They visualize it as a business, like insurance, or selling groceries. To be implicated in theatre work even involves more or less risk on one's reputation and standing in the community. In Europe the theatre is considered with a certain amount of reverence. It is one of the arts. Each leading playhouse is as important to its town as the art museum or the cathedral. In America the gas works and the department store are much more likely to be pointed out with pride."

worked for a year. His enthusiasm for theatre, however--particularly in the new art of scene design--was not so easily extinguished, and he left for London to study the new movement in design from its very roots. While in London he met one of England's more famous actresses, Ellen Terry, whose son, Gordon Craig, was one of the foremost leaders of this new movement in the theatre. The relationship between Miss Terry and Hume eventually led to a meeting between Craig and Hume, and Hume was invited to study with Craig in Florence, Italy.[9] This meeting was to have lasting influence on Hume.

Samuel Hume was studying with Craig when Craig's theories of screen devices were used in the Moscow Art Theatre's production of Hamlet in 1911. In fact, Hume actually constructed the model and helped in the drawing of the work plans for this now-famous production by Stanislavsky.[10] The Moscow Art Theatre production was the first application of Craig's theory of design since it was first introduced a few years earlier in an exhibition at the Leicester Galleries in England. Huntley Carter described the Leicester demonstration of the screen devices for scene design:

---

[9]Kenney, op. cit., p. 8.

[10]Huntley Carter, The Theater of Max Rinhardt (New York: Mitchell Kenmerley, 1914), pp. 300-301.

> This new device consisted of a gray portable jointed screen to be used together with some cylinders, cubes, squares, rostrums, and white and colored limelights. Mr. Craig demonstrated in seven little scenes how their "bricks" are put together to form backgrounds. This plain wooden screen is adaptable to any stage. It is made to reach above the proscenium, and thus not only serves to represent the scene, but to mask in anything that the audience is not required to see. . . . Beyond this it can be folded to form interior and exterior settings, suggesting battlements, ramparts, pillars, walls, and so on, according to the need of the drama.[11]

As Gorelik observes, however, Craig's attempt to put his theories into practice was not entirely successful: "Apparently Craig, ready enough with brush and pen, proved unequal to the mechanical side of his work."[12] Gorelik also points out the dissatisfaction of Stanislavsky with Craig's screens:

> Craig's ideas of Hamlet displayed themselves in a monumentality, in a largeness of measure, in a generality and simplicity of decorative production. Having told all his dreams and plans for the production, Craig left for Italy, and left us to begin to fulfill the ideas of the chief director and initiator of the production, Craig. This moment saw the beginning of our tortures . . . the great screens would not stand up well and would fall. If a single screen fell, the others followed it.
>
> At the final rehearsal, just as the audience was entering the theatre, the screens fell, breaking frames and tearing canvas all over the stage. The curtain, which Craig had intended to keep unused throughout the performance, had to be lowered and used all through the performance to cover scene shifts.[13]

---

[11] Ibid., p. 302.

[12] Gorelik, op. cit., p. 291.

[13] Ibid.

Stanislavsky was arguing that no matter how pleasing the screens were aesthetically, they were highly impractical.

Hume's relationship with Craig, as well as the Moscow Art Theatre's production of Hamlet, were to have a great influence on him. An early issue of Theatre Arts Magazine published the following: "Sam Hume would be the first to give Gordon Craig credit both for inspiration toward a new art of the theatre, and for the principle of interchangeable stage setting."[14] In a recent letter to Ronald Kenney, Hume declared that this experience was apparently valuable:

> The screens for the Moscow production of Hamlet were a fiasco. The screens were impractical. They did not lend themselves to easy movement, due to the large size of the screens and the way in which they were constructed.[15]

Cheney observed Craig's influence in Hume's scene design at the Arts and Crafts Theatre: "He [Hume] gained inspiration from Craig, and adopted Craig's principle of interchangeable scene, and had a fuller knowledge of the mechanical features of the earlier invention."[16] Cheney describes Hume's European studies:

> Travel in Europe helped to convince him of the cheapness of standards existing on the English-speaking stage, but it was not until he talked with Gordon Craig that the

---

[14]Sheldon Cheney, "Sam Hume's Adaptable Setting," Theatre Arts Magazine, Vol. I (May 1917), p. 118.

[15]Kenney, op. cit., p. 48.

[16]Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., p. 104.

> vision of a new art of the theatre spread before him. In the months during which he worked side by side with Craig he learned much, not only about ideas, but about the methods which the greatest of the progressives hoped to revolutionize stage art.[17]

III. HUME'S HARVARD EXPERIENCE, 1913-1914

Hume's nearly three years of association with Craig were cut short by the weakening condition of his mother, which forced him to return to the United States. In 1913, less than a year after his return to the United States, Hume enrolled in the now-famous 47 Workshop at Harvard, a project which included such theatre practitioners as Eugene O'Neill, Sheldon Cheney, Irving Pichel, Sidney Coe Howard, Edward Sheldon, Frederic Ballard and Lewis Beach.[18]

In a review of the 47 Workshop's early days Wisner Payne Kinne describes Samuel Hume's activities there:

> Samuel J. Hume . . . was perhaps the dominant personality of the first Workshop play. He was quite free to dominate the group as actor, designer, and

---

[17] Ibid., p. 88.

[18] "George Pierce Baker tried to give his English 47 [47 Workshop] full experience with the realities of the theatre for which they were writing. He encouraged his English students to devise their own scenery and lighting for each play in terms of the playwright's purpose; but he also tried to open the eyes of his writers to new ideas of mass, color, light, and shadow which he knew to be as substantial stuff as plot." Wisner Payne Kinne, George Pierce Baker and the American Theater (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 179.

> director during George P. Baker's absence. Hume was disappointed to find his new teacher essentially a critic of the written play with little feeling for the pictorial or decorative revolution in the theatre. . . . It is noteworthy to mention that as G. P. B. assumed the direction of the second Workshop production he did not have Hume direct the setting and lighting of the Workshop plays.[19]

Toward the end of October, 1913, Hume designed the setting for a wordless fantasy, The Romance of the Rose, which he had written for English 47. It was the markedly decorative use of the stage that prompted H. T. Parker, drama critic of the Boston Evening Transcript, to write in his column the following week this question:

> With all allowance for youth in these university playwrights, are they not more concerned, as far as their work disclosed them, with effects in the theater and making use of them than with the observation of life, study of character, the play of the imagination over action?[20]

After this production George Pierce Baker took that stand which characterized his later teaching, "that the theater must advance as a whole, design along with other elements of production, but this advance must be balanced and ultimately subordinate to the playwright."[21] Several months later in the spring of 1914, Hume withdrew from the Workshop to practice this new art of stage design elsewhere.

---

[19] Ibid., p. 180.

[20] Boston Evening Transcript, November 4, 1913. Quoted by Kinne, op. cit., p. 180.

[21] Ibid., p. 182.

In the autumn of 1914 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Hume exhibited a comprehensive collections of photographs, original designs, and models of stage scenery that had been created by the foremost artists who were practicing what was to become known as the new stagecraft.[22] This exhibition attracted so much attention that Hume was invited to show it in New York, Chicago, and finally in Detroit through the efforts of the Arts and Crafts Society.

IV. HUME'S EARLY ACTIVITIES IN DETROIT

The Arts and Crafts Society, whose membership included many prominent Detroit citizens, was at the same time becoming interested in the "little theatre" movement that was crossing the United States. The excitement generated by such theatres as the Washington Square Players, the Portmanteau Theatre, Chicago Little Theatre, and the Neighborhood Playhouse started the members talking of building a playhouse which would enable them to bring this new concept

---

[22]The First American Exhibition of Stagecraft, as Hume called it, showed works by noted theatre designers, such as the Russians--Badst, Golovine, and Anisfield, whose work was known through the Russian Ballet; Austrians--Loeffler and Urban, the latter known in this country through productions of the Boston Opera Company. The Germans--Ernst Stern, Adolph Appia, Fritz Erler, and Adolph Linnebach; the English--Sime, Wilkinson, and Rotenstein; and the Americans--Livingston, Pratt, Robert Edomon Jones, and Hume himself. Hume gave lectures and demonstrations of the exhibition's tour.

of theatre to Detroit. A wealthy Detroiter, George Booth, stepped forward with a plan to turn this theatre dream into reality. At Cranbrook, an estate near Detroit, Booth was building a theatre inspired by the Greek theatre at Syracuse in Sicily. He invited Sam Hume to come to Detroit to produce an outdoor spectacle for the dedication of his new Greek theatre, with the proceeds to be used to equip the Arts and Crafts Theatre. Hume accepted, and suggested that a young friend, who was attending Professor Baker's 47 Workshop at Harvard, be given the opportunity to write the script. Booth agreed and left all production matters to Hume, who in turn, sent for Sidney Coe Howard.[23]

Sidney Howard was commissioned to write the masque, which became known as the "Cranbrook Masque" later re-named, Romance, as Hume began to coordinate and direct the entire production.

A reviewer, Frank Tompkins, gave much credit for the successful use of Booth's new Greek theatre to Hume:

> That the production was adequate to the setting was due to the understanding of the problem which the producer Sam Hume brought to his task, to the background of knowledge and artistry broad enough and fine enough to meet all requirements.[24]

---

[23]Joy Hankanson Colby, Art and A City (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1956), pp. 39-40.

[24]Frank Tompkins, Theatre Arts Magazine, Vol. I (November 1916), p. 3.

A contemporary newspaper report noted of Hume's staging:

> In staging the play he has kept steadily in mind the setting with which he is working and its adaptability to the different period and manners of play the masque treats of. . . . Though most of the company were amateurs, they assumed their various roles with a beautiful naturalness and apparent joy in doing what charmed every witness. Their manner betrayed the infinite care and patience of their training by Mr. Hume, who instructed and rehearsed them with an art that prevented them from sinking into the semblance of mere puppets jerked about by strings of stern control.[25]

Frank Tompkins, in an early Theatre Arts Magazine, pointed to Sam Hume's ability in the direction of the masque and his use of lighting:

> Mr. Hume played upon the theatre a tune in lights, a marvelous tune that kept the audience in a state of rapt expectation, but a tune that was designed only to make harmony of the place and time and the story; in fact, lights, place, story were all one, . . . always seeming as a force remarkably combined from many.[26]

The Society netted $1,600 from the masque to furnish the theatre that was being built on Watson Street, the location of The Arts and Crafts Society. Hume, who had performed brilliantly at Cranbrook, was the obvious choice for artist-director. A committee composed of Society members was appointed to retain direct control of policy and general conduct of the theatre. The artistic direction was left entirely to Hume.

---

[25] The Detroit News, June 28, 1916 (No page available).

[26] Tompkins, loc. cit.

In an interview with the Boston Evening Transcript Hume described his initial attitude: "If several hundred people in Detroit were interested in dramatic production of merit to support such a movement, then I would undertake the management of such an operation."[27]

V. HUME STARTS AS ARTIST-DIRECTOR

Hume found the people of the Arts and Crafts Society more than willing to follow and support an art theatre. He began by working with the architects of the Arts and Crafts building, and affecting modifications of the stage plans. These changes, according to Cheney, "resulted in the creation of one of the best little theatre stages in America."[28] Hume also designed the lighting equipment and supervised its installation. Finally, he designed his permanent adaptable setting,[29] which is one of the main subjects of this paper.

---

[27]Boston Evening Transcript, November 17, 1917.

[28]Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., p. 90.

[29]Hume clarifies the use of the phrase, permanent setting, in his book, XXth Century Stage Decoration. He wrote: "It is necessary from the out set to distinguish between those systems in which the architectural permanent elements form a part of the construction of the stage, and are definitely incorporated in it, and the permanent setting with its moveable elements offering considerable suppleness and fairly extensive possibilities for variation. . . . In the second case, to which we give the name 'permanent setting' the architectural elements are moveable, and not so

By the time Hume arrived in Detroit to manage the new Arts and Crafts Theatre, he had acquired a combination of qualifications for the undertaking. First, through his broad education he was able to distinguish the better drama from the type found in the commercial theatre. Second, he had enough practical knowledge of the traditional stage to be able to choose those existing mechanical devices and technical aids that would be useful in a theatre constructed according to new ideas. And third, as Cheney expressed it, "he had become thoroughly imbued with the new spirit, and had studied every department of theatre production--playwriting, acting, lighting, setting and stage management."[30] Hume found the opportunity to test and prove his power as artist and director combined when he was called to Detroit to take charge of the Arts and Crafts Theatre.

---

fixed that only a pick and wrecker could alter or remove them." William Fuerst and Samuel Hume, XXth Century Stage Decoration (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924), Vol. I, pp. 36-37.

[30]Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., p. 89.

CHAPTER III

HUME DEVISES A THEORY OF "SPATIAL RHYTHMS" TO ENHANCE MOOD

I. A FRESH CONCEPT OF STAGE AREAS

Hume's theoretical views of scene design are a composite of his experiences, and they show the strong influence of his association with Gordon Craig. Hume's version of the new stagecraft developed along lines similar to the rest of the movement: suggestion, imaginative invention, and atmospheric beauty were subordinate to the creation of the mood of the drama.[31] Creation of mood and appropriate atmosphere was the concern of the scene designer, rather than the creation of realistic scenes which were faithful to real life.

As Hume said in the book, XXth Century Stage Decoration, "we have tried to show [that] the setting must not illustrate: it must be, in a way, the drama itself."[32] Hume believed that the freer the scene designer, the less he would be concerned with any attempt to express the higher truth of the drama by the re-creation of the entire

---

[31] Ibid., p. 144.

[32] Fuerst and Hume, XXth Century Stage Decoration, op. cit., p. 69.

environment. The more the designers evolves toward suggestion, and at the same time toward the creation of the mood, the more he tends to eliminate direct reality and thus focus the attention on what Hume called "the inner truth of the dramatic spectacle."[33]

The process of suggestion and creation of the mood of a play was brought about through the organization of the space about the actor. Hume believed that one of the primary functions of scenery was to surround the actor with "an appropriate space, because the actor detached from space is isolated in an intolerable solitude."[34] Scenic expression then is determined by the harmony or contrast of two basic rhythms--first, the rhythm of movement of the actor, and second, the rhythm of the space surrounding the actor. If the scene designer accepts these rhythms as means to reinforce scenic expression, he must not allow it to end in an abstract symbolization. Hume points out the importance of this principle:

> . . . for to attempt to utilize the symbol detached from its substratum and so reduced to an abstract play of lines and colours, in a misconception in the theatre. . . . Besides, the stage itself refuses to admit such a dematerialization of the setting by opposing to it an element which always remains three-dimensional, real and plastic, namely the actor.[35]

---

[33] Ibid., p. 68.

[34] Ibid., p. 51.

[35] Ibid., p. 34.

Hume also believed that achievement of a mood must not be at the expense of the actor. To Hume the organization of this space about the actor was essential to the life of the drama. He states later in XXth Century Stage Decoration, "it should be clear that the stage is never presented to us as a picture, but as an organization of space surrounding the actor."[36]

The scene designer presents the characteristics of a certain environment, according to Hume, by two devices: first is proportion, which is the organization of the occupied and unoccupied spaces that surround the actor, and second is color: "It is proportion which determines the spatial rhythm, and to which psychological expression corresponds."[37] As an example of this, Hume shows that by the mere differences in height, by the dimensions of the stage--narrow or wide, deep or shallow--and by the bareness of a wall--these are all means to reflect the psychology of the drama, namely the creation of the mood. "The acted drama," according to Hume, "is detached from its world the moment it is detached from space."[38] It is also by proportion that the scene designer can express the sombre or gay, freedom or constraint, in the moods of the play.

---

[36] Ibid., p. 75.

[37] Ibid., p. 68.

[38] Ibid., p. 52.

Color permits the scene designer to modify and change the expression of the spatial rhythm. The mood of the scene can be changed by the introduction into the same setting of a new color element. Hume points out, "By the change of a curtain, a sail, the addition of some banners . . . the designer can modify the character of the setting."[39] The character of the setting can also be modified by changing the color of the lighting on the setting. Through experience the scene designer learns which colors are best suited to express the character of a play. According to Hume, the scene designer--

> . . . must learn to choose a gamut of colours which in general accord with the piece, and then repeat . . . them with all their nuances in both the costumes and stage decoration. This palette must be chose with sufficient range to permit variations, for we must be able to realize not only harmony but contrast as well. . . . In fact, all the means inherent in color are permissible, provided that scenic expression results.[40]

To Hume, color should be used to create the mood of the play and the variations of that mood within a certain scene. He does not give the reader any idea of his choice of colors for use in specific scenes. Instead, he leaves the choice to the designer, asking only that scenic expression be the desirable result.

---

[39] Ibid., p. 71.

[40] Ibid., p. 72.

In summary, Hume believed that scenery should suggest and create a mood for the actor through the organization of the space surrounding the actor. The creation of this mood and atmosphere is achieved through management of proportion, of the occupied and unoccupied spaces, and of color. Hume supports the idea that "the art of the theatre, like all the arts, is the searching for character and expression."[41]

---

[41] Ibid., p. 67.

CHAPTER IV

HUME'S THEATRICAL PRACTICES AT THE ARTS AND CRAFTS THEATRE, 1916 TO 1918

I. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF DESIGN

Before Hume could put his theories into practice at the Arts and Crafts Theatre, it was necessary for him to manufacture scenic components that would take into consideration: 1) economy; 2) interchangeability; 3) mobility; and, 4) convenient storage. As Hume commented in a letter to Ronald Kenney, "the scenery had to be practical for use in the Arts and Crafts Theatre. By practical I mean that it had to be easily moved, inexpensive to build and maintain."[42] Actually, Hume's zeal for economy was inherent in his demand for interchangeability.

The expense of the setting was one of the foremost considerations of Hume's scene design. One method Hume employed to cut cost was to have scenery built at the Arts and Crafts Theatre. The settings were, for the most part, constructed in the theatre plant, and cost considerably less than those which could have been purchased from a scenery

---

[42]Kenney, op. cit., p. 62.

studio.[43] An important factor in the savings by Hume was the use of volunteer labor, which could be used both in the painting and construction of the scenery. Although some of the labor on the settings was contributed by paid professional carpenters, it is important to note that the majority of the labor was volunteer.

It was paramount for the permanent set components to remain simple in their construction, so new pieces could be added inexpensively. This requirement demanded close co-ordination of each new piece with existing structures. "There must be a rigid standardization of the original elements and of each added unit."[44] Through developing set pieces in standardized units that could be used for more than one play Hume minimized the need for entirely new sets of scenery for the different plays, again cutting cost drastically. The financial savings of having interchangeable and adaptable units to meet the needs of the varied plays produced is best summed up by Cheney in an article in a Theatre Arts Magazine.

> Although the original equipment . . . cost more, perhaps, than the average little theatre setting, it was

---

[43] Irving Pichel indicates the measure of this economy: "Its initial cost is lower, far lower than that of several sets out of the scene painter's catalogue." Irving Pichel, Modern Theaters (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935), p. 32.

[44] Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., p. 172.

> far less expensive than the usual commercially designed set. Once installed, changes and additions could be made, at a very slight cost, to serve to create effects which would have called for an outlay of several hundred dollars for each scene under the usual system. In ten variations used at the Arts and Crafts Theatre in its first season the total cost of adding pieces averaged less than fifteen dollars for each scene.[45]

Hume placed other limitations on the Arts and Crafts Theatre scenery: it must possess ease of handling and movement during the many scene changes and be easily stored when not in use. A wide and varied program of plays was usually offered at the theatre in accordance with the policy of offering something of interest to a wide range of audience tastes. On the average there were three or four plays, depending upon the length of the plays, in an evening's performance. Such a program demanded complete scene changes during the brief fifteen-minute intermissions. Ease of handling of the various pieces therefore became a necessity.

Hume worked in close collaboration with the architects of the new theatre to affect working space and storage areas in the theatre architecture. At his insistence a stage almost as large as the 350-seat auditorium was constructed. Apparently this design allowed sufficient space for the construction and storage of scenery because the majority of the set components were constructed solidly

---

[45]Cheney, "Sam Hume's Adaptable Setting," op. cit., p. 120.

enough to stand without support; they were not hinged to fold.[46] It is interesting to note however that Hume in his, Theatre and School, presents detailed instructions for building collapsible set units for easy storage.

Hume's clever use of draperies, both to frame his settings and within the settings themselves, was a versatile method of solving the problem of scenery storage. The draperies could be removed and folded more conveniently and compactly than the conventional scenery flats for storage and they consumed very little space when stored.

II. HUME'S PERMANENT SETTING

Hume incorporated the practical considerations of economy, interchangeability, mobility, and convenient storage into the construction of the permanent components which would be adaptable to many settings. These components included the following parts:

> . . . four pylons, constructed of canvas on wooden frames, each of the three covered faces measuring two and one-half by eighteen feet; two canvas flats, each

---

[46] An obscure item in the architect's construction, cited by Irving Pichel, created a difficulty that was not anticipated by Hume and could have been the reason for his constructing the units to stand unsupported: "The architect . . . in his desire to use only the best of building materials, specified a stage floor of maple. As a consequence, it was almost impossible to support scenery by the use of stage braces, screwed into the floor with a stage screw or peg." Pichel, op. cit., p. 32.

> three by eighteen feet; two sections of stairs three feet [wide], and one section eight feet [wide], of uniform eighteen-inch [three step] height; three platforms of the same height, respectively six, eight, and twelve feet long; dark green hangings as long as the pylons; two folding screens for masking, covered with the same cloth as the pylons; and two irregular tree forms in silhouette.[47]

The pylons, flats and stairs, and the added pieces were painted in a system of broken color, called stippling, after the system introduced into the theatre by Joseph Urban.[48] This procedure eliminated the need and expense of painting each new setting. For example, Hume painted the set pieces a neutral tone and then sprayed them with the three primary colors--red, yellow, and blue. By changing the color of gelatin in the flexible light fixtures, the basic color of the set components could be varied. A demonstration of this effect is seen if straw-colored light would be projected onto such a painted setting, the yellow dots of the spray paint would reflect the yellow light, resulting in a warm golden glow. A cool blue light on the set would cause the blue dots to reflect the light, causing a cool

---

[47]Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., pp. 166-168.

[48]This system, called pointillage in the art world, was originated as an art effect by the French painter George Seurat. His method of painting was to place dots of color on canvas and from these dots an image developed. It had been demonstrated that by painting dark blue dots beside white dots, a light blue is the result, but the depth and texture were more definite than those of a mixed light blue.

somber effect. Claude Wise, in his book, Dramatics for School and Community, described Hume's total effect of stippling the permanent setting.

> . . . the combinations possible are endless under this type of painting. Plain sets apparently of one color may suddenly be transformed into another color in a way almost magical, simply by flooding them with a different colored light.[49]

Thus with a basic complement of scenic units, a painting scheme of manifold design and an imaginative use of colored light, Hume could realize an infinite number of scenic effects.

III. AN EXAMINATION OF SEVEN FLOOR PLANS[50]

Through the examination of several settings from the available floor plans and pictures, one can see the flexibility of Hume's permanent setting. Its first application took place on November 17 and 18, 1916, when Lord Dunsany's The Tents of the Arabs and Kenneth Goodman's The Wonder Hat were presented at the Arts and Crafts Theatre. (Two additional plays were on the program, but they did not utilize

---

[49] Claude Merton Wise, Dramatics for School and Community (Cincinnati: Stewart Kidd Co., 1923), p. 42.

[50] These seven floor plans have been selected by the writer from among the thirty-six Hume productions during two years at the Arts and Crafts Theatre. These seven plays seem to be representative of Hume's total concept of the permanent setting. Further examination of other plays would prove to be repetitious of the seven mentioned in this chapter.

the permanent setting.) The scene changes were affected, as will be demonstrated in the seven examples, by the rearrangement of the set components and an occasional addition of newly constructed units.

First two examples compared. In Figure 1, appears the floor plan for The Tents of the Arabs. The setting consisted of the eight-foot section of stairs, placed in the center of the stage, with an arch, the first new component added to the permanent setting, above the stairs and between the two pylons. The the two three-by-eighteen-foot flats separated the other set of pylons to form a wall. The center stairs and arch formed the Gates of Thalanna, mentioned in the play. Behind the flats, stairs, and pylons were the three sets of platforms, eighteen inches high, and six, eight, and twelve feet long, respectively. The overhang of the platforms was caused by the fact that the platforms totaled twenty-six feet in length, and the setting occupied only twenty-four feet. This overhang was covered by dark green hangings that were as long as the pylons. The screens, covered with similar green materials were used to frame the picture at the sides of the stage. The two irregular tree forms were silhouetted against the sky-dome background.

The simple rearrangement of the parts achieved an entirely new setting for The Wonder Hat as seen in Figure 2.

The center arch which had been added to the permanent setting, was removed. The three-foot flats between the pylons in The Tents of the Arabs earlier in the evening, were now removed and placed on their sides to form a balustrade at the back of the platforms, which remained in the same location as The Tents of the Arabs. The three-foot sections of stairs, which were not used in the earlier production, were placed between the pylons in the place where the flats had previously stood. The eight-foot stair section, pylons, hangings, screens, and tree forms were the same for both plays. The only major changes were the removal of the arch piece and the rearrangement of the flats to a sideways position with the stair units placed in their former position. The setting for The Wonder Hat was made up only of parts from the original setting design by Hume.

Third example. The third production of the 1916-17 season included four one-act plays, the first of which was Helena's Husband by Philip Moeller. Figure 3 shows that where was nothing on the stage that had not already appeared in the scenes of The Wonder Hat and The Tents of the Arabs, but two decorated curtains, not evident in the floor plan, were added. Two pylons, two sections of stairs, the platforms, and the balustrade appeared exactly as seen in The Wonder Hat. Only one pylon was used--on the left side--giving the balcony a wider opening. The pylon which was

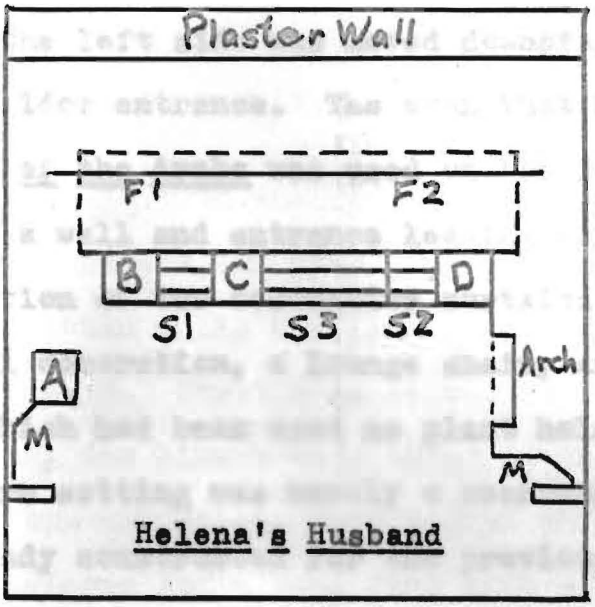


FIGURE 3

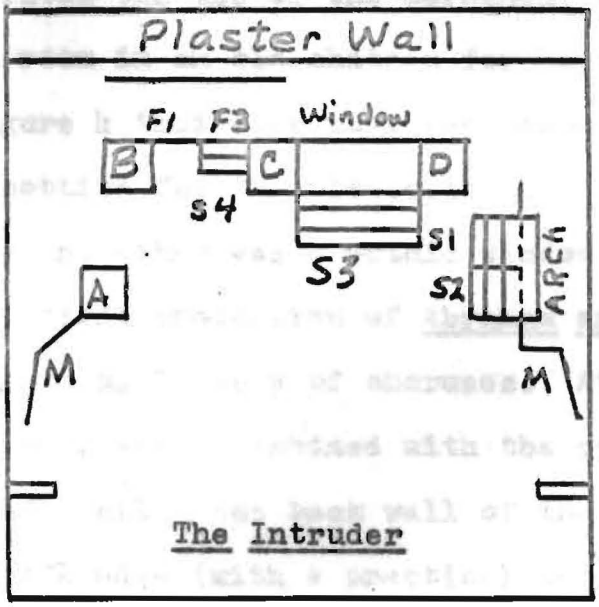


FIGURE 4

Explanation:

A, B, C, D	Pylons	S1, S2	3 ft. Stair Units
F1, F2	Original Flats	S3	8 ft. Stair Unit
F3	Added Flat	S4	Special Stair Unit
~~	Hangings	M	Masking Screens

removed from the left side was moved downstage, right, to suggest a corridor entrance. The arch that had been built for The Tents of the Arabs was used on the left side of the stage to form a wall and entrance leading to the exterior. With the addition of two decorative curtains and a few set pieces (a wall decoration, a lounge chair, and two rectangular boxes which had been used as plant holders in Wonder Hat) the entire setting was merely a rearrangement of the elements already constructed for the previous productions.

Fourth example. The fourth production of the 1916-17 season illustrates the use of the permanent setting as the interior of a room in an old chateau for Maeterlinck's The Intruder. Figure 4 indicates that two important pieces were added to the setting for this production. One piece was a door flat, and the other was a Gothic window which had been built for an earlier production of Abraham and Isaac, an old English play made up largely of choruses. At stage left was the familiar arch, which combined with the pylon and curtain to form the left wall. The back wall of the set was built from the Gothic window (with a practical working casements added) and the new door-piece, flanked by curtains. The stair units and the platforms of the permanent setting were utilized in front of the window and under the arch. A new small two-stair unit was added, leading to the newly built door flat. Only two new pieces were added for The Intruder

(excluding the Gothic window, which had been built for a previous play), the door flat and the two-step stair unit.

Fifth example. In the fifth and final production of the first season Hume's own play, The Romance of the Rose, which he had written while enrolled in the Harvard 47 Workshop, was presented. Through an examination of Figure 5 one can see that two new pieces were added to the permanent setting. The two new pieces were a flat which formed the front of the balcony and a long flat with a niche to hold a Madonna statue. Temporary platforms also had to be constructed for the balcony floor. The pylons and hangings were used down stage to create the illusion of dark street shadows on either side. Two original flats, the arch, and the Gothic window formed the walls at the side of the balcony. This set proved to be the most expensive of the eleven variations of the permanent setting for the first season. The expense was caused by the addition of two new flats and the temporary platforms for the balcony. Expenditure was held, however, to a mere twenty-five dollars.

Sixth example. The second season, 1917-18, saw the production of Lord Dunsany's The Golden Doom. This time the permanent setting formed an Aztec temple as seen in Figure 6. The pylons were set lightly upstage from the green hangings which framed the stage on the left and right. A unique

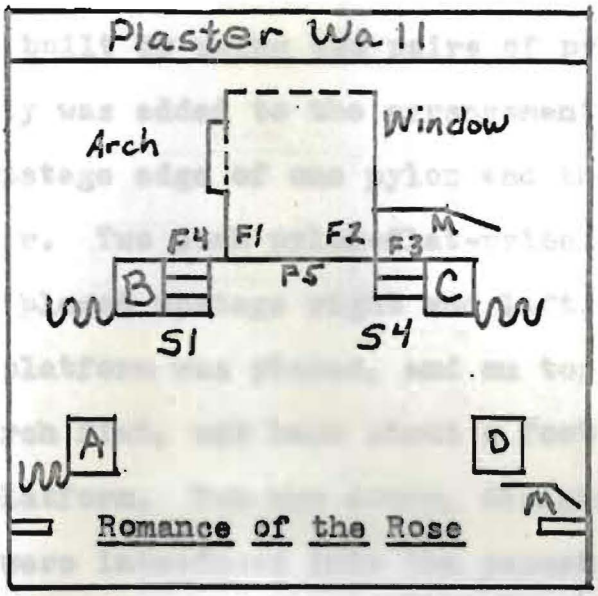


FIGURE 5

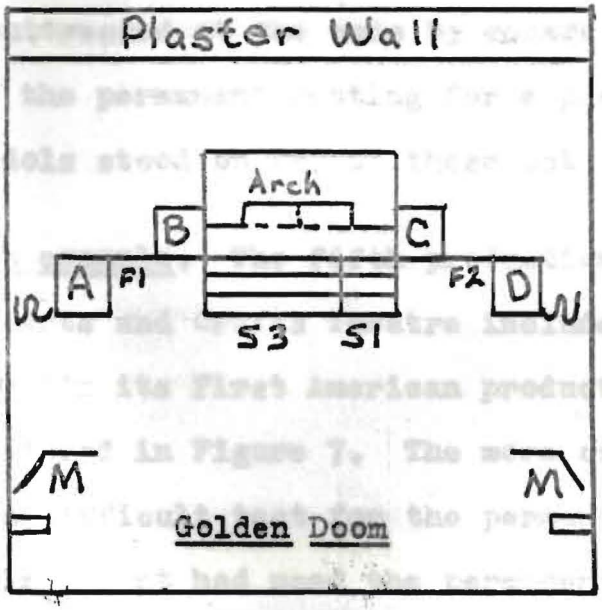


FIGURE 6

Explanation:

A, B, C, D Pylons
F1, F2 Original Flats
F3, F4 Added Flats
~~vin~~ Hanging
F5 Added Flat
S1, S2 3ft. Stair Units
S3 8 ft. Stair unit
S4 Special Stair Unit
M Masking Screens

structure was built by using two pairs of pylons and two flats. Variety was added to the arrangement by lashing the flat to the upstage edge of one pylon and the down stage edge of another. Two such pylon-flat-pylon structures were assembled and placed upstage right and left. Between them the six-foot platform was placed, and on top of it was mounted the arch flat, set back about a foot from the front edge of the platform. Two new doors, designed to fit the center arch, were introduced into the permanent setting. Steps, consisting of the eight- and three-foot sections, were added to the setting in front of the platform. The stairs were buttressed at the ends by square boxes which had been added to the permanent setting for a previous play. Paper mache idols stood on top of these buttresses.

Seventh example. The fifth production of the second season at the Arts and Crafts Theatre included A. A. Milne's Wurzel-Flumery (in its first American production). The setting is pictured in Figure 7. The more or less modern interior was a difficult test for the permanent setting. Most of the plays that had used the permanent setting successfully had been of a poetic nature, but this play demanded that the permanent setting represent a smart modern home interior. The pylons were again used in a straight line similar to the arrangement for The Tents of the Arabs. The front face of the pylon was obscured by the hanging of

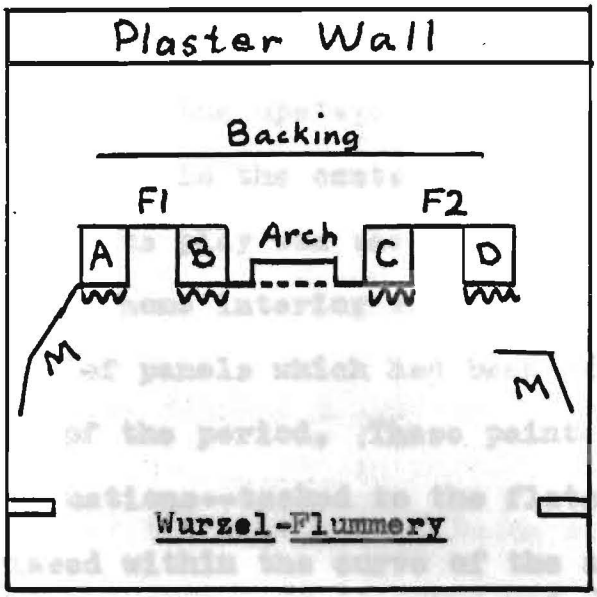


FIGURE 7

Explanation:

A, B, C, D Pylons
F1, F2 Original Flat
M Masking Screens
Green Hangings

the dark green drapes. The three-foot by eighteen-foot flats were lashed to the upstage side of the pylons, and the arch flat was placed in the center between the pylons. A flat from a previous play was used for a mask behind the arch. The modern home interior was achieved largely through Hume's addition of panels which had been painted with decorative figures of the period. These painted panels were used in two situations--tacked to the flats between the pylons and placed within the curve of the arch flat to square off the doorway. (Hume appears to have thought that the arched doorway was not appropriate to modern decor.) A decorated draw-drape filled the squared doorway. An ornate fireplace (which does not appear on the floor plan) dominated the right downstage area. The setting was dressed with modern furniture and set pieces. Now new set pieces were built for this production.

Hume's staging of Wurzel-Flumery, with its use of the painted panels tacked to the flats, demonstrates his method of varying the appearance of the set pieces without repainting them for various productions. The total effect of the permanent setting variations indicates great flexibility and ease of movement.

IV. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PERMANENT SETTING

Hume's re-use of the set pieces was a way to cut costs drastically. As previously mentioned, the average cost of adding pieces during the first season was only fifteen dollars per production. The single exception was the preparation for The Romance of the Rose, which cost twenty-five dollars.[51]

The cost of the setting had to be one of the foremost considerations for Hume. It is important to question whether his economics sacrificed too much in the creation of mood and other aesthetic factors of staging. Several contemporary critics were favorably impressed.

Sheldon Cheney, appraising the setting for The Intruder, stated: "This arrangement afforded exactly that suggestion of spaciousness and mystery for which the play calls."[52] Referring to the production of Helena's Husband, Cheney remarked, "This remarkable atmospheric scene was envolved merely by re-arranging elements already on hand."[53]

A local reviewer in a Detroit newspaper was favorably impressed by The Intruder at the time of its presentation:

---

[51] Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., p. 171.

[52] Ibid., p. 169.

[53] Ibid.

> . . . though not a small share of the credit must go to Sam Hume, the director, for this superb setting. The play is a play of atmosphere. It attempts to suggest, through the conversation of those on stage, another person present, one of the dead. It [the setting] attempts to subtly impose the mood on the audience, to make it believe what it cannot believe, to make it see what it cannot see.[54]

Another newspaper clipping reflects the local reviewer's opinion of The Intruder:

> Sam Hume has lived up to the best work he has ever shown us in the art of stage direction, and in the matter of settings and lighting effects he has outdone himself.[55]

Referring to the settings for The Tents of the Arabs and The Wonder Hat, which appeared on the same program, Cheney commented:

> While the physical changes were few, the atmosphere of the setting was so entirely different that probably not a half dozen people in the audience realized that any of the same elements appeared in the two scenes.[56]

A reviewer for The Detroit News praised the permanent setting as it appeared in the production of The Intruder and Suppressed Desires, both of which were on the same program:

> . . . the smart modern interior was fashioned from the permanent setting designed by Sam Hume [see photograph in appendix]. Certainly the permanent setting has

---

[54]Newspaper clipping in Arts and Crafts Society scrapbook, Detroit, Michigan (No other information available).

[55]Ibid.

[56]Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., p. 169.

demonstrated every claim of flexibility and beauty . . . tonight.[57]

It would seem that Hume's permanent setting was the answer to all the problems of design for a stage setting. It did not, however, meet the needs of the more realistic plays. The permanent setting seemed to lend itself readily to those productions where atmospheric background was needed, rather than definite locality. Hume did occasionally experiment with the permanent setting for a modern realistic interior, but he made no attempt to extend its function to the staging of more realistic plays. Instead, special settings were built for these plays.[58]

Hume had no difficulty in adapting his permanent setting to the newer poetic plays of the new art theatre movement. The permanent setting could create the important dramatic mood and atmosphere on the stage that the modern art theatre plays demanded.

---

[57] The Detroit News, April 14, 1917, p. 4.

[58] Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., pp. 172-73.

CHAPTER V

A COMPARISON OF SAMUEL HUME'S THEORIES AND HIS ACTUAL PRACTICE AT THE ARTS AND CRAFTS THEATRE

I. CRITICAL COMMENT OF EFFECTIVENESS

To preface the actual comparison of the theories and practices employed at the Arts and Crafts Theatre, a noteworthy comment by Sheldon Cheney, a man who became the voice of the art theatre movement, gives an insight into the effectiveness of the permanent setting.

> . . . no other of the progressive theatres in America has shown a series of scene so impressive and so well harmonizing with the respective plays as the variations of the permanent set at the Arts and Crafts Theatre. Putting aside consideration of realistic backgrounds at the Detroit playhouse, and remembering that several of their permanent setting arrangements fell considerably short of the ideal, it is still clear that this was the finest group of stage backgrounds yet devised for a series of plays in American theatre. It is possible to point to a single productions of Urban or Jones or others as equalling or surpassing the average attained by Hume at Detroit; but no consecutive series of plays has been so well mounted. I know from direct comparison that the Arts and Crafts group was far superior to the series of settings for poetic plays of the Washington Square Players and the Portmanteau Players. . . . It is well to remember, too, that the range . . . included such widely different requirements as the interior of a medieval chateau for The Intruder, the Gates of Thalanna for The Tents of the Arabs, the wall of heaven for The Glittering Gate, and a Spartan palace for Helena's Husband.[59]

---

[59]Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., p. 165-66.

Cheney's comparison placed Hume's work in Detroit far above that found in other art theatres in America.

His high standard of excellence was due to Hume's effective application of his theory that scenery should surround the actor with the appropriate mood and atmosphere created by the spatial rhythms. This spatial rhythm was achieved through the organization of the occupied and unoccupied spaces, called proportion, and finally by the use of color. Analysis of representative floor plans, available photographs, and critical commentaries reveals the effectiveness of this theory. First, an examination of Hume's use of proportion to affect spatial rhythm.

One of the more successful effects achieved by Hume was the treatment of organized space with his permanent setting. He placed elements of the permanent setting in various relationships to create predetermined illusions of height. A demonstration of this illusion can be seen in the productions of The Tents of the Arabs and The Golden Doom.

In these productions Hume lashed tall flats to the upstage side of the pylons. The eighteen-foot high pylons and flats, extended to a city wall of The Tents of the Arabs and a temple wall of The Golden Doom the suggestion of massiveness and tremendous heights. This was further complimented by the placement of a large arch in center stage. For these productions the flats and pylons were in

combination, however, in the performances of Helena's Husband and The Wonder Hat the flats were removed and the pylons towered alone. Again due to their measurements, the three dimensional pylons simulated the tall graceful columns of a Greek palace in Helena's Husband and a balcony overlooking a garden in The Wonder Hat. The arrangement of the pylons far down stage in the production of, The Romance of the Rose, also created the illusion of mysterious tall Renaissance buildings.

Another unit of the permanent setting, the dark green hangings, also served to suggest height. Although usually used for masking, Hume employed them alone to represent a woodland scene in The Doctor in Spite of Himself. He attempted to drape the eighteen-foot curtains so that their soft folds would depict the trunks of towering trees. According to Cheney, the illusion of height was achieved. However, he believed the suggestion of trees was too abstract.[60]

Thus far organization of vertical occupied spaces has been the topic of discussion. An examination of the permanent setting arrangement reveals Hume's success in affecting horizontal lines of the stage picture. Through a simple rearrangement of the eighteen-foot flats, Hume intensified

---

[60]Ibid., p. 171.

the horizontal lines of the occupied spaces. The Wonder Hat, most readily demonstrates this practice. The long narrow flats were merely placed on their sides, end to end, on eighteen-inch platforms, and various step units were arranged down stage of the platforms. The total effect of these units inhanced the horizontal lines. This effect can be seen in a photograph of Helena's Husband found in the appendix. Horizontal proportion also was exhibited through Hume's skillful use of set decorations. An eye catching dark rail in The Lost Silk Hat, a group of silhouetted rock forms in The Glittering Gate, and the richly appointed altar piece in Abraham and Isaac are but a few examples.

Hume's permanent set pieces by virtue of their measurements achieved the illusion of spaceous heights and widths. These units created clean, sharp lines which could be modified through the use of decorative drapes, arches and similar devices. At this point a discussion of the dimensions of height and width has occured, but equally important was the dimension of depth.

The more significant elements used to achieve the illusion of depth were the plaster sky-dome, the flexible lighting system, and the contrast of placement of the permanent set units. An article found in The Detroit Free Press point out the effects achieved by the lighting of the sky-dome. It read:

> Mr. Hume has equipped the stage with his own lighting effects, including a concrete [plaster] cyclorama dome, a permanent arrangement which when lighted by various hues gives distance or proximity which cannot be obtained with a painted curtain.[61]

Rather than depend on painted perspective to pictorialize far-off horizons, Hume illuminated his sky-dome and arranged the set pieces in a manner that suggested great depth and at times infinity. The light on the sky-dome, when viewed through scenically contrived apertures, not only created a dimension compatible with the three-dimensional actor, but achieved a desired compliment to mood and atmosphere. A demonstration of this effect can be illustrated in the production, The Wonder Hat. Here much of the picture consisted of the pylons and the sky-dome. The pale blue light from the lighted sky-dome created the illusion of far horizons, when seen through the open spaces between the pylons. Light streaming through a large Gothic window in the production The Intruder and the lighted open space behind the balcony in The Romance of the Rose, again illustrates how the lighting of the sky-dome produced the illusion of depth. (See photographs in appendix.)

The suggestion of depth was also achieved through contrast of placement of the permanent set pieces. An arrangement first seen in Helena's Husband demonstrates the

---

[61] The Detroit Free Press, November 15, 1916, p. 5.

use of this device. A pylon moved down right stage to represent a corridor entrance, created a feeling of depth by virtue of its relationship to the upstage scenery units. The procedure was followed in the later production of, The Romance of the Rose. This time two pylons were placed far down right and left stage, again providing contrast to the upstage units and producing the illusion of depth.

Hume believed that scenic expression was determined by the harmony or contrast of the rhythm of the actor and the rhythm of the spaces surrounding him. Hume explained it in this manner:

> All human contacts and relations which are forced to appear before a plane incapable of being spatially conceived lose their causality and the spectacle becomes only a play of marionettes.[62]

It was Hume's opinion that a three-dimensional actor must appear before three-dimensional settings, because when a three-dimensional object appears before incomprehensible planes, the object loses contact with realism and clashes with the familiar impression in the viewers mind. However, Hume did not want this third-dimension to reach the realm of abstraction. This in his opinion became highbrow and was equally difficult to comprehend.

---

[62]Furest and Hume, XXth Century Stage Decoration, op. cit., p. 52.

The point should be made that the permanent set pieces never portrayed the exact images, as was the tendency in the naturalistic theatre of the time. Hume believed that the actor should be surrounded by spaces which would provide the appropriate environment and atmosphere for each drama--readily identifiable by the audience and yet not realistic in detail.

Hume's skillful organization of the permanent set pieces gave the feeling of spaciousness to the three dimensions, namely height (including various acting levels), width, and depth. These dimensions were created naturally by the organization of the set pieces, rather than by painted perspective. Through the difference in heights, the dimensions of the stage, the bareness of the wall, an added curtain or painted decoration, and the position and location of the set pieces Hume reflected the psychology of the drama. The verticalism of the pylons, the proportion between the occupied and unoccupied spaces, and a silhouette placed in opposition to the plaster sky-dome, all became factors in the expression of the atmosphere and mood.

II. USE OF COLOR

One of the primary factors of color was to re-inforce the mood created by the spatial rhythms. Hume maintained that the function of color was to change the expression of

the drama or modify the mood within the scene, without major change in the organization of the set pieces. Hume used the flexible lighting system to achieve these modifications in color. He said: "The means which best meets the exigencies of each new scene and which is most completely adapted to express the psychologic event, is, after all, light."[63] In order to perceive how it was used, the reader must recall the technique with which Hume painted the set pieces. He sprayed the units lightly with the three basic colors. This allowed light to pick up a particular color and intensify it. For example a straw light turned the set into a warm glow; blue light strengthened the cool tones of the units; red light on the green hangings turned them black; and endless other combinations of effects modified a given set and produced numerous moods.

Today it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of Hume's use of color due primarily to the lack of practical color photography in 1917. However, an examination of the critical reviews give insights into his use of color and lighting. A general remark made by a reviewer sent from Boston to attend the opening night of the second season shows that Hume knew how to attain the desired mood and atmosphere through lighting. The reviewer wrote: "His

---

[63] Ibid., p. 71.

intimate knowledge of the stage equipment and all the tricks of lighting enables him to give these permanent materials the utmost variety of effect."[64] The Detroit News, when reviewing the production of The Chinese Lantern, pointed to Hume's abilities in lighting. It read: "His deserved reputation as master of lighting and stage effects in color . . . and scenery was increased tonight."[65] Helena's Husband was so successful in the use of color that it prompted Cheney to write: "As seen on the stage, in colour and under Hume's subtle lighting, the setting for Helena's Husband was the most beautiful of the series."[66]

Hume also used the addition of color in the form of set decorations. In The Romance of the Rose and Helena's Husband he made use of decorative curtains, while in The Golden Doom, he used painted decoration on the two large doors and a pair of colorful statues flanking the doors. It was Hume's ingenious use of color in the set decoration that gave variety to the permanent set pieces, and at the same time intensified the mood and atmosphere.

In summary a review by The Boston Evening Transcript of a program of plays--including A Sunny Morning by

---

[64]The Boston Evening Transcript, November 17, 1917.

[65]The Detroit News, February 17, 1917, p. 8.

[66]Cheney, The Art Theatre, op. cit., p. 169.

S. Quintero, The Doorway by Harold Brighouse, The Drums of Oude by Austin Strong, and Nettie by George Ade, testifies to Hume's successful use of color in the creation of the all-important mood and atmosphere.

> The stage settings were altogether extraordinary. The conventional part of A Sunny Morning blazed with warm color of tropical sunlight. The Doorway, played in semi-darkness, showed the mere outlines of the door of some large building, and proved amply realistic for a piece in which all the interest centres [sic] on the character. For the melodrama a suggestive setting, had been arranged, sufficiently adorned with properties to conjure up the immage of a Hindoo interior. But the scene for Nettie was nothing short of a triumph. The corner of a palm room in a large New York hotel was suggested by a series of fantastically decorated screens, placed in front of the heavy dark-green curtains, which are part of the permanent equipment of the stage. For sheer beauty the scene is notable. . . . Without representing anything, the scene suggested all the essentials --the frivolous tone of the script, the somewhat garish grandeure of the hotel, the coziness of the corner table. In addition, it was of course, accurately adapted to the demands of the action.
>
> It is to be added that in all these four scenes the structural materials were identical. With his pylons, platforms, steps and background curtains, aided by special properties for special purposes, Mr. Hume creates a sunny park of a London street, a Hindoo palace, and an American hotel. Under the lights, the stippled surface took on a new color value. The green curtains, now brown, now a elusive mauve, now black. It was abundant technical knowledge and artistic resource that makes his Arts and Crafts stage distinguished among its kind, not only for beauty but also for economy.[67]

The success of the permanent setting in the creation of the rhythm of spaces surrounding the actor is evident.

---

[67]The Boston Evening Transcript, loc. cit.

Hume's organization of the occupied and unoccupied spaces to create height, width, and depth surrounded the actor with the mood and atmosphere intrinsic to the various dramas. The use of color and lighting to modify the moods and atmospheres of the set pieces was excitingly effective according to the critics. Moreover with all the favorable results, Hume continually held the cost to a minimum and in most instances prevented the artistic outcome from reaching abstraction.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: HUME'S DESIGN EARNED A PERMANENT PLACE IN AMERICAN THEATRE

I. HUME'S THEATRE AS A COMMUNITY INSTITUTION

At the time Samuel J. Hume launched his theatrical career, advocates of the "new stagecraft" were contesting the conditions and attitudes which existed in the American theatre. They opposed the three established theatrical treatments: Belasco's romanticism, the most prevalent style; the commercial stage's honeycoated sentimentalism; and the gaudiness of the glamor-girl show. The rebellion began in a handful of small so-called art theatres and spread later to the larger and more commercial theatres.

The artists and innovators in the new art, of whom Hume was one, were not interested in the myriad of realistic details demanded by the current naturalistic style; they extended their efforts to conveying the inherent moods of the new drama. Many of the advocates of the new movement, however, were busy in the early twentieth century trying to achieve these artist results without sufficient attention to audience interest and theatre finances. Their art-for-art's-sake attitude was not appealing to the average art theatre patron, and one by one art theatres began to close their doors because of financial failure.

Hume, an astute observer in practical matters, attempted to remedy financial conditions in the art theatre with his personal motto, "Entertainment plus art."[68]

Hume had a great and varied talent to offer to educational and community theatre. His educational and theatrical background, from university studies in California to his studies with Craig abroad and with Baker at Harvard gave him a wealth of experience. Hume while at Detroit became interested in using this experience to make the theatre a moving force in the community. However he believed that before change could be made in the theatre, the general audience--people from all walks of life--must be made aware of, and taught to appreciate, the better drama. No amount of academic or social schemes designed to increase an "appreciation" of the drama would necessarily create an audience to support the theatre. The actual presence of an audience in the theatre was the first step in this general education.

While at the Arts and Crafts Theatre Hume lectured, demonstrated, and performed for schools of the Detroit area in an effort to bring the theatre into the lives of the people of the community. He worked with unusual energy to

---

[68]The Detroit News Tribune, May 20, 1918.

practice and spread his belief that the theatre is a moving force in a community.

II. HUME'S THEORETICAL ADVANCES

Hume's successful application of the theory of rhythm of spaces and the use of proportion and color to affect this rhythm was a huge step forward for the art theatre movement. The Arts and Crafts Theatre experiment proved that Hume's ideas were practical on stage as well as on paper, and that his ideas did lend themselves to a smaller theatre which lacked a fly area. He successfully created with the permanent setting the impressions of spacious heights, width, and depths--effects which previous directors had hoped their scene painter could create with painted forced perspective.

The most unusual attribute of Hume's ideas was that they did not bankrupt the theatre. Hume was able to make the simplest additions to his settings--an arch, a door flat, a Gothic window, decorative drapes, painted scenes tacked to previously painted flats and suggested ingenious new stage practices on a ridiculously low budget. Moreover, his tight control of expenditures does not appear to have sacrificed necessary mood and atmosphere of the productions.

Reviewers found Hume's variations of the permanent setting both colorful and exciting. His careful planning began to educate audiences to the higher types of drama and

scenic treatment without making his productions esoteric or ostentatious. An increasing number in the audience attest to this success.

III. HUME'S PERSONAL DYNAMISM

The theatre historians should not lose sight of Hume's own personal importance in the success of the art theatre movement. The successful applications of his settings depended upon a carefully trained artistry and practical sense of color, space, texture, and proportion. It is important to interject a comment made by Cheney ten years after Hume's permanent setting had been used as the exclusive system of scenery at the Arts and Crafts Theatre. This statement points up Hume's dynamic ability. Cheney stated:

> His [Hume's] adaptable setting . . . has been widely and not too intelligently taken as a model by many professional acting groups. A system of this sort has extraordinary range of possibilities for beauty when manipulated imaginatively and with taste. . . .[69]

It would seem that some directors did not possess the vivid imagination when using the permanent setting as did its designer.

Before a theatre can be successful, there must be some guiding personality at the head of the organization who

---

[69]Sheldon Cheney, Stage Decoration (New York: John Day, 1928), p. 87.

has a thorough knowledge of the many crafts of the theatre, as well as a keen sense of finance and management of people. Hume tirelessly extended his personal efforts to make sure that his staging techniques did succeed, both artistically and financially. But financial success and artistic integrity are the result of personal ability. It can therefore be said that Samuel J. Hume made the permanent adaptable setting work. By itself it was an ingenious solution to a variety of problems. In the hands of a very skillful director it was an extraordinary theatrical achievement.

It is interesting to speculate on the further developments which Hume might have accomplished with the permanent setting if World War I and Hume's own advancement had not altered his plans. During his two years at the Arts and Crafts Theatre, he was able to stage about twenty-five different plays with his adaptable setting. Hume left the Arts and Crafts Theatre in 1918 to assume the directorship of the Greek Theatre at the University of California due to the death of its founder.

IV. DISADVANTAGES OF THE PERMANENT SETTING

A serious disadvantage of the adaptable setting was its need for artistic manipulation by the director. The setting was not always successful in the art and community theatres of the nation when Hume did not personally direct

its use. However, a sensitive director who is thoroughly acquainted with the possibilities of the adaptable setting ought to be able to apply the principles of plastic and atmospheric design which Hume demonstrated and develop a similar system. Hume's method of painting his scenes is especially noteworthy and easily adaptable to other scenic systems.

The additional drawback, the system's difficulty in establishing a definite locale in realistic drama, was perhaps not thoroughly investigated in Hume's two years at the Arts and Crafts Theatre.

The dependence of the permanent setting on a plaster cyclorama and a flexible lighting system could be a limitation of some theatre groups. However, with some ingenuity, the scene designer should be able to develop acceptable substitutions. Many modern scene design books will instruct the beginner in the construction of cloth cyclorama structure and a flexible lighting system.

The principles of Hume's permanent adaptable setting are valuable to the scene designer today. The limitations under which Hume worked are still unavoidably present in the small educational and community theatres. Advantages such as ease of construction, mobility, ease of storage, and low cost are as valuable in the theatre now as in 1916. The rigid standardization of permanent setting units, the use of

drapes, multicolored stippled painting, and the close control of cost are still necessary lessons which the present theatre groups must learn. Sam Hume's solution to these limitations is therefore still worthy of serious study.

The original principles of such a type of scene design may not have been invented by Hume. His application of these principles, however, was the first financially and artistically successful experiment in such a method of design. Much credit belongs to Samuel Hume for his skill and courage in attempting such a dynamic experiment in the theatre when it was most needed.

Hume's staging theories proved successful as he demonstrated them in approximately twenty-five productions at the Arts and Crafts Theatre in Detroit, between the years 1916 and 1918.

After a quiet retirement in Los Angeles, Samuel James Hume died on September 1, 1962. All but forgotten during the passing years, he has been a long-time friend of the nation's art and community theatres. Perhaps the perspective which the passing of time lends to events will prove more clearly in coming decades that his contributions to the art and community theatres were truly lasting and particularly important.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. BOOKS

Burleigh, Louise. The Community Theater. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1917.

Carter, Huntley. The Theatre of Max Reinhardt. New York: Mitchell Kenmerley Company, 1914.

Cheney, Sheldon. The Art Theater. First edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917.

_____. The Art Theater. Second edition, revised. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925.

_____. The New Movement in the Theatre. New York: Mitchell-Kenmerly Company, 1914.

_____. Stage Decoration. New York: The John Day Company, 1928.

_____. The Theatre: Three Thousand Years of Drama, Acting and Stagecraft. New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1929.

Colby, Joy Hankanson. Art and a City. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1956.

Craig, Edward Gordon. On the Art of the Theatre. New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1936.

Dickinson, Thomas H. The Insurgent Theater. New York: B. W. Buebach, 1917.

Gorelik, Mordicai. New Theatres for Old. New York: Samuel French, 1941.

Hughes, Glenn. A History of the American Theatre, 1700-1950. New York: Samuel French, 1941.

Hume, Samuel J., and Lois M. Foster. Theater and School. New York: Samuel French, 1951.

_____, and Walter Rane Fuerst. XXth Century Stage Decoration. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929.

Kinne, Wisner Payne. George Pierce Baker and the American Theatre. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954.

Macgowan, Kenneth. Footlights Across America. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929.

_____, and Robert Edmond Jones. Continental Stagecraft. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1921.

_____, and William Melnitz. The Living Stage. New York Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1955.

Mackay, Constance D'arcy. The Little Theatre in the United States. New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1917.

Marquis, Albert N. (ed.) Who's Who in America. Vol. 13. Chicago: A. N. Marquis and Company, 1925.

Simonson, Lee. The Stage is Set. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932.

Wise, Claude Merton. Dramatics for School and Community. Cincinnati: Stewart Kidd Company, 1923.

B. PERIODICALS

The Century Magazine, 1916-1918.

Cheney, Sheldon. "Sam Hume's Adaptable Setting," Theatre Arts Magazine, Vol. I (May 1917).

The Detroit Saturday Night Magazine, 1916-1918.

Tompkins, Frank. Theatre Arts Magazine, Vol. I (November 1916).

C. NEWSPAPERS

Boston Evening Transcript, 1916-1918.

The Detroit Free Press, 1915-1919.

The Detroit Journal, 1916-1918.

The Detroit News, 1915-1919. (Including files of The Detroit News Tribune.)

D. UNPUBLISHED WORKS

Etheridge, Benjamin Taylor. "The History of the Arts and Crafts Theatre, Detroit, Michigan, 1916-1919." Unpublished M. A. Thesis, Stanford University, Stanford, California, 1953.

Josenhans, Alma (comp.) "The Arts and Crafts Theatre, 1915-1917." Vols. I and II. Typescript. Personnel of the Works Progress Administration, 1934-1941. The Detroit, Michigan, Public Library.

Kenney, Ronald. "Samuel James Hume's Contributions to the American Theater." Unpublished M. A. Thesis, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1961.

Scrapbook of the Arts and Crafts Theater, 1915-1919. Arts and Crafts Society, Detroit, Michigan.

E. PAMPHLETS

Society of Arts and Crafts, Eleventh Annual Report. Detroit, Michigan.

Society of Arts and Crafts, Twelfth Annual Report. Detroit, Michigan.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

PLATE 1

THE INTRUDER

PLATE 2

THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE

PLATE 3