1968


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THE RISE OF THE COSTUME DESIGNER: A CRITICAL
HISTORY OF COSTUME ON THE NEW YORK STAGE
FROM 1934 TO 1950.

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and
Mechanical College, Ph.D., 1968
Speech-Theater

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THE RISE OF THE COSTUME DESIGNER: A CRITICAL HISTORY
OF COSTUME ON THE NEW YORK STAGE
FROM 1934 TO 1950

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in
The Department of Speech

by
Eelin Stewart Harrison
B.A., Brooklyn College, 1945
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1946
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To the memory of my mother and father who looked for this long ere now.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is a critical survey of costume design on the New York stage during the sixteen years from 1934-35 to 1949-50. Primary sources were commercial programmes for musicals and plays produced during those theatrical seasons, and regular journalistic theatrical reviews in the several daily papers published during the period. Programmes provided information about billing of designers, recognition of technical assistants, and crediting of costume construction.

The first chapter presents an historical background prognosticating the trends and practices in theatre production which led to the development of the costume designer. The second chapter identifies the job of costume designing and defines the duties and privileges of the various artists in costume design by citing programme billings and observing working relationships with producers, actors, and set designers. The third chapter describes the newly emergent costume design specialist as a professional by considering his qualifications and training, his self-evaluation, his goals and ideals, his union affiliation, and his public recognition. The fourth chapter computes the relative
amount of costume criticism proferred by various critics and traces the growing significance of its placement in the review throughout the period. The fifth chapter measures the growing awareness and increasing knowledgeability of costume design and designers on the part of the critics by analyzing and cataloguing examples of various kinds of journalistic costume criticism.

The study concludes that costume itself among the visual arts of the theatre reached new prominence and developed an importance it had not achieved before this time. In this period costume designing produced both a profession and a specialist--the job and the man. The influence of journalistic criticism was vital to the development of costume design as a specialization. Critics of the New York area daily newspapers reflected the growth of costume design as an entity and recognized the existence and quality of the emerging designer. Not only the technical practice of costuming but also the art of costume design, and its professors, achieved recognition, became credited customarily in programmes and billing, was granted criticism regularly as a prime element of production, and was honoured by prizes and awards.
Each of you, when his turn comes, must go down to the general underground abode, and get the habit of seeing in the dark. When you have acquired the habit, you will see ten thousand times better than the inhabitants of the den, and you will know what the several images are, and what they represent, because you have seen the beautiful and just and good in their truth.

Plato

At the beginning the confines of this study were tentatively blocked out as covering the theatrical seasons of 1934–1935 to 1944–1945, but as the data were observed and recorded two points became apparent. Trends and movements in costume were still inconclusive by 1945, so the time span was extended to 1950. Also an increasing concern of critics with costume criticism and with the new costume designer came to light, warranting a closer attention to journalistic reviewing. So, the purpose of the study was formulated as a critical survey of costume design in the New York theatre from 1934 until 1950.

Three previous dissertations on costume in the American theatre had been written, a study by Genevieve Richardson of wardrobe practice and costume style during the
first one hundred and fifty years of the American stage,\textsuperscript{1} Janet Loring's treatment of costuming from 1895 to 1915 emphasizing as typical of the time practices in Charles Frohman's companies,\textsuperscript{2} and Josephine Paterek's excellent survey of costuming procedures on the commercial stage from 1914 to 1934.\textsuperscript{3}

The primary sources upon which this study is based are the actual dramatic productions on the Broadway stage during the theatrical seasons of 1934-1935 to 1949-1950, as recorded in the several yearbooks compiled by Burns Mantle and continued after his death by John Chapman. Two main sources of information about these productions were tapped: the commercial programmes for the plays as held by the Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library and regular journalistic theatrical reviews in the several daily papers published during the period. Additional information was found in souvenir programmes held also by the Theatre Collection, in newspaper and magazine articles in contemporary periodicals, and from the only too few biographies and

\textsuperscript{1}Genevieve Richardson, "Costuming on the American Stage, 1751-1901" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois, 1953).

\textsuperscript{2}Janet Loring, "Costuming on the New York Stage from 1895 to 1915, with Particular Emphasis on Charles Frohman's Companies" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1960).

books on theatre of the time. A valuable resource proved to be direct information from acquaintances who had practiced in the theatre of the period.

The starting point for the study was in the several yearbooks of the theatre edited by Burns Mantle for the seasons of 1934-1935 through 1947-1948 and by John Chapman for the seasons of 1948-1949 and 1949-1950.\(^4\) Listed in these annuals are short descriptions of the productions presented on Broadway during each theatre year.

Circuses, vaudeville, and ice shows were not included because production methods were generally different, as was the personnel.

A consideration of the ballet was left out for much the same reason, although there had been great discussion in theatrical circles about that very point. The ballet both in America and abroad had engaged many easel painters to do the designing of settings and costumes. Designs had been supplied by Picasso, Matisse, Dali, Roualt, Chagall, Braque, Dufy, and Utrillo among others. But because of antagonism in the profession, and the union regulation that an artist had to pass the entrance examination and be admitted to the union before he could have his settings and costumes executed,

the ballet, toward the end of the period under study, was
designed less by modern painters as by scene designers:

Within the past few years, however, a curious and
confounding situation has developed. . . . The current
trend in ballet production is plainly away from the
use of distinguished artists as designers of dance
settings and costumes. Many of the new ballets . . .
are being mounted by professional scene designers
rather than fine painters.5

Among the costume design specialists who designed for the
ballet in the later years of the period were Stewart Chaney,
Lucinda Ballard, Irene Sharaff, and Motley. So many
designers had begun to do ballet and opera that at the end
of the period Donald Oenslager was able to say:

The designer in the theatre works in a variety of
theatre forms—opera, ballet, musical, drama, and
comedy. For these various forms he must adapt a
variety of styles of expression.6

Designers enjoyed the challenge of designing for dance.
Virginia Volland, costume specialist, goes as far as to say:
"Designing costumes for ballet brings designing, in my
opinion, as close to being an art form as it is ever likely
to get."7 In executing costume for dance, too, the skill is
necessarily greater and comes closer to the creative. Edith
Lutyens felt that her shop was known to work well with
painters because she was interested in their work and "could

5Emily Genauer, "Modern Art and the Ballet," Theatre
Arts, XXXV (October, 1951), 17.

6Donald Oenslager, "All the Visual Arts," Library
Journal, LXXVI (November 1, 1951), 1762.

7Virginia Volland, Designing Woman (New York, 1966),
p. 171.
contribute to the visual aspect as I was able to interpret their ideas." But because of the variation in production methods a consideration of ballet was regretfully left out of this survey.

Opera too, with some notable exceptions, was eliminated from this study. *Porgy and Bess* in both 1935 and 1942 was reviewed by both drama critics and by music critics because George Gershwin, the composer, wished it considered as a musical drama. *The Consul* (1950) was called the best musical of the 1949-1950 season by the New York Drama Critics' Circle. John Chapman evaluated it as "top grade musical theatre" and "not grand opera." These two exceptions are included in the study.

Plays in repertory were excluded since production problems differed substantially from the single play in continuous run. Because this study was to be a survey of the New York commercial stage, all productions of foreign origin, either European or West Coast, were left out. Off-Broadway production which was not then the commercial enterprise it later became nor yet recognized by the theatrical unions was also eliminated. A report from the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center defined On-Broadway, substantially the same as during the years of the period studied, as follows:

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8 Edith Lutyens Bel Geddes, in a letter to the writer, July 8, 1966.

On-Broadway is any theatre in the Borough of Manhattan having more than 299 seats presenting first class productions which employ Equity casts, IATSE crews, and other theatrical union personnel. Producers of On-Broadway productions must also sign and meet the production standards and minimum royalty requirements of the Dramatists Guild.10

The above delimitation of Broadway by exclusion defined Off-Broadway for purposes of the study.

The group of musicals and plays that remained after the small percentage of exclusions cited represented Broadway, the presentations of the New York commercial stage during the years of the study. Of the 138 productions described by Burns Mantle in 1934-1935, the peak year of the survey, 126 were eligible for use in the study. In the low year of 1949-1950, of the 59 listed in Burns Mantle, 48 were chosen as appropriate to the work.

All the play titles chosen from Burns Mantle's listing were researched for programmes, housed in the New York Public Library's Theatre Collection. A programme was found for over 93 per cent of the plays; only a few programmes out of each year were missing and those mostly for short-lived or poorly reviewed productions. In one or two instances the researcher's own collection afforded a Playbill the Library lacked. The programmes reaffirmed, or in some instances corrected, facts noted from the yearbooks. The programmes provided additional information about billing of set and costume

10 Maxwell Silverman, Off-Broadway producer and Theatre Collection staff member, in a letter to the writer, July 6, 1966.
designers, recognition of technical assistants in set and in costume, crediting of construction of costumes, execution of designs, and names of various houses and manufacturers that supplied costume accessories.

The programme, known by the trade name Playbill, "a weekly magazine for theatregoers . . . published for Broadway productions only," was a booklet of anywhere from a dozen pages upwards of fifty, contracted for by the producer of a Broadway show from the New York Theatre Program Corporation (now called Playbill, Inc.). Toward the middle of the booklet appeared some pages of information about the production. All copy pertaining to the play, including billing and credits, was submitted by the producer or the press agent, "also responsible for proof reading." In the programme section of the Playbill:

The order usually remains the same except for contractual agreements between the producers and the cast. An example of this would be whether the stars' name is to appear above or below the title of the show, what percent of the title the stars' name should be, etc.

The order of the first page devoted to production information was an indication of the relative importance accorded each of the production elements:

The union contracts may specify who should get billing in the program but size and location of billing is a matter of individual negotiation.

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12Ibid.

13Ibid.
between the producer and the artist involved whether he be actor, director, designer, or whatever. You have no doubt noted that the credits on the title page are confined to the more or less creative and interpretive personnel.14

When the actors were stars their names could precede the name of the play. If the playwright was important his name went before the play title. No name ever superseded the producer's except that of a charitable cause or organization under the auspices or sponsorship of which the performance might be held. Next in this hierarchy came the designer or, if he were eminent, the composer of incidental music. The listing for a musical comedy was similar, with all the librettists, lyricists, and composers in their assigned spots before the designer. Alongside the set designer, or perhaps below him opposite the lighting designer, appeared the name of the costume designer.

On the next page the cast was listed, usually in order of appearance. Following the cast was a synopsis of scenes. Everything that went before the cast was called the billing. All that came after the synopsis was called the technical credits, sometimes prefaced by the heading CREDITS. After the credits the pattern of the programming was not so rigid and often included the producer's staff and the theatre staff, as well as short biographies of producer, actors, and sometimes technical people.

In the course of the present study the programme was

14Silverman, op. cit.
the final authority for billing and crediting of costume design and execution because it was prima facie the authoritative publication from the producer. Often Burns Mantle named the set designer but not the costume designer, even though the latter was mentioned in the billing. Sometimes the same designer would be billed for both costume and setting, but Mantle noted only set design. A frequent phrasing when the same man did both sets and costumes was "production designed by" followed by the designer's name. Early in the period, before costume acknowledgment was always billed but after costume specialization had achieved some recognition, costume design upon occasion was credited in a separate box between synopsis and technical credits. Upon rare occasion neither Burns Mantle nor the programme noted costume design but the identity of the designer became apparent from the mention and praise of reviewers. Early in the period, too, instances occurred of the setting designer being recognized in the billing but not the costume design although done by the same man. Lee Simonson accounted for this in a letter to Mrs. Paterek, dated April 5, 1960, in which he said that when he had done both sets and costumes and no special costume credit was given it meant that he supervised selection of bought or rented clothing.15

According to Mordecai Gorelik, union regulation placed

15Josephine Paterek, unpublished material deposited in the Theatre Collection.
costume design credit at least before the cast and after the scene designer. But credits could be negotiated and stated in the contract. The billing order in the programme became important for more than reasons of prestige for "The courts are tough about credits. They realize credits are as important as money."16

After information from the Playbills had been added to data from Burns Mantle, the reviews for each play were sought out. Throughout the sixteen seasons a total of eighteen newspapers were investigated for regular journalistic criticism. In all but one of the newspapers from time to time one dramatic critic replaced another, so there were many more than eighteen reviewers read. In 1936 Shepard Traube wrote:

There are only ten important daily newspapers in New York, all told. The American, Brooklyn Eagle, Daily Mirror, Daily News, Evening Journal, Evening Post, Herald-Tribune, Times, Sun, and the World-Telegram.17

That same year the American and the Journal were amalgamated, as was the Sun with the World-Telegram in the last year of the study. Although the Christian Science Monitor was a Boston paper, its influence was national, since it reviewed regularly the New York theatre openings. Women's Wear Daily too was nationally read, and its drama critic had personal


17Shepard Traube, So You Want To Go Into the Theatre? (Boston, 1936), p. 205.
prestige in the theatre. Albeit the life span of FM was but a few years it achieved power through its features, including drama reporting. In 1942 regular theatre coverage became available from the Newark *Evening News*, the Brooklyn *Citizen*, and the *Morning Telegraph*. *Variety* was the trade paper on Broadway. Two newspapers from which some material had been gathered, the *Daily Worker* and the *New York Star*, were later discarded because the coverage was too slight and irregular. The general tenor of the criticism of the whole show was noted as a control: good, bad, panned, praised. If the scenery was commented upon in any way, that fact was noted. Costume mention of any kind was copied down verbatim for future analysis.

In conjunction with the study of original and live sources contemporary periodical literature was combed for social as well as theatrical reference to costume and costume designers. A great part of the biographical and educational material on the designers themselves came from the souvenir programmes, also collected in the Library. These were far fewer in number than the Playbills, because they were sold to the theatre audiences of musicals and of some of the more spectacular of the plays.

The programme data were analyzed for set designer and costume designer relationships. The journalistic reviews were aligned for an assessment of the critics and for kinds of costume criticism. The material on the designers was organized to uncover the nature of the profession. Much of
the material on technical credits was discarded in the handling of the data. Masks and makeup were considered outside the scope of this study. Enough notice was taken of the other types of costuming to verify the continuing validity of findings of Mrs. Paterek's previous study. Nothing was done with data on crediting of accessories and suppliers of accessories and costume fabrics, many of which remained from the last period; the system stayed the same, and had been treated by Mrs. Paterek.

In order to put the findings in costume design in this period into their proper place, Chapter I provides both a history and a background. Chapter II considers the various tasks in theatrical costuming, the identities of artists and craftsmen who carried them out, and sorts out the interlacing and overlapping domains of both jobs and workers. In this period costume designing produced both a profession and a specialist, the job and the man. Chapter III defines the designer as a professional.

The influence of journalistic criticism was vital to the development of costume design as a specialization. Critics of the New York area daily newspapers reflected the growth of costume design as an entity and recognized the existence and quality of the emerging designer. Chapter IV analyzes the critics and their contribution to that growth. Chapter V deals with specific journalistic criticism for trends and criteria in costume designing.
CHAPTER I

HISTORY

"The brief and passing chronicles of our time."

Hamlet

Early American actors brought over with them costumes and costuming procedures directly from England. According to American theatre historians, Lewis Hallam picked up whatever bits of costume, along with actors and scenery, that he could from his brother's London theatre when he voyaged to America in 1752. Throughout the next hundred and fifty years until the rise of the Syndicate, the responsibility of furbishing himself for the stage continued to be the actor's. Whether he chose a costume from the company's trunk, willy nilly, colour and cut to suit his own fancy rather than the play's needs, or found it elsewhere, it was the actor's place and prerogative to furnish his own costume. Many an actress was considered the finer artist for her ability to create her own costumes. Toward the latter part of the nineteenth century when dressing and fashionable clothes were a strong audience attraction, actresses were often hired on the appeal of their wardrobes.
But, says Mrs. Richardson, by the end of the period of her study "costume has become the responsibility of the manager-producers. The individual costume is selected or specially designed for a particular actor in a particular role, and to harmonize with the rest of the costumes and with the setting."¹

This reversal of responsibility came about as a result of the operation of a number of factors.

Early in the second half of the nineteenth century, as the country was suddenly netted with railroads, traveling companies booked themselves nationwide into theatres earlier inhabited by resident acting companies. This annual booking took place in New York during a few weeks at the height of the summer. The multiple transactions carried out by all concerned, actors, managers and theatre owners, in setting up the next year's playing arrangements were necessarily confusing and inefficient and led to many abuses. To initiate some order into the procedure, the theatres, obviously the most stable of the units involved, gradually began to band together into circuits, or booking routes. The temper of the country's economy was one of amalgamating financial interests into big trusts. In 1896 three of the theatre management chains combined to form the Theatrical

Syndicate, controlling nearly every first-rate theatre in the country, and becoming a booking monopoly. Members of the Syndicate were not only agents and theatre owners but, in many cases, like the powerful Charles Frohman, were also producers, and naturally favoured their own welfare. The independent actor-managers were caught between the Syndicate's dichotomous interests of the theatre owners on the one hand, represented by Klaw and Erlanger, and of the business men producers, like Charles Frohman, on the other.

Previously, actors, in the fast-disappearing time of the great stars and theatre-minded actor-managers, had been treated with importance and respect. But now the functions of acting and management were separating and the theatre was in the hands of businessmen who were not much aware of, nor had much concern for the actor and his place and privilege in the world of the theatre. By the nineties, the critic William Winter says, in the theatre were no longer "actors and men truly comprehensive of, and sympathetic with, actors. . . . That institution had passed almost entirely into the hands of the so-called 'business man.'"\(^2\)

In the same year as the Syndicate was formed, actors gathered protectively into the Actors' Society of America, a group which proved powerless against the growing Syndicate. Again and again the actors and actor-managers rebelled

against the bloodsucking practices of the Syndicate, only to be forced again to give in. After ten years of rebellion and oppression an unexpected ally appeared. The Shubert brothers, rapidly expanding as theatre owners, who found their way up blocked by the Syndicate, set about building a rival empire. Their first move was to ally themselves to the perennial revolters—David Belasco, an independent producer, and manager Harrison Grey Fiske, with his wife, the star actress Minnie Maddern Fiske. All through the next decade the fight continued; the participants never seemed to realize that the choice tidbit they tore from one another was disintegrating. Shuttled between two warring factions, the actors were still no better off; and the road business, for which the Syndicate battled, was rapidly dissolving. In 1916, when the Syndicate's power was finally gone through sheer lack of energy, the draw of vaudeville, cleaned up to the status of a family show, and the pull of the movies were found to be melting the bulk of road audiences away.

In the meantime the artistic life of the theatre had gone on. During this period two theatrical elements that audiences loved were stars and clothes, and the wise producer gave them both. Stars, like Billie Burke and Ethel Barrymore, were chosen for their ability to wear costume.  

3Janet Loring, "Costuming on the New York Stage from 1895 to 1915, with Particular Emphasis on Charles Frohman's Companies" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1960), p. 16.
Actresses were expected to furnish their own clothes and were hired together with their wardrobe. But even the disproportionately highly paid stars could not afford, nor had they always the taste, to provide the extravagantly fashionable clothes the audiences demanded.

In order to exercise more complete control over both star and production, in 1895 Charles Frohman initiated the practice of paying for all costumes with the rare exception of some modern dress for men and non-spectacular gowns in minor parts. In addition his provision for a costume parade and even two dress rehearsals, for he insisted on his actresses wearing their clothes well, put new importance on costume as a production element.4

Charles Frohman maintained also a company wardrobe, under the guardianship of Louise MacDonald. Miss MacDonald's position was that of costumer and custodian. She fitted to the actors those costumes that Frohman had purchased abroad, and repaired and stored used costumes. When, in 1919, after Frohman's death, James Stroock bought several thousand costumes from the Frohman storehouse, he hired Miss MacDonald and went into the business of renting and manufacturing theatrical costumes as Brooks Costume Company. In 1944, at sixty-five years of age, Louise MacDonald was still at Brooks in charge of the stock theatrical costumes.5

4Ibid., p. 289.

5Maurice Zolotow, "How To Dress a Broadway Show," Saturday Evening Post, CXXVI (June 24, 1944), 76.
Frohman's influence on production practices of other major New York companies was great. Augustin Daly had begun to exercise control of costume in his Shakespearian productions and in musicals during the eighties and nineties. Frohman had kept his place as innovator by controlling contemporary dress as well. Belasco then extended his naturalistic hand over yet another production element by providing clothes in 1900 for a costume play, and by 1918 was furnishing his actors with contemporary clothes.⁶

Although other managers began to follow the leads of Frohman and Belasco in providing stage clothes, costume expense was still one of the major grievances of actors. It was not until after the actors' strike in 1919, called and won by Actors' Equity, an association which had sprung phoenix-like from the ashes of the moribund Actors' Society, that management became contractually responsible for stage clothes.⁷

Before Equity contracts went into effect, actresses were compelled to furnish their own costumes if the play were modern. This was decidedly unfair, for if the play was what was termed a "society drama," the costumes had to be costly. The actress was forced to go into debt to procure suitable costumes for a play which might, and often did, close after a week or two. Fortunately, Equity had remedied this. Nowadays a producer must pay for all wearing apparel that is

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visible. This includes shoes and stockings and even underwear if it is seen.\(^8\)

For all its importance to audiences, and in the financial arrangements of the stage, costume as a production element was at this time relatively ignored in the opening night reviews. Any comments critics made were of costume plays; modern dress was seldom mentioned. Whatever costume evaluation that was made was found in periodical articles rather than in the daily newspaper reviews.\(^9\)

The prevailing tendency of the drama in America during most of the nineteenth century had been Romantic. In Europe of the past twenty years Naturalism, in the Parisian Théâtre Libre of Antoine, in the Moscow Art theatre of Stanislavsky, and in Otto Brahm's Freie Bühne in Berlin, had broken Romanticism's hold on the theatre. But America was loathe to accept this "disgusting"\(^10\) tranche de vie sort of drama. Not until David Belasco had sweetened it with his own particular lyricism did this new form of theatre become popular. Belasco aimed for scenic effect, for the appearance of reality, for the exact reproduction of a real environment, rather than for the meaning behind it.

Belasco gave the stage its greatest impetus toward realistic staging. He tolerated no painted waterfalls -- on Belasco stages either real water spilled or none


\(^10\)Augustin Daly, quoted in Gorelik, *op. cit.*, p. 160.
at all. He was master of scenic and lighting effects, often so spectacular that they stole the show from the actors.11

Belasco standardized the American form of Naturalism into the romance-tinged shape of his own realism, and brought it to its peak of showmanship by 1914. But by 1919 Belasco realism was no longer Broadway's nine days' wonder but had found the inevitable outlet for its American romantic Naturalism in Hollywood.

Throughout Europe a new stagecraft had supplanted Naturalism. It was a movement led by the designers, but included in its scope the newly important artist in theatre, the director, as well as the playwright, for the watchword of the New Stagecraft was unity. The heart of its theory was summed up by Moderwell as "an endeavor to grasp the whole, to discover its inner meaning and to reveal its unity and purpose, to select the essential and repeat it constantly," and to practice by "selection rather than imitation, suggestion instead of representation."12 This scenic rebellion against the pictorial accuracy of Naturalism sought not a realistic truth but the poetic truth of symbols. Rather than outward realism, the adherents of the New Stagecraft sought inner psychological realism. The ultimate initiator of this movement was Adolphe Appia, both theorist and


practitioner, who believed in and worked for a plastic architectonic stage dependent upon fluid lighting. But it was Edward Gordon Craig, the theatre visionary, who provided the new movement with its greatest stimulation and inspiration. This "artist who can write even as he can draw" became the "spokesman of the New Movement the world over."\(^{13}\) However, Max Reinhardt, the organizer and doer of the new stagecraft, made the movement popular. Art theatres appeared in every country in Europe, including the showman's own Kleines Theater to which, says Washburn-Freund in 1924, "in some measure, the 'little theatre movement' even in this country at the present time is indebted."\(^{14}\)

In the encouraging atmosphere of the Little Theatre with its efforts to experiment, the young designers interested in the New Stagecraft worked and developed and became known. Among them Robert Edmond Jones designed settings for the Washington Square Players, for the Provincetown Players both on Cape Cod and on Macdougall Street where they called themselves the Playwright's Theatre, and for the Neighborhood Playhouse. Aline Bernstein at first designed costumes at the new Neighborhood Playhouse, and then sets as well.\(^{15}\) Donald


Oenslager, too, started out at the Neighborhood Playhouse, and Mordecai Gorelik at the Provincetown. Lee Simonson not only designed for the Washington Square Players but later, when in 1919 they became the Theatre Guild, served also as a board member. Jo Mielziner and Raymond Sovey were early Theatre Guild designers, too. Norman Bel Geddes, who had designed for a little theatre in California before doing his first New York set for the Metropolitan Opera in 1918, mentions in his autobiography that "The Dramatists Guild says that eighty percent of the talent in the professional theatre of our day got started in little theatres."  

Kenneth Macgowan, coproducer with Robert Edmond Jones later in 1924 of the Experimental Theatre, traveled with him through Europe observing the little art theatres there. After their return Macgowan formulated in 1921 the scenic philosophy of the new movement. He said that the desired goal of the quality theatre was to achieve style and atmosphere. This end was to be accomplished by the artistic means of simplification, suggestion and synthesis. Simplification involved a limiting selection of scenic elements, the better to focus on the actor; and suggestion denoted a qualitative selection of the elements. Synthesis stood for the fusing of all production factors into one unified projection of

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idea. Macgowan said that "the new stagecraft sets itself to visualize the atmosphere of a play." The influence of this philosophy traveled with all of the above-mentioned designers throughout the next thirty years of their work in the theatre.

The soil in which the new stagecraft took root was that of the post-war boom. It was a financial boom, for war profiteers and forcibly retired liquor dealers invested their money in show business. It was an emotional boom, for Americans released from the tensions of war brought an "intense spirit of longing for new and different things." It was an intellectual boom, for there was an entrance of college-bred men into the theatre. From among these educated minds came many of the producer-directors who were amenable to the new stagecraft. The cultured and wealthy Winthrop Ames and his former production assistant, Guthrie McClintic, Arthur Hopkins whom Macgowan calls "the producer who has done most for the progress of the new stagecraft in the commercial American theatre," and the cosmopolitan Gilbert Miller all reflected the new spirit in the theatre and carried it on into the thirties and forties.

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The director, as a separate artist from the producer, became a newly important factor in production. James Light of the Provincetown and then of the Experimental Theatre, and Philip Moeller of the Theatre Guild were examples of the American form of Craig's ideal director. John Mason Brown saw them all as theatre men "ready and anxious" to work with the designer, "to coordinate and fuse the whole production into a cogent whole."  

The director in America did not develop into a complete theatrical autocrat as did his European prototype, the régisseur. Norman Bel Geddes, who was after all a designer, upon occasion came close to it in his projected production of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1921) and *Dead End* (1935), in *It Happened on Ice* (1940), and in the design concept for the 1941 Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus. But he was a designer and this period was a designer's renascence.

The designers in this era of the theatre have been the leaders and the thinkers, the writers and the theorists. Books and articles published by the designers of this long period remain definitive of American theatre beyond mid-century. The inspiring *The Dramatic Imagination* by Robert Edmond Jones, Lee Simonson's *The Stage Is Set* and *Part of a Lifetime*, Aline Bernstein's numerous articles for *Theatre Arts* and other magazines, *Scenery: Then and Now*, by Donald Oenslager, Jo Mielziner's *Designing For the Theatre*, and

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22Brown, op. cit., p. 53.
Mordecai Gorelik's monumental *New Theatres For Old*, continue as the verbal articulations of the designers' era in theatre.

With the visual impetus of the times developing new personnel in all branches of theatre there came too a new American theatrical criticism. The young vociferous critics were active in books, in columns in daily, weekly and monthly periodicals. Among them were scholars and aesthetes and newspapermen and theatre buffs; among them were Kenneth Macgowan, Stark Young and Barrett Clark, George Jean Nathan and Joseph Wood Krutch.\(^2^3\)

In the 1927-1928 season a theatre slump occurred that anticipated the business crash by more than two years and 1929 was the "worst legitimate season in a 9-year period."\(^2^4\) The decreased activity on the New York stage was due to more than an economic letdown. Although the new movement was qualitatively strong, the bulk of theatre production was still in the hands of artistically uninterested business men who, as *Variety* puts it, were out to make a buck. In New York by the middle twenties the little theatres were folding. They either shut their doors or, like the Theatre Guild and the Neighborhood Playhouse, became institutions. The little art theatre in New York had done its job. The young designers had been cradled until their maturing talents could stand alone. Robert Edmond Jones was designing extensively for


\(^{24}\)Green & Laurie, *op. cit.*, p. 286.
Arthur Hopkins. Lee Simonson devoted his growing power to the Guild's sets, costumes and lights. By 1925 both Mielziner and Oenslager had begun to free-lance. Gorelik had done John Howard Lawson's *Processional* (1925) and Boris Aronson *Day and Night* (1923), by Ansky. Bel Geddes' great visual triumph of setting, lighting and costume for *The Miracle* was current. The artists of the new stagecraft, insisting on a unity or synthesis of scenery, costumes, lighting and movement within the play itself had established a new relationship of the designer with the actor and director.

The theatre slump was not only an economic one, it was also an artistic one. For the new movement from its inception had been a designer's renascence. The Symbolist theatre in America was a visual one. There had been no developing drama to match the growth of design. Irving Pichel, director and producer, expressed the idea in these words:

> The impulses which so remarkably refreshed the theatre were all visually actuated. The drawings of Gordon Craig, the scenic simplifications of Ernest Stern, the mechanical improvements which moved plastic sets readily—these were the kind of evidence of a new life in the theatre. It was not a new drama, a fresh stream of dramatic poetry, or a young generation of great actors.25

John Gassner came to the conclusion that only in the one-act plays was the Symbolist achievement in playwriting

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rewarding enough not to fall short of expectation.26 The drama, which seemed to be resurging in the late teens, was based, as was the rebellious scenic movement, on an inner realism. Playwrights were concerned with "the inner life of the mind and spirit,"27 as inspired by the writings of Freud. But Symbolist drama, concerning itself with inner realism, too often degenerated into the claptrap of pseudo Freudianism with its analytic verbalizations. Another deviant from the Symbolist core was the increasingly popular psychological thriller. The Expressionistic form that Symbolist drama ultimately took in Europe had an aborted development on the American stage. Only Eugene O'Neill, whose choice of dramatic form was both catholic and eclectic, was the one arguable peer of the great designers, the one playwright who wrote for the new stages of his time.

Lee Simonson surmised that American writing was not up to the challenge of the designers' rebellion against Naturalism:

For the dominating trend of American playwriting is realistic. Our occasional attempts at allegory are thin and arbitrary, our symbols, when used, without dramatic eloquence.28

John Gassner commented that "without a literature of


27Brown, op. cit., p. 58.

its own even the most attractive type of theatre dies of inanition and proves to be only a flash in the dark."\textsuperscript{29} So, by the early thirties in America an efflated Symbolism was gradually merging with the still prevalent romantic Naturalism. The New Movement was failing because directors, writers, and the rest of theatre activity had not followed where designers led. The greener fields of Hollywood had attracted many of the adherents of the New Movement. Some like Helen Westley, the Theatre Guild actress, Arthur Hopkins, director, and Kenneth Macgowan, producer, stayed in the West and enriched the movies. Some few like Robert Edmond Jones and Mordecai Gorelik, disillusioned at not finding conditions to match their own artistic integrity, returned to Broadway. But the once surgent wave of Symbolism was receding from the American stage.

The New Movement dwindled away but left behind it a number of valuable survivors. Gorelik mentions that "a certain amount of simplification, agreeable color schemes, tasteful furnishing and pleasant lighting were all that remained to tell the story of the hard-fought struggle to pass beyond the Naturalism of Belasco."\textsuperscript{30} In addition to the points expressed in this innocuous recapitulation of Macgowan's credo of Symbolism by Gorelik, two further


\textsuperscript{30}Gorelik, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 309.
derivatives remained of the once-new movement, each a part of the larger concept of synthesis. The idea of the director as "an autocrat, a final interpretator who orchestrated the entire performance" was to grow throughout the thirties and forties. The other drive continuing from the impact of the New Movement was the urge to unify the visual style of a production.

When the progenitors of the new stagecraft used the term scene design, they implied the whole scenic environment including costume and lighting. The designer of the entire visual mise-en-scene was called a scenic artist. The scenic artist considered himself a total designer. John Mason Brown, in explaining the phenomenon of the new visual impetus, described the designer as follows:

The new designer came to the theatre not as a spiritless hack but as an artist entitled to the privileges of interpretation and expecting to be judged as a creator. He was, in short, no longer a scene painter, but a scenic artist, and the difference is enormous. . . . "Remember," wrote Craig, "he does not merely sit down and draw a pretty picture or historically accurate design with enough doors and windows in picturesque places, but he first of all chooses certain colours which seem to him to be in harmony with the spirit of the place, rejecting other colours as out of tune. He then weaves into a pattern certain objects—an arch, a fountain, a balcony, a bed—using the chosen object as the center of his design. Then he adds to this all the objects which are mentioned in the play, and which are necessary to be seen. To these he adds, one by one, each character which appears in the play and gradually each movement of character and each costume. He is as likely as not to make several mistakes in his pattern. If so, he must as it were, unpick the design, and rectify the blunder even if he has to go right back to the beginning and start.

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31 Brown, op. cit., p. 53.
the pattern all over again—or he may even have to begin with a new pattern. At any rate, slowly, harmoniously, must the whole design develop, so that the eye of the beholder will be satisfied. While this pattern for the eye is being devised, the designer is being guided as much by the sound of the verse or prose as by the sense or spirit."  

At the same time that the actor was released from the financial burden of providing himself with stage clothing, the scenic artist appeared to take up the aesthetic task of designing costume, thus creating a chiasmus of good fortune for both. Costume in the new stagecraft very often became the catalyst that synthesized all the elements, united the whole into a total impression, and established the rhythm that patterned the design of the production. Macgowan's analysis of the work of Jacques Copeau, exponent of the new movement in France, explained this synthesizing use of costume:

The chief function of the costumes rises from the necessity of an aesthetic marriage between the human and the non-human elements in the design. . . . For drama is eternally concerned with the planes, colors, metabolic changes of human action. . . . Copeau obeyed an infallible instinct when he turned to the most plastic means at his disposal: the dimensions of human bodies, of human movement, and of human utterance.  

The working press were either unaware of the implications of the new stagecraft, or ignored them, for, according to Mrs. Paterek, "costuming was not considered important enough to be discussed in the normal course of a review,

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32 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
33 Macgowan, op. cit., p. 157.
along with the acting, direction, and scenic effects. Criticism of even scenery was scanted at the beginning of the period. In 1915, reviewers were "confining themselves for the most part to a remark that the staging (embracing costume, scenery, and lighting) was 'handsome.' Small wonder that costume's place as a production element was so lacking in prestige when management itself "commonly omitted any reference to designers or costume houses" from the billing and credits, excepting in the programmes for musical productions or "fashion" dramas. Irving Pichel, citing the ascendency of the new stagecraft after the war, observes that:

The designers—Robert Edmond Jones, Lee Simonson, Norman Bel Geddes, Jo Mielziner, Cleon Throckmorton, and others—had their names advanced from the bottom to the top of the program.

But, for all its prestigious importance, instances of total designing, sets and costumes and lights from one hand, were numerically in the minority during this period. Mrs. Paterek found, in her survey of costuming procedures on the Broadway stage of the late teens, the twenties and the early thirties that the costume element of production was achieved

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\[35\] Ibid., p. 24.

\[36\] Ibid.

\[37\] Bricker, op. cit., p. 146.
in one of five different ways. These five procedures were aligned in the nature of a gradient. She explained: "One may think of these types of costumes as being on a scale whereby the lowest level represented the least demonstration of designing for the stage, and with each successive level, the idea of theatrical designing (as apart from the simple use of clothing for stage wear) became more pervasive."38

The lowest two categories were comprised of clothing that could be used either off the stage or on. (1) The first level consisted of the stage use of clothing purchased off the peg for an anonymous cast member. (2) The second was the stage use of "gowns," either selected from or designed by a couturière for a designated performer. (3) The third level consisted of period-place garments, accurate representations of another time and place designed for stage use only. (4) The next category was garments for musicals, for the stage only, not necessarily representative of any time or place. (5) The fifth level, Mrs. Paterek calls costume-within-the setting.39 Here the designer is working with all phases of visual theatre in mind, with the idea that costume should be integrated, unified with the other elements of visual theatre or design. Although this fifth level of costuming was related in importance to the dominating influence of the period, the new stagecraft, it accounted for the

38 Paterek, op. cit., p. 22.
39 Ibid., p. 23.
fewest number of plays. Mrs. Paterek recorded the fifth
type of costuming as the "smallest group numerically" during
the twenty years from 1914 until 1934.40

By 1931 the depression had really gripped the legiti-
mate theatre. The number of new productions had drastically
decreased; almost half the houses on Broadway were dark.
Mortgages on theatre houses were foreclosed; producers went
into bankruptcy—the Shuberts, A. H. Woods, and Arthur
Hammerstein.41 The great ones were passing. The deaths of
E. F. Albee, A. L. Erlanger, David Belasco, Flo Ziegfeld,
and William Morris underlined the unhappy end of an era.
Business went steadily down to an all-time low in 1933. The
people of the theatre were unemployed. "Directors, actors,
designers, costumers, stage hands—turned to any sort of job
that could be found, however temporary, however poorly
paid."42 The actors had been trudging west, and in 1932 more
than 22,000 actors were registered with the Hollywood casting
bureaus. Everywhere in the theatre there was a restlessness.
Personnel was shifting and moving. With the artistic and
financial end of an era, the old forms and structures were
breaking down.

In the area of costuming this trend was most manifest
among the costume houses. The small designer-executor

40Ibid., p. 145.

41Green & Laurie, op. cit., p. 379.

businesses merged with one another.\textsuperscript{43} Many went out of business, and management and employees both sought work in the movies. The workshops, that the big producers like Oliver Morosco and Arthur Hammerstein maintained disappeared. The Hippodrome's costume construction department was gone, but, according to Mrs. Paterek, Ziegfeld maintained his as late as 1930.\textsuperscript{44} At their inception the little art theatres had developed workshops as a practical means of constructing most economically sets, costumes, and properties. During this next period, after the demise of the workshops of the big producers, the Theatre Guild may have been the only producing organization in the Broadway area, with the exception of the Federal Theatre, to maintain its own workrooms. Only a few of the little costume construction businesses like Kiviette and Mahieu were able to survive into the new era.\textsuperscript{45} The big rental houses had been increasing their handling of costume building and for a while in the latter twenties Brooks Costume Company tended to specialize in construction of women's costumes and Eaves Costume Company of men's.\textsuperscript{46} As the new period brought with it a growing importance in the practice of costume designing Eaves and Brooks dominated the field as executors of costume designs.

\textsuperscript{43}Paterek, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 189-190.
\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., p. 132.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., pp. 121, 128.
\textsuperscript{46}Ibid., pp. 97, 185.
The unions too were in a state of upheaval at this time, for, although they had gradually become powerful in the twenties, it took the general plunge of the crash and lack of employment in the depression to bring to a head the festering unrest between labour and management.

The earliest of the unions, the Theatrical Protective Union, Local #1, for stage carpenters, property men and electricians, was chartered by the American Federation of Labor in 1894 as a local branch of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employes and Motion Picture Operators, the IATSE. These workers were hired by the theatre owner.

The Dramatists' Guild, established in 1912 as a division of the Author's League of America, remained weak as an organization until after 1925 when altercation with the managers ended in the acceptance of a mutually agreeable contract. The Guild, an open union, is not affiliated with any labour organization.

A single union, the United Scenic Artists, at that time composed of scene painters, became affiliated in 1918, through the Brotherhood of Painters, with the American Federation of Labor. Jurisdiction over New York and the Eastern states was held by Local 829. In 1923 the growing fear on the part of the old style set painters that they would gradually be ousted by the new stagecraft led to a

ruling that prevented union men from working on any designs but those of their fellow union members. This edict forced the designers to join or give up designing. Norman Bel Geddes recounted that he was required to join the union, or union carpenters and painters would have been pulled off the job on The Miracle. Bel Geddes recalled that among those who, like him, were not too unhappy about becoming union members and who joined at that time were Joseph Urban, Robert Edmond Jones, Lee Simonson, Cleon Throckmorton, Claude Bragdon, Woodman Thompson, and others.  

Some designers who were also scene painters were pleased but the majority of designers preferred not to join a labor organization in which they as artists were so far outnumbered by the craftsmen. Of the three hundred and seventy members of Local 829 in 1934, only fifty to sixty were designers. To this day the imbalance has been a major cause of whatever dissension occurs in the union. But the benefits of protection against the advantages that unprincipled managers can take were obvious, and the designer is "unquestionably better off with the [union] contract than without." 

As a section of Local 829, the Theatrical Costume Designers' Union was formed in 1936 with smaller entrance  

50 Eustis, op. cit., p. 85.  
51 Ibid., p. 86.
fee and dues, and lesser privileges. Only in the spring of 1966 did the costume designers become entitled to participate in elections.52

Actors' Equity Association, formed in 1913 and strengthened in 1919, has a closed shop but is an open union, affiliated with the American Federation of Labor.

The League of New York Theatres, an open union, unaffiliated with the A. F. of L., was formed in 1930 for the purpose of combating ticket scalping. This loose organization depends upon an esprit de corps to function.

Of the numerous other theatre unions, three are important to this study. The Theatrical Wardrobe Attendants' Union, Local 16770 of the American Federation of Labor, consists of a closed shop of dressers and sewers. A Costumers' Union affiliated with the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (1900) has jurisdiction over seamstresses and workers in costume houses and construction workshops. There is also the Theatrical Costumers' Association, an open unaffiliated union, made up of manufacturers and renters of theatrical costumes.

During the first two decades of this century, as the theatre was passing out of the hands of the old theatre-minded actor-managers into those of the business man, a certain urge supplanted the old quality of the stage. This

drive, "--call it gambling if you will--which has always played a part in legitimate theatrical production, became, in Twentieth Century America, almost the whole of theatre business. The sudden discovery that a successful play could reap a fortune for its backers caused Big Business to hurl itself into the Broadway arena, pushing aside old line theatrical people."53

There were, in 1934, twenty-five separate protective organizations in theatre. Each of the unions had been formed to combat and protect the worker against specific misuse of labour on the part of producers and theatre owners. In an industry whose art and whose business both thrive on creative cooperation among the several contributors, each labour union was thinking and operating only for its own immediate good. In the general rush to kill the goose the workers felt that they, too, had a right to their share of the golden egg, so:

The theatre's incorporated groups and associations accordingly passed laws, made rules, fixed wages and hours to insure their members as large an immediate weekly, or daily, compensation as possible and to force producers, managers and theatre owners to accede to their demands.54

Such demands put so much of a drain on even the large profits to be made from a production that it became no longer possible to maintain a moderately popular show with a

53Eustis, op. cit., p. 3.

54Ibid., p. 5.
moderate overhead, let alone a lavish hit. Many a play that on the surface appeared to be a success was losing money because of unnecessary production and running expenses. The abuses became so extreme that public hearings were held in Washington, D.C., in the spring of 1934. Eustis reported the executive advisor of the League of New York Theatres, Dr. Henry Moskowitz, as speaking for management:

That the condition of the theatres is prostrate can be demonstrated by one fact: there are seventy-eight members of the League of New York Theatres, and of these seventy-eight only seven at the present time [March, 1934] are working at any profit.55

To which assertion William C. Elliot, President of the Stagehands' International Union, as reported by Eustis, replied:

It is surely fresh in the memories of everybody, as it was only a few years ago, that Savage, Belasco, Erlanger and Cohan were making theirs by the hundreds of thousands of dollars a season, and the Shuberts by the millions. We were making nothing in those days—$8, $9 and $10 a week—and we had two-year contracts with them. Our men, particularly myself, went to them and said: "In view of the fact that we have a two-year contract, can't you extend yourself a little bit next season?" We were told to live up to our contracts.56

The Theatre Code Authority hearings aired the problems but did very little even in revising the Code permanently to ameliorate the situation.

Times were bad. Variety reported that, for the first time in theatrical history, in 1933 every Broadway legitimate show was in the cut-rates.57 Hollywood had taken backing

55 Ibid., p. 158. 56 Ibid., p. 162.
57 Green & Laurie, op. cit., p. 425.
money away and was now taking the actors. Talent scouts were scouring Broadway and by September of 1933 the movies had signed three hundred and fifteen actors from the legitimate stage.

But the economic tide had begun to turn as soon as Federal aid in the form of relief was made available in May of 1933, and Broadway as usual reflected the business trend of the country. According to Burns Mantle the season of 1933-1934 had a low of one hundred and thirty-nine productions, but the theatre was optimistic because the percentage of failures had decreased. Productions in 1934-1935 fell to one hundred and ten but the upswing in successes was apparent. The number of new productions continued to fall but by 1936-1937 Hollywood, in spite of a stricter contract with the Dramatists' Guild, was openly backing one out of four shows. 58

There was a different tenor to the times. The people were sober. Audiences approached the theatre with a new seriousness. The old "tripe" would not do. Robert Benchley spoke for all Broadway:

I am now definitely ready to announce that Sex, as a theatrical property, is as tiresome as the Old Mortgage, and that I don't want to hear it mentioned ever again. . . . I am sick of rebellious youth and I am sick of Victorian parents and I don't care if all the little girls in all sections of the United States get ruined or want to get ruined or keep from

getting ruined. All I ask is: don't write plays about it and ask me to sit through them.59

The theatre was ready for a new kind of writing. Bamber Gascoigne, modern English critic, analyzed the subject matter of the drama of the twenties as one of inaction, of negation of action. The drama of the thirties was different:

What was new in the free world in the thirties was the way in which individual authors began to use the stage as a soap-box, from which they could shout their own personal solutions to contemporary problems.

It was the depression which brought about the change. In the boom days the politically minded writers had felt themselves to be voices crying in a spiritual wilderness. Once the wilderness became material as well, and the general public for the first time had to admit that something was wrong, the writers' views began to be listened to. Their views, in turn, became much more specific.60

The early thirties' preoccupation with social problems had been foreshadowed in the latter twenties by the left wing propagandist theatres with their "agit-prop" plays, many of which anticipated in form the Living Newspaper of the Federal Theatre.61 This movement of "social significance" began with two groups of radical intellectuals sympathetic to labor's problems: in 1926 the Workers' Drama League, and in 1927 the New Playwrights' theatre, which opened with John Howard Lawson's Loudspeaker. Then the

59Quoted in Green & Laurie, op. cit., p. 378.
61Gorelik, op. cit., p. 402.
labouring class itself spread the agitational technique of the Workers' Laboratory Theatre across the country in 1930, culminating in the first social drama on Broadway, The Young Go First (1935), produced by the Theatre of Action. The high points of what Gorelik calls the growth from "social significance" to art were reached in the successful Broadway productions of the Theatre Union, notably in Stevedore (1934) by Sklar and Peters, in Clifford Odets' thrilling Waiting For Lefty (1935) for the Group Theatre, and in the presentation of the garment workers' own Labor Stage, the hit revue Pins and Needles (1937). Gascoigne praises the theatres and playwrights of the American thirties for "making direct and unprecedented use of highly dramatic contemporary situations."  

The most influential and longest lasting of the socially aware theatres was the Group Theatre whose first Broadway production was Paul Green's House of Connelly (1931). The group was an off-shoot of the Theatre Guild, formed among his fellow apprentices by Harold Clurman, actor and play reader. The Guild was encouraging in a practical way with rehearsal space and working capital. During the short action-packed decade the Group Theatre lasted it developed personnel that were to people all phases of the theatre for the succeeding score of years and longer: playwrights, Clifford

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62 Ibid., p. 403.

63 Gascoigne, op. cit., p. 34.
Odets, Irwin Shaw, and Robert Ardrey; scenic artist and theatre theorist, Mordecai Gorelik; actors, John Garfield and Franchot Tone, the Adlers, Stella and Luther, and Morris Carnovsky; directors, Harold Clurman, Elia Kazan, and Robert Lewis; teachers, Stanford Meisner and Lee Strasburg. Hughes explained that their "binding element was youthful unrest and radical dissatisfaction with the social order." But by the start of the forties several Group members had found fame and fortune in Hollywood and on Broadway. They were all older and the times were comparatively prosperous. So, in 1941, the Group Theatre ended metaphorically with Clifford Odets' *Clash By Night*.

In 1933 government action began to alleviate the general economic disaster. The emergency measure of Federal relief held back hunger, and longer ranging works projects offered a man help to help himself and his family. But the people of the theatre were confined to the bitter rolls of relief. The special skills of performers are difficult to employ elsewhere and "unskilled labor was also unemployed and could dig better ditches."  

In April of 1935 the government stepped in and under the Works Progress Administration set up the Federal Theatre Project with Hallie Flanagan as the national director. So began what has been called "one of the greatest stimulants

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64 Hughes, *op. cit.* (1947), p. 422.
of the American theatre [that it] had ever known."66 Mrs. Flanagan's goal from the beginning had been to put as many people to work before as wide an audience as possible. The Federal government became a nationwide producer of show business. Mrs. Flanagan set up a National Advisory Committee of theatre people, educational, professional, community. Throughout the country, theatre divisions were organized under regional directors who were to run "... self-contained theatre plants, each with its own art directors, costume designers, seamstresses, property crews, workshops. ... ."67

Among the legitimate theatre divisions in New York City there were six outstanding units. The Negro theatre under the direction of John Houseman and Rose McClendon, produced the Negro Macbeth (1936) and the Swing Mikado (1938). The Popular Priced theatre under Edward Goodman, designed for original plays by new authors, presented T. S. Eliot's dramatic milestone, Murder in the Cathedral (1936). The Classical Theatre, better known at the time as Project 891, made producer John Houseman and director Orson Welles famous for Horse Eats Hat (1936) and The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus (1937). The Dramatists' Guild sponsored an Experimental theatre for new plays by young playwrights, under the

66Quoted in Green & Laurie, op. cit., p. 396.

direction of Vergil Geddes and James Light, which produced the hit *Chalk Dust* (1936) and E. P. Conkle's nationally popular *Prologue to Glory* (1938). In the Managers' Tryout theatre the members of the League of New York Theatres could, by paying royalties on plays of their own choice, using stored costumes and scenery, using actors whose salaries were paid by the Federal Theatre, try out a play at a greatly lessened financial risk.

Perhaps the most well known and certainly the most controversial of the six New York units was the Living Newspaper under the guidance of the New York Newspaper Guild, with a staff headed by Morris Watson and set up like a city daily. *Triple-A Plowed Under* (1936) and *One Third of a Nation* (1938) were two of the timely, exciting, social-minded productions of that unit. In spite of all the controversy about the spiritual parentage of the Living Newspaper, an honour many were willing to claim, Hallie Flanagan states quite simply that the form arose from the purely practical considerations of how to put as many people to work as soon as possible.

I suggested the plan of dramatizing contemporary events in a series of living newspapers which would have a rapid, cinematic form and an emphasis on many people doing small bits rather than roles demanding a few stars.68

Not only, as *Variety* says, did the Federal Theatre

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68 Ibid., p. 20.
keep "hundreds of actors off the street," but it put to work technicians also. Like the old-time producers and the little theatres, the Federal Theatre, for the sake of efficiency and economy as well as to provide more jobs, maintained its own workshops and warehouses. These shops operated on a tight time scheme building sets and costumes for a multitude of activities. Production for the touring companies and the children's theatres in addition to that for the six big downtown units originated in the Federal Theatre's central workshops. The technical division was headed by Kate Drain Lawson, wife of the playwright John Howard Lawson, and one-time technical director of the Theatre Guild.

In twenty states across the nation, over nine thousand people worked in the Federal Theatre project. Of that number, four thousand and seven hundred were in New York alone. By the end of its first season, 1935-1936, the Federal Theatre was the "chief producer of works of art." In May of 1936 the Literary Digest wrote: "The greatest producer of hits is the Federal Government. It has four smashing successes in New York, a record unequaled by any producer in eight years."71

The Federal Theatre Project was living up to its ideal

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69Green & Laurie, op. cit., p. 427.
70Ibid., p. 396.
71Quoted in Flanagan, op. cit., p. 80.
of taking the theatre beyond private enterprise into the public interest where it, "properly fostered, might come to be a social and educative force,"\(^{72}\) when, on the eve of the renewal of the W.P.A. appropriations, the Project was investigated by the Dies Committee on Un-American activities. In spite of overwhelming public protest, on June 30, 1939, the Federal Theatre, alone of all the arts projects, was deleted from the renewed Works Progress Appropriations bill. American government had espoused the stage and after four years of an exciting marriage, accused her of misconduct with another political system, and divorced her.

Broadway too had been making a recovery. The annual number of new productions kept falling on past the end of the thirties, but the percentage of successes rose. The quality of the plays continued to exceed expectations up until the first American year of the war when neither Critics' Circle award nor Pulitzer Prize were given, for lack of suitable plays. There was quality in production as well. Renewed activity brought theatre workers back from the West Coast to Broadway. Productions became more "lavish and spectacular."\(^{73}\) An upsurge of the classics brought two Hamlets in 1936, Leslie Howard and John Gielgud. Again in 1937 Shakespeare was represented with Maurice Evans' *King Richard II*, and with *Antony and Cleopatra* starring Tallulah

\(^{72}\)Flanagan, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

\(^{73}\)Green & Laurie, *op. cit.*, p. 427.
Bankhead and Conway Tearle, and in 1938 with the Mercury Theatre's modern *Julius Caesar*. Ward Morehouse summarized the tone of the period:

The theater in New York in the second half of the thirties, had bounced back from the depression. There was an increase in the attendance at the playhouses; there was quality in many of the plays, and Broadway was now adjusting itself to a play-parade of less than one hundred per season. The trend was steadily downward. A variety of causes contributed to the sharp decline in production: the rise in all production costs, the shortage of play-backing money, the continued rush of playwrights and actors to Hollywood, and, in consequence, the cessation of theater activity on the part of playwrights who knew their trade.\(^{74}\)

When war came Broadway was ready and plunged into the conflict on both fronts, at home and abroad. By 1942 twenty-five per cent of Equity's membership was in uniform.\(^{75}\)

Pearl Harbor had knocked the box office off its feet for several weeks until the country found its footing. But the tension that war brought and the increase in spending money swelled theatre audiences. Wartime need persuaded Equity to allow Sunday night performances, which peace made permanent. The Broadway box office was no longer affected by seasonal drops. In the summer of 1943 there was not even the usual dividing line between the seasons. In 1944-1945, which Burns Mantle accounted as the best financial year on Broadway since the boom years of the late twenties,\(^{76}\) there

\(^{74}\)Morehouse, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

\(^{75}\)Green & Laurie, *op. cit.*, p. 484.

were few jobless actors.

The open-hearted people of the theatre contributed to the war effort in their own way. Early in the war the American Theatre Wing set up the Stage Door Canteen for men and women in the uniforms of all countries. Irving Berlin, with the United States as producer, took his own musical *This Is The Army* (1942) with a company composed of men in the armed services on a three-year tour to raise money for the Army Emergency Relief Fund. The largest proceeds ever realized from a single show, almost ten million dollars, represented also the largest private gift to the United States government.77 Moss Hart wrote and staged for the Army Air Force *Winged Victory* (1943), a plainly propagandist show about Air Force men, acted by Air Force personnel. The United Service Organization, a private agency, sent out a number of camp shows, among them Major Maurice Evans', which toured the Pacific combat areas with a streamlined G.I. version of *Hamlet* (1945). The American Theatre Wing financed an Army production of Katharine Cornell in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (1944), which toured the USO's American camps as well as what was known as the foxhole circuit overseas. The American theatre contributed to what *Variety* called: "Morale from the front line to the home front."78


Hughes summed up the war's effects on the theatre in this fashion:

The effect of war on Broadway was to raise fantastically the cost of production, and correlatively, prices of admission. This boom brought great prosperity to a few producers, playwrights, actors, designers, and technicians, and it gave a general air of prosperity to the whole world of theatre. But no permanent nor far reaching gains were made. 79

Enlarged costs increased the length of time a play had to run before a profit could be made. There came a point during the run of the play, relative to the size of the house, where the popularity of a show could not keep the box office open long enough to pay off the initial outlay. As production expenses increased, the existence of an ordinary play became untenable; there could be only hits or flops. Variety pointed out that, as at midcentury "legit" boomed, "you couldn't get into the hits and you couldn't give away the inbetweeners." 80

Hughes mentioned in the above quotation that no gains as such were directly noticed as a result of the war. Nevertheless many trends begun in the latter thirties and held in abeyance during the war while the people of the theatre contributed, as fighting men and as performers, to the immediate need for survival, continued and became intensified in the post-war years.

The Federal Theatre had revived a taste for live

80Green & Laurie, op. cit., p. 561.
theatre among the people of America and had encouraged the makers of theatre, the actors and artisans, designers and directors, to a renewed faith in themselves as professionals. The war served to deepen this generally increased interest in theatre. Theatre people kept busy both within the services and out. Live theatre was continually available to American audiences by means of touring plays at home and camp shows on the fronts. The demand for theatre was fed. Simplified staging and the trend toward theatricalism that the Federal Theatre's economy had compelled continued in wartime's need for space-time efficiency in transportation. Experimentation, one of the tenets of the Federal theatre, persisted in G.I. staging in the guise of the invention that necessity mothers. But another influence on the changing shape of show business was the sudden dearth of theatre houses. Through the years many had been bought by the movies and now in the latter forties more were engulfed by the burgeoning medium of television. In the aftermath of war, a populace that had climbed with theatre out of poverty, and had ridden with theatre through prosperity to victory, now looked to Broadway for action. But the boom of the war years was over. The commercial theatre had cut down its activity. The season of 1946-1947 was known as the year of revivals rather than of revival in the theatre. Gassner felt that

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81Burns Mantle (1946-47), p. 3.
sources of modern drama were not welling up this time as they had during the first post-war period; that "the condition of the world was not as favorable to a brilliant recovery by the theatre from the last great holocaust."  

In an attempt to satisfy the national urge to participate in live theatre that had been created by the Federal Theatre and fostered by wartime activity, a number of organizations, not connected with the strictly commercial aspect of Broadway, sprang into being. In 1935 Congress had chartered the American National Theatre and Academy as a non-profit theatre organization. It lagged along doing very little for ten years until a vital group of theatre people took hold in 1946 and brought it to life. Under the directorship of Vinton Freedley, it acquired a nationwide membership, working along educational lines, with propaganda lectures and printings to decentralize the theatre. The purpose was not to denigrate Broadway but to develop regional theatre opportunities. In 1950 ANTA achieved its own theatre in New York and for a while sponsored unusual productions of artistic interest. In New York, too, ANTA reactivated a war casualty. The Experimental Theatre, Inc., with the goal of discovering new talent in acting and in writing, backed by Equity and the Dramatists' Guild in 1940,

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had been discontinued at the end of its first season. ANTA, cooperating with the Theatre Guild, revived it.

Late in the war years under the joint sponsorship of Equity and the New York Public Library, a showcase theatre for new or unemployed talent, actors and directors, was formed. Sam Jaffe was the Equity leader and George Freedley the representative of the Library, which provided theatre space, light, and heat. A cash contribution from the John Golden Theatre Fund made possible the thirty-seven productions of the first season. Since 1944 when it began, with the exception of a short interim, Equity Library Theatre has been operating up to the present.

But all the legacies from the Federal Theatre, which had gained new impetus after the war, were manifest in a single theatrical phenomenon, the mushrooming of off-Broadway production. There had been off-Broadway activity before, the little theatres and labor stages of the twenties, sporadic anomalies in the thirties, but nothing to equal the flood of small producing units that inundated Manhattan Island in the late forties. The situation became so prolific that Equity made special rulings for off-Broadway, starting in 1948 for the Experimental Theatre's productions. All available space was used. Small amateur theatres were redesigned, union meeting halls were rented, storage and warehouse lofts were converted into every possible shape of theatre. The search for lebensraum was the cult of off-Broadwayites. Hughes wrote that in 1949:
It was announced that approximately 300 "off-Broadway" groups of actors were offering plays intermittently in New York City, and in April of 1950, 53 of these groups banded together with a view toward obtaining a theatre to be used for their activities on a year-round basis.84

Gassner described off-Broadway as "an aggregate of activities on the periphery of Broadway."85 Off-Broadway was not a movement akin to the little theatres of the twenties with their new stagecraft, or like the Group Theatre with its social and artistic standards, but the physical result of a need on the part of theatre people to do--anything, and to be seen--anywhere. There was not room on Broadway so off-Broadway happened. Mrs. Flanagan wrote in 1940: "That actors are eager to practice their professions off as well as on Broadway was proved by the Federal Theatre."86 The true rationale for off-Broadway was as showcase--for actors, for directors, and less frequently for designers.

But the truly notable development of the forties was the flowering of the big musicals. The new American musical form represented the achievement of a group of creative artists.87 Its successful presentation demonstrated the result of a merging of many talents. The form itself was a

84Hughes, op. cit. (1951), p. 475.

85Gassner, op. cit., p. 512.

86Flanagan, op. cit., p. 370.

unique fusion of elements of the musical theatre, legitimate drama, and ballet. The elements inherent in a successful musical play were a worthy theme, advanced by the score and the singing, and furthered by the choreography, with visual aspects of lighting, setting, and costume that remain intrinsic to the plot. Hughes believed that war stimulates the production of musicals, but something more than the alleviation of military and civilian tensions accounted for the emergence at this time of the new art form that the American musical became. This new art form which burst into blossom in the forties had been growing in America for over half a century.

A number of influences had merged to produce the musical. As early as 1866 The Black Crook blended advantageously in performance the dancing of a stranded ballet troupe and the music and book of a musical extravaganza. The musical comedy as a formula show consisting of star, high-kicking chorus line, framed songs, and low comedy routines, began to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century. This hybrid had developed out of borrowings from the old minstrel show, burlesque, and vaudeville. In the first decade of this

88 Hughes, op. cit. (1951), p. 455.


90 Ibid., p. 117.
century the influence of mid-European operetta added the
element of a musical score as a basic part of the whole.91
By 1923 two productions had built music into the show.
Wallflower used songs to help tell the story and Rose Marie
integrated musical numbers within the plot.92 A tradition
of splendour in costume and setting was acquired from the
revue, a form noted for richness of dressing. The Wizard of
Oz (1903) and Chin-Chin (1914) were praised for lavish sets
and costumes.93 Florenz Ziegfeld leaned heavily on the star
system, having shows written as vehicles for the performer's
own personality, glamour girl or comic.94 His formula of
matching "beautiful costumes to beautiful women . . . and
music to comedians" carried the Follies successfully from
1907 to 1920.95

An increased production of musical comedy during the
twenties reflected the stimulus offered by World War I to
their popularity. In 1921 Gilbert Seldes commended Irving
Berlin for bringing the musical to a high level of entertain­
ment because Berlin considered all of the elements of the
production including "the costuming of the members of the
cast."96 Show Boat (1927) was a landmark in the development

91 Crooker, op. cit., p. 105.
92 Thornton, op. cit., p. 57.
95 Thornton, op. cit., p. 45.
96 Ibid., p. 52.
of the musical theatre. *Show Boat* effected an artistic unity, incorporating true characterization, both comic and straight, and a reasonable plot expressive of a serious theme. Thornton states *Show Boat* was the first musical comedy to achieve a "dramatic verisimilitude comparable to that of the speaking stage."\(^{97}\)

In 1932 for the first time the Pulitzer Prize for drama was awarded to a musical comedy, *Of Thee I Sing*. The satiric theme, ridiculing current events, and the comic characterization of the leading actor were both thoroughly integrated with the plot. Throughout the thirties the other production elements continued to implement the now-essential plot. *On Your Toes* (1936) was the first to use ballet materially to advance the story.\(^{98}\) *Porgy and Bess* (1935), difficult to catalogue but presented as a Broadway production at the wish of the composer, George Gershwin, was reviewed in the New York Times by the music critic, Olin Downes, and by Brooks Atkinson, the drama critic. Brooks Atkinson felt that the show's songs added to the story a certain dramatic impact that had been missing from the earlier play, *Porgy* (1927).\(^{99}\) *Knickerbocker Holiday* (1938), *Lady in the Dark* (1941), *Cabin in the Sky* (1940), all advanced the development of the musical form until a balanced blend of all the production elements was possible in *Oklahoma!*

\(^{97}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 66.\)

\(^{98}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 96.\)

\(^{99}\text{Crooker, *op. cit.*}, \ p. \ 272.\)
Oklahoma! (1945), the culmination of years of musical comedy growth, coalesced elements of musical, dramatic, and balletic theatre into a new dramatic form. Burton Rascoe described the form in his *World-Telegram* review:

> With its *Oklahoma!* . . . the Guild had combined some of the best features of the ballet at the Met with some of the best features of the great tradition of Broadway's own indigenous contribution to the theatre—a girl show with lively tunes, a couple of comics, a heavy, pretty costuming, and an infectious spirit of gaiety and good humor.\(^{100}\)

Later that year *Carousel* (1945) improved the technique by accomplishing greater mastery over fusion of the various parts. Two years later *Brigadoon* (1947) drew this accolade from Brooks Atkinson in the *New York Times*:

> This excursion into an imagined Scottish village is an orchestration of the theatre's myriad arts. . . . All the arts of the theatre have been woven to a singing pattern of enchantment.\(^{101}\)

The genius of the musical continued to burgeon until in 1949 *South Pacific* was considered the most successful of them all. But not all attempts were equally effective. The new form required an expert balancing of all the elements. Thornton emphasized the need for unity and described it like this:

> . . . "unity" or "integration" of the musical means the fusion of all elements of the production, i.e., music, lyrics, story, dances, setting and costume. . . . The music, lyrics, dances, setting and costumes advance the story line. All of these elements blend

\(^{100}\)Burton Rascoe, quoted in Crooker, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

into the plot in an easy natural manner.\textsuperscript{102}

When any one of the various elements was unintegrated or heavy, the success of the whole was impaired. \textit{On the Town} (1944) was really a ballet musical with a series of dances woven into a thin plot. Both \textit{Bloomer Girl} (1944) and \textit{Up in Central Park} (1947) were criticized for being a bit heavy in the book.\textsuperscript{103} Lawrence Langner, Theatre Guild producer, ascribed the lack of lightness in \textit{Allegro} (1947) to an "... extremely cumbersome scenic investiture, which made it difficult to operate the stage..."\textsuperscript{104} In \textit{Street Scene} (1947) lyrics and music often halted the advance of the story contributing to an incomplete fusion of elements.\textsuperscript{105} Although critics praised \textit{Lost in the Stars} (1949), audiences did not accept the extremity of its serious theme.\textsuperscript{106} However, as long as the various factors were unified and well-balanced the musical play maintained the integrity of its form and had every chance of success, as this opinion on \textit{Brigadoon} from the London \textit{Times} attested:

"If the latest musical play to be imported from America succeeds ... the reason may be found on the plane of Theatrical Art [rather] than on that of worldly-wise showmanship. The piece strives for and in great measure achieves unity of impression."\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{102}Thornton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{103}Crooker, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 386.
\textsuperscript{104}Lawrence Langner, quoted in Crooker, p. 386.
\textsuperscript{105}Crooker, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 397. \textsuperscript{106}Ibid., p. 429.
\textsuperscript{107}London \textit{Times}, quoted in Crooker, \textit{op. cit.}, p. lxix.
With the flowering of the musical form, the unified theatre, the Gesamtkunstwerk that Gordon Craig had prophesied, was realized on the American stage. It came about not as Craig saw it, the product of one brain, but as the result of an ideal commingling of many creative minds toward a single goal. And as one of the intrinsic parts of this artistic gestalt, costume design came into its own.
CHAPTER II

KIND OF DESIGNERS

Your young men shall see visions.        Joel

This chapter is concerned with the various kinds of theatre artists working in costume design. Identified according to programme billing are set designers, set and costume designers, and costume design specialists; in addition the chapter names stylists, couturiers, costumers, and technical assistants in costume. Subject to discussion are combinations of working relationships among them, examples of the plays costumed, and several professional vitae. The chapter begins with a report of an analysis of the programmes to discover the relative annual proportion between accreditation of both set and costume designing, and set design crediting alone.

The body of plays selected from Burns Mantle according to the system set down in the introductory chapter were divided into two groups. All plays for which no indication of costume designer was to be found in yearbook, programme, or review sources were put in one group. The second group consisted of productions that showed costume design credit in addition to scene design. Both groups were analyzed by
year, sixteen in all. The first five years of the sixteen included in this study made a movement away from credit for set design alone and toward a proportionate increase in costume design credit. The balance of crediting in the first year of the study, the season of 1934-1935, was three to two in favor of set crediting alone. But the balance had moved to the equilibrium by 1938-1939. In the next three years a notable shift was made to the side of costume design crediting, and by 1941-1942 the scales weighed on the side of costume plus set crediting against credit for set alone by four to three. During the next four years, from 1942 to 1946, the proportions held steady at two for costume credit to one for absence of costume mention. The odds in the last four years shifted rapidly from five to one until, in the final year of the period, the season of 1949-1950, for the first time all the productions credited both a costume and a scene designer.

During this period of change a number of different kinds of designers developed.

The old established scene designers, who had been designing costume as well as sets all along, began to be recognized also for costume—men like Watson Barratt and Claude Bragdon, Raymond Sovey, and Woodman Thompson, and a woman, Aline Bernstein. Two other old hands were sufficiently unusual in their activities to warrant categories of their own, Norman Bel Geddes and Robert Edmond Jones. Robert
Edmond Jones, of course, had always seen the wisdom of a happy marriage between setting and costume, admitting in addition, as did his pupil Jo Mielziner, the catalyst lighting, to complete an effective ménage à trois. From the debut of his career with The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife, Jones had been credited with both setting and costume design. And Norman Bel Geddes, "a master builder in the widest sense of the word" as Max Reinhardt praised him, confined his efforts in theatre not only to the visual environment of costume and setting but, as John Mason Brown observed, "he functions not only as a designer but also as a director. . . . But when Mr. Geddes has finished with it [the play] . . . he will have appropriated rather than interpreted it. . . ."¹ So, Bel Geddes' recognition in design had always included costume.

Along about the beginning of the period studied, young men like Stewart Chaney were at the start of their professional life. In 1935 Chaney's first Broadway assignment was The Old Maid, for which he did both sets and costumes. During the next fifteen years of designing costumes and sets for twenty-seven productions, Stewart Chaney's double-crediting exceeded that of any other designer. Among the plays costumed and set by Chaney were such classics as Nazimova's production of Ibsen's Ghosts (1935), and Leslie Howard

Hamlet (1936), Helen Hayes' Twelfth Night (1940), and the long-running Life With Father (1939).

Howard Bay, another young man with a somewhat different viewpoint, was also just beginning to design early in the period. Although he believed firmly in the importance of visual unity in theatre design, Bay felt that the designer had not time to do justice to the supervision necessary in carrying out both set and costume design. He much preferred to work closely with a costume designer with whom he was artistically compatible. In spite of this conviction, or perhaps as a cause of it, very early in his career Howard Bay did manage to design costumes and settings for the short-lived production of Merry Wives of Windsor (1938). Whether this commercial, although not artistic, setback had anything to do with shaping his mind was not known. At any rate in actual practice many scene designers followed his example of sticking to set design alone but collaborating closely with the costume designer.

Jo Mielziner, who rivaled Stewart Chaney in having designed both costume and setting for the next greatest number of shows, voiced an outlook similar to that of Howard Bay:

For the first ten years of my career I always designed the costumes as well as the scenery and lighting for a production. But gradually I was

Howard Bay, lecture to theatre students at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, May, 1964.
forced to give in—against my will and against my principles: the demand for closer and closer supervision of scenery, props lighting, and costumes made it impossible for me to be in several places at once. Of course, one can do the basic designs for costumes and set the general style and then have another artist execute them, but I like to exercise full control over any job I do, whether it be the final fitting of a costume, or a light rehearsal, or the painting of scene designs before their final execution. Particularly during the last week before a play leaves town, if the costume designer is not present at every final fitting, the difference between a good job and a great job is lost. I realized some time ago that the ten percent had to go to the settings, and so I have done few costume designs since... 1942.3

As he suggested above, in the early years of this period Mielziner did design both costumes and scenery for about a dozen and a half plays for various directors and producers. Of the eight he did under the McClintic banner, four were outstanding examples of a great producing, directing, acting, and designing team. For Miss Katharine Cornell, actress-producer, with Guthrie McClintic directing, Jo Mielziner designed Romeo and Juliet (1934), Saint Joan (1936), Wingless Victory (1936), and The Barretts of Wimpole Street (1935, production revived from 1931).

For McClintic alone Mielziner designed the Gielgud Hamlet (1936) and Maxwell Anderson's High Tor (1937). In twenty-five years before, during, and after the period of this study Jo Mielziner designed twenty-five productions for McClintic.4 For fifty of the remaining productions he

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3Jo Mielziner, Designing for the Theatre (New York, 1965), p. 43.

designed during this period, Mielziner shared honors on costume with more than a dozen artists, from rank beginners to popular old hands.

In opera, ballet, musical comedy or drama, it is first the entire stage scene the designer thinks of—the complete scene—the actor in a play on a stage before an audience. This is the approach I have adopted.5

These are the words of Donald Oenslager who was recognized as one of the foremost designers of the legitimate theatre, yet the exigency of having little time for supervision forced his costume-plus-set designings to be few in comparison with his output of scene designs alone. Of the ten shows that were double-credited in both costume and setting Ruth Gordon's production of Ibsen's Doll's House (1937) and the beautiful Eastward in Eden (1947) were considered outstanding by critics. The remaining four-fifths of his productions during this period were designed together with an assortment of most of the costume designers of the time. In many instances, when Oenslager was billed as production designer, after the initial idea for costume was conceived, he merely supervised. For this purpose it was his custom to use a technical costume assistant. Other designers who followed this practice were Jo Mielziner, Norman Bel Geddes, and Raymond Sovey.

Robert Edmond Jones was acknowledged by critics and

5Donald Oenslager, Scenery Then and Now (New York, 1936), p. xiii.
designers alike as the finest of them all. Jo Mielziner called him "the greatest designer in the twentieth century." John Mason Brown named him "one of the most significant experimenters in our theatre." His ideals of theatre were high and he adhered to the single standard of designing costume and set together. Jo Mielziner, later his apprentice, described seeing Jones' first Broadway design:

Here, for the first time, was the work of an imaginative artist. The house in which the man who married a dumb wife lived was like a charming Persian print. Relationships between line, color, form, and costume were beautifully balanced. Even in this, his first production for Broadway, Jones revealed his extraordinary ability to omit nonessentials and thus give greater authority to what was left. He made every line of his settings and costumes count, and count in terms of theatre.

Representative of the productions Robert Edmond Jones designed during the period of this study were the four he did for the Theatre Guild: The Sea Gull (1938), Without Love (1942), Othello (1943), and The Ice Man Cometh (1946). But if his first, The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife, amazed Broadway with its new techniques, it was the sheer perfection of "Bobby" Jones' beautiful Lute Song (1946) that New York will long remember as "One of the most exciting achievements in stage design. . . ."

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6 Jo Mielziner, informal talk to theatre students, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, February 20, 1967.

7 Brown, op. cit., p. 158.

8 Mielziner, op. cit., p. 5.

9 Judith Kaye Reid, "Art on Stage," The Art Digest, XX (March 1, 1946), 27.
Lee Simonson is the second member of the triumvirate which John Mason Brown extolled as "the prophets and high-priests and chief practitioners of scenic art in this country." The other two were Robert Edmond Jones and Norman Bel Geddes. Simonson, like his colleagues, saw the production whole:

The total stage picture, the choice and arrangement of its details, are of aesthetic importance.

The fact [is] that a stage setting is no more important than the production of which it is a part. It fails or succeeds to the degree that a total cohesion of lights, forms, gestures, and voices succeeds in illuminating the script as performed.

Lee Simonson had been a board director of the Guild since its inception so it is no wonder that "most of my designing is done for the Theatre Guild." Of the five double-credited Simonson shows of this period, one, the highly praised Joan of Lorraine (1946), was done for the Playwrights' Company. The others, Bridie's A Sleeping Clergyman (1934), Shaw's The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles (1935), Prelude to Exile (1936), and Anderson's ambitious Masque of Kings (1937) were all done for the Theatre Guild.

Something about the work of Norman Bel Geddes "had quickened the pulse of Reinhardt." After their overwhelmingly successful production together of The Miracle in 1924,

10 Brown, op. cit., p. 148.
12 Ibid.
Reinhardt recognized "something above the ordinary" in this man and called him "kolossal."\(^{13}\) So, of the four production designs credited to Norman Bel Geddes during this period, two are under the aegis of Max Reinhardt: Irwin Shaw's *Sons and Soldiers* (1943), and the pictorially impressive *Eternal Road* (1937) of Franz Werfel. As his own impresario, Bel Geddes did *Iron Men* (1936), which Brooks Atkinson thought Bel Geddes produced solely for the purpose of designing it.\(^{14}\) On the other side of the ledger was Bel Geddes' own production of *Dead End* (1935) noted for both the play itself by Sidney Kingsley and for the outstanding and exemplary setting.

Raymond Sovey was one of those designers whom John Mason Brown cited as closely seconding the aforementioned high priests of visual art in the theatre. Sovey started his career making costumes for Walter Hampden's production of *George Washington*, before the beginning of this period, but he was chiefly known as a set-and costume designer. Notable, among the double-credited productions he designed in this period, was the long-running and much praised *Oscar Wilde* (1938) with Robert Morley. *The Damask Cheek* (1942) was equally commended for play and visual environment, while *Therese* (1945) was said to be made more "believable" by "realistic" costuming.\(^{15}\) But Sovey's own favorite job was

\(^{13}\)Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 162.


\(^{15}\)George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, October 12, 1945.
The Hasty Heart (1945), "one of the most beautiful and touching plays I know."\(^{16}\)

The following four designers of both costume and set presented five double-credited productions during the period. In addition, each of them shared credit with another designer for scenery or costume in various other shows.

Woodman Thompson, whom John Mason Brown placed also on that roster supportive of leading designers, was known for his quiet, effective designing of the Katharine Cornell production of Shaw's Candida (1937), and for the handsome Magnificent Yankee (1946).

Perry Watkins, the "well-known Negro scene designer,"\(^{17}\) did the popular Mamba's Daughters (1939), redesigned the 1942 revival of Three Men on a Horse (1935), and created costumes and settings for the Negro folk drama, Run, Little Chillun (1943).

Watson Barratt, considered mainly as a set designer, was noted for the charming and graceful costumes and scenery he designed for the Theatre Guild's production of The Rivals (1942), and for the exaggerated spoof given to The Importance of Being Ernest (1939) under Estelle Winwood's direction.

Lemuel Ayers, who was trained as an architect, began his career partway through this period with set and costumes

\(^{16}\)Raymond Sovey, souvenir programme, The Hasty Heart, January, 1945.

\(^{17}\)George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, February 5, 1949.
for the much panned *As You Like It* (1941) whose bad reviews he shared with the director. Fortunately this bad beginning was wiped out within a month by the great success of set and costume in the hit melodrama, *Angel Street* (1941). His progress continued with the "incredibly beautiful"¹⁸ *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1946) revived by José Ferrer, and the "superlative"¹⁹ designs for *Kiss Me Kate* (1948).

David Ffolkes, while originally British, was an important designer in the American theatre during the period under study. In London, when he was barely twenty and newly out of school, he leaped into such prominence for his designs that Lillian Baylis offered him the post of art director at Old Vic for a year. During that year one of the plays he designed was *Richard II*. When Maurice Evans brought the production to New York in February 1937, he had Ffolkes redesign it on a more lavish scale. His *Hamlet* (1938) and *King Henry IV* (1939), both for Maurice Evans, rated nothing but raves and properly credited him for costume and setting. After the war, during which he served in the Royal Scots Greys, David Ffolkes returned to America, joined the union, and remained to design, among others, the "bright and attractive"²⁰ *Where's Charley* (1948).

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In 1934, "one of the most talented and original designers in America," Raoul Pène du Bois began his career by designing scenery and costumes for the Ziegfeld Follies. For most of his shows Raoul Pène du Bois did both set and costume. Largely designers, as has been seen in the quotation from Jo Mielziner, and by Howard Bay's avowed practice, considered themselves set designers first and so decided when faced with the choice. But Pène du Bois was primarily a costume designer. He had no credits for scenery alone but frequently designed costumes for the settings of other well-known designers. Raoul Pène du Bois concentrated his talents on musical comedy and revue, both of which offered comparatively greater scope for the costume designer. Two great musicals, DuBarry Was a Lady (1939) and Panama Hattie (1940), he designed for the producer Buddy De Sylva. For producer Gertrude Macy he created the costumes and scenery for the revues One For the Money (1939) and Two For the Show (1940). One of the number he did for producer William R. Katzell was the long-running revue Lend An Ear (1948).

Aline Bernstein was the one woman among the top-notch set-costume designers. She too was on John Mason Brown's supporting list.

Aline Bernstein is the name that first comes to mind when one thinks of women engaged in this field

21Biography of Raoul Pène du Bois, souvenir programme for Hold Onto Your Hats, September, 1940.
of theatre work. In a long and multiple-faceted career, she had done over a hundred productions for the Theatre Guild, Herman Shumlin, Gilbert Miller, Eva LeGallienne's Civic Repertory Theatre and other producers.22

Mrs. Bernstein began her career in 1915 designing for the Neighborhood Playhouse which the Lewisohns had just built on Grand Street as an art theatre. For more than thirty years she designed settings and costumes, sometimes together, sometimes separately. She felt that "Designing of the stage picture . . . should be done by one person, but sometimes, when productions are very large, there is not enough time for one person to take care of all the details."23 Yet during the period of this study, the latter part of her designing years, Mrs. Bernstein managed to do both costumes and sets for a number of productions. For Eva LeGallienne she designed L'Aiglon (1934) of many scenes and large cast, the Ben Hecht comedy To Quito and Back (1937) for the Theatre Guild, and The Happy Time (1950) for Rodgers and Hammerstein.

"You cannot do it unless you have the passion for it burning in your breast," Aline Bernstein says. "It is hard work with little reward except for the exciting moment . . . when the curtain rises and magic takes place."24

With the increase of emphasis on costume design that this period brought, a new kind of theatre artist came into


23Ibid., p. 136.  
24Ibid.
prominence, the designer who specialized in costumes only. Women began to share this field with men. Women set designers have been comparatively rare. Often, like Aline Bernstein, they keep to the one-designer unity by doing both set and costume. Or, like Kate Drain Lawson and Caroline Hancock, they designed scenery at one time and costumes at another. But as the possibilities opened up in costume, women like Irene Sharaff and Lucinda Ballard and Anna Hill Johnstone, began to design costumes only and made the job prominent.

New too was the singular anomaly, the lady designing team, Motley. Motley was the working name of three young women who formed a designing team while they were art students in England in 1932. John Gielgud employed them to do the entire decor for Richard of Bordeaux the outstanding success of which established them among the first ranks of European designers. Margaret Harris did the sets, Sophia Harris kept their modern dress shop in St. Martin's Lane, and Elizabeth Montgomery designed the costumes. Elizabeth Montgomery and Margaret Harris came to America in 1940 to do Romeo and Juliet for Laurence Olivier and Vivian Leigh. In America the group split up. Margaret Harris went back to England to teach theatrical design at the Young Vic school and "Liz" Montgomery married an American, continuing to design as Motley, and became "one of the outstanding costume
designers of the modern theatre." Before their professional debut with Richard of Bordeaux, the group had had a bad experience designing costumes of an Oxford University Dramatic Society production of Romeo and Juliet. As they express it, the costumes lost "considerable of their value" against the scenic background of a designer who had "widely dissimilar ideas as to color and draftsmanship." "Liz" Montgomery said:

The experience left me with the irrevocable conviction that any production will be more effective if done by one person, except in cases in which both costume designer and set designer work permanently together.

True to her conviction Motley has been most successful in those productions which were designed as a whole. The first of a series Motley did for Katharine Cornell, The Three Sisters (1942), was noted as stunning. Of the two that were done under Margaret Webster's direction, The Cherry Orchard (1944) was called effective and "charming" by PM's critic, Louis Kronenberger, and Kelcey Allen of Woman's Wear Daily; and the Vera Zorina Tempest (1945) was praised for its beauty. For Leland Hayward, Motley designed the timely and popular A Bell for Adano (1944), and for the Theatre Guild, under Tyrone Guthrie's direction, the stylized production of He Who Gets Slapped (1946).

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26 Mielziner, op. cit., p. 34.
Of the comparatively few productions on which Motley shared designing with a scenic artist about half are musicals, a notoriously laborious sort of show to design. Most of her collaboration was with one of two top-flight designers, either Donald Oenslager or Jo Mielziner.

Motley costumed the enormously successful South Pacific (1949), set by Mielziner. Another Motley-Mielziner effort, Anne of the Thousand Days (1948), was not as fortunate through no real fault of either, unless Jo Mielziner overloaded his calendar. Mielziner told of scheduling about that same time for Death of a Salesman:

For the average legitimate play the time that remained would have been ample; it would have been enough even for a small musical. But Death of a Salesman had so many knotty problems to solve that we would be pressed.

The calendar for those six weeks also showed that I would have to be preparing preliminary ideas for South Pacific; there would be meetings with Joshua Logan, who was going to direct it, and Rodgers and Hammerstein, who had written it and were producing it. Besides this, the New York opening of Anne of the Thousand Days was coming up; I had designed this during the autumn, and it would demand at least three full days of my time up to the final pre-opening rehearsal.27

But he had not counted on emergencies. During the out-of-town tryouts of Anne of the Thousand Days the multi-scene settings were found to move far too slowly, to interfere with the pacing of the show, so were scrapped. In the next few days, Mielziner had to reset the show, which he did very

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27Ibid.
simply with drapes and platforms. Although some critics
mentioned an unaccustomed lack on the part of Jo Mielziner,
Motley's costumes drew raves, called "masterpieces" by Brooks
Atkinson in the Times.

With Donald Oenslager doing sets, Motley designed cos-
tumes for another Katharine Cornell success, Shaw's The
Doctor's Dilemma (1941), and for Alfred Drake's musical from
Goldoni, The Liar (1950). The Oenslager-Motley collaboration
in the Gertrude Lawrence-Cedric Hardwicke production of Shaw's
Pygmalion (1945) was particularly fortunate. According to
Variety, the trade newspaper: "The combination of director,
cast and set and costume designers is first rate."28

With the exception of a few designers like Stewart
Chaney, Robert Edmond Jones, and Aline Bernstein who usually
did both costume and scenery, and of Motley before the split,
the set and costume designers formed and reformed working
teams throughout the period. Many types of combinations
evolved. The usual set designer-costume designer merger
resulted in some fine working relationships. Jo Mielziner,
who teamed at one time or another with most of the good cos-
tume designer specialists, expressed his views in this
fashion: "... I have never underestimated the responsi-
bility of the scenic artist to collaborate closely with the
costume designer, as Julia Sze and I did happily on Death

In collaboration with Lucinda Ballard, ten very successful shows mark the most prolific output for both of them. Mrs. Ballard and Jo Mielziner began to work together in 1939 with the Paul Osborn comedy, *Morning's At Seven*, and still in 1950 were receiving fine notices for the Joshua Logan–Helen Hayes *The Wisteria Trees*.

Together they turned out four outstanding musicals. Later on in their first season, the team designed *Higher and Higher* (1940). In 1947 their designs for the musical drama *Street Scene* were praised. From the duo's drawing boards came costumes and settings for two of the great musicals, the "brilliant" and "blazing" and "dazzling" *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946), and the lovely *Allegro* (1947), in which "Lucinda Ballard has transcended her costume designing art. . . ."31

To the credit of the Ballard–Mielziner pair are three memorable plays. Critics commended setting and costumes as important contributors to the comedy *Happy Birthday* (1946).32 For the Lillian Hellman drama, *Another Part of the Forest* (1946), both set and costume were called "beautifully

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29Mielziner, op. cit., p. 44.
nostalgic." The consensus of criticism for *A Streetcar Named Desire* was that scenery and costumes were exactly right for the play. The Antoinette Perry Award for the best costume designer of the 1946-1947 season was given to Mrs. Ballard for this play.

Lucinda Ballard was generally recognized as a leader in costume design, the doyenne of the costume design specialists. She was a firm believer in the idea that stage clothes must have meaning besides being decorative. When she costumed John Van Druten's *I Remember Mama* (1944), "... her costumes ... not only caught the spirit of the 1910 period but helped to create the nostalgic mood of the play to such an extent that John Van Druten, the playwright, paid her the unusual compliment of saying she was the first costume designer he'd ever worked with whose conceptions of dress were an important factor in making his script come to life." These costumes won her the much-coveted Donaldson Award for the best costumes of the 1944-1945 season.

When at eighteen Lucinda Ballard went as assistant to Claude Bragdon, the noted scene designer, she had a good fine arts background. She had studied in Paris and at Fontainebleau, for a short while at the Traphagen School of Fashion Design, and at the Art Students' League. Each Saturday

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34Maurice Zolotow, "Designing Woman," *Saturday Evening Post*, CXXI (September 18, 1948), 137.
matinee when she was a child in New Orleans, the bizarre costumes on the stage of the French Opera house sent her imagination spinning. When she began to design with Bragdon few people specialized in costume, but she went to work designing costumes for the Walter Hampden-Ethel Barrymore Shakespearean Repertory Company. In 1928 she joined the staff of Norman Bel Geddes, and her apprenticeship in costume really began. For her first Broadway show, Dwight Deere Wiman hired her to do the costumes for his revival of *As You Like It* (1937). Mrs. Ballard, whom Maurice Zolotow described "... as exhaustive in research as a Ph.D. scholar...", was noted for her thoroughness. Brooks Atkinson commended this first play of hers for having "the lively impudence of a Masque," setting the precedent for a continually good press.

Her next show was the Surry Theatre's poorly reviewed *Three Sisters* (1939). The costumes were criticized by John Mason Brown as unfitting to the play (as was the set): "Lucinda Ballard's over-rich costumes were equally inappropriate," and by George Freedley, who called the setting "disastrous to the play," and "the costumes, extremely beautiful in themselves, throw the play out of focus by their cosmopolitan splendor." A month later, the earlier

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37 *George Freedley, Morning Telegraph*, October 16, 1939.
mentioned first collaboration with Jo Mielziner, Morning's At Seven, opened and Lucinda Ballard was on her way to success.

Over the years Lucinda Ballard teamed on costume design with many of the well-known set designers, with Howard Bay, Frederick Fox, George Jenkins, and Donald Oenslager. But the 1946 revival of Show Boat, with setting by Howard Bay, for which she conceived five hundred and sixty costumes, earned her a new reputation. The costume cost of $125,000 set an all-time record. Morris Jacobs, business manager for the producing firm of Rodgers and Hammerstein observed of Lucinda Ballard: "As a costume designer she's the tops. She hits the bulls-eye every time. But, hell, she's a reckless dame with a buck." 38

One critic of the production noticed the satirically comic viewpoint she brought to much of her work. Robert Garland in the Journal-American called her Show Boat costumes "colorful cartoons in her mocking mood." 39 But three years later in the Theatre Guild's Make Way For Lucia (1948), for which she unaccustomedly designed both set and costumes, the consensus of criticism applauded the comedic approach for which Lucinda Ballard was renowned. Brooks Atkinson noted that "she has dressed the men as well as the women in

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38 Zolotow, op. cit., p. 138.

comically ostentatious clothes."^® Howard Barnes said, "with elegance and with humor."^® John Chapman granted her designs "taste, style and humor."^® Variety praised setting and costumes for having a "hideous elegance."^® Richard Watts mentioned "humor and charm,"^® and the Brooklyn Daily Eagle called the designing "gorgeous . . . and comic."^® And George Freedley, as was his wont, related visual design to the play as a whole:

Viola Roache has a wonderful romp in Lucinda Ballard's absurdly amusing costumes against one of the rarely seen Ballard settings of a drawing room in a provincial (or so we regard it) town in 1912. Mrs. Ballard is one of the best artists that can be found in the theatre. When you combine Roache and Ballard you really have a team.46

Irene Sharaff, one of the first and certainly one of the most active of the costume design specialists, was known for good taste and daring inventiveness. Miss Sharaff was born in Boston and educated in New York and in Paris. She

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43Hobe, Variety, December 29, 1948.


46George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, December 24, 1948.
attended the New York School of Fine and Applied Arts as well as the Art Students' League, and in Paris the Grand Chaumière. Her first New York Assignment was at Eva LeGallienne's Civic Repertory. There, under the tutelage of Aline Bernstein, she learned among other things to cope with limited budgets. Miss Sharaff's first solo effort was costumes and sets for the magic Alice in Wonderland (1932), based on Tenniel's well-known drawings. From then on until 1943, when she went west for eight years to do films, Miss Sharaff designed costumes for at least one show a season.

With Jo Mielziner, her first collaboration was on the Moss Hart musical, Jubilee (1935), and at the end of the period they were still designing together in Dance Me A Song (1950). In the meantime among their team productions were a Kaufman-Ferber drama, The Land Is Bright (1941), and a hit musical, The Boys From Syracuse (1938).

Known for successful designing of spectacles, "Irene Sharaff has been responsible for some of the most beautiful of the large musical productions. . . ."47 Her collaborator on two musicals, one outstanding—Banjo Eyes (1941), and one great—Lady in the Dark (1941), was Harry Horner, the acknowledged master of settings for musicals. Three of her other popular and long-running musicals were Streets of Paris (1939), which was "tastefully costumed by

47vom Wien, op. cit., p. 146.
Irene Sharaff, "probably because "the nudity was as much a matter of Irene Sharaff's stunning costumes as anything else. Figured by the square yard it [the nudity] is doubtless average"; and the *Great Waltz* (1934), whose costumes, shared in design with Doris Zinkeisen, the noted English costume designer, were "swell entertainment"; and the burlesque revue *Star and Garter* (1942) for which Michael Todd gathered "a few names ... and dished them up in sumptuous Irene Sharaff costumes," "some of the smartest and most daring ever seen in a Broadway musical." Of the romantic musical *Virginia* (1937), whose sets were designed by Lee Simonson, the *World-Telegram* said: "The costumes by Irene Sharaff are poetically faithful to this exquisite period"; and the often sharp John Anderson allowed, "Irene Sharaff has cloaked it all in costumes that are as distinguished in design as they are beautiful in color and right in taste." Critics have lauded Irene Sharaff for good taste, for

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49Richard Watts, Jr., New York *Herald Tribune*, June 20, 1939.

50Abel, *Variety*, September 25, 1934.


cleverness of design, and for handling of colour. The criterion of colour appreciation was the most frequently voiced criticism in journalistic reviewing, overwhelmingly so to the extent that it became a critical catch-all. Yet in the case of Irene Sharaff's work there was good reason. Howard Bay, with whom she teamed on a number of shows, said that she had "an unusually good sense of color," and that he liked to work with her for that reason.\(^55\) John Beaufort said in the *Christian Science Monitor* that the Shuberts, the producers of the less than long-running musical *Count Me In* (1942), "have allowed Irene Sharaff to splash color extravagantly; the dominant motif is red, white and blue."\(^56\) The use made of colour in costume in this show, set by Howard Bay, impressed Brooks Atkinson also:

Irene Sharaff has designed the costumes. For several years she has been imparting gaiety and electricity to musical shows by the use of design and color. But what she has done for the musical comedy that arrived at the Ethel Barrymore last evening deserves a prize. Miss Sharaff has even discovered how to make Uncle Sam's unobtrusive and eminently practical Army Uniform blend into the fantasy of a musical show.\(^57\)

Aline Bernstein, who had started out as a scenic artist, emerged during this period as one of the costume design specialists, collaborating notably with other


\(^{56}\)John Beaufort, *Christian Science Monitor*, October 9, 1942.

designers. Mrs. Bernstein was the costume designer in a successful little producing cluster of Herman Shumlin, producer-director, Howard Bay, set designer, and Lillian Hellman, playwright, on two of her plays, *The Little Foxes* (1939) and *The Searching Wind* (1944). Designing with Lemuel Ayers for Helen Hayes' *Harriet* (1943) was "particularly a triumph for Mrs. Bernstein." 58

Costume criticism for Cocteau's *The Eagle Has Two Heads* (1947) starring Tallulah Bankhead was used, not so indirectly, to pan the actress and the play. From the acid pen of George Jean Nathan came this bit: "There is today something a little ridiculous in seeing an actress costumed to the ears, clinging to the center of the stage, and reciting enough lines to a helpless cast to suffice half a dozen actresses in any more reputable play." 59 Even the usually kinder and always more conservative Brooks Atkinson resorted to facetious language, "To dress her [the star] properly Aline Bernstein has whipped up regal gowns with glorious bosoms and majestic trains." 60

A new kind of teamwork mention was made for the musical drama, *Regina* (1949), when *Theatre Arts* featured "Designer and Director, Aline Bernstein and Robert Lewis."

58 George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, March 5, 1943.


This felicitous association began in October, 1949, during "Regina" and has continued through "The Happy Time." ... Since shortly after the turn of the century Aline Bernstein has been an outstanding figure in scenic design, as well as one of the most beautiful and gracious ladies of our theatre.61

Toward the latter part of this period practicing on the New York stage were two young designers who continued costume activity into the next period: one, Julia Sze, mentioned before in connection with designs for Death of a Salesman, went on in the legitimate theatre, and the other, Mary Grant, married Vincent Price and went to Hollywood.

Before Death of a Salesman, Julia Sze had teamed with Jo Mielziner on her first show, the long-running Command Decision (1947). In 1950, they again collaborated on the melodrama, The Man. A successful revue, Angel in the Wings (1947), set by Donald Oenslager, followed that first year. But it was for the mediocre musical, Hold It (1948), that Julia Sze received her best press. Robert Coleman in the Daily Mirror could "enthuse over Julia Sze's costumes."62 As the World-Telegram's William Hawkins put it, "One of the important contributions to the show is the costuming of Julia Sze, who plasters the stage with uninhibited splashes of bright color that give the whole thing the air of a circus."63

61Caption under two photographs, Theatre Arts, XXXV (January, 1951), 24-25.


Costume designers, like actors, become typecast, but sometimes it can turn out more than fortunate. For a poorly received drama with a Mexican setting, The Cat Screams (1942), a young designer named Mary Grant designed "appropriate costumes." In the middle of the next season, Michael Todd opened his production, Mexican Hayride (1944), to very good notices, "the most lavish thing seen on Broadway since the great Ziegfield ventures." Costume designer Mary Grant, in her first big time attempt created one of the most extravagantly dressed musicals in years in spite of all of wartime's difficulty in getting materials. The producer was characteristically modest. "As a matter of truth the costumes are sensationally spectacular," said Mike Todd.

John Chapman in the Daily News agreed:

But if I were to pick a star of the show I would put up in lights the name of Mary Grant. Miss Grant, of whom I'd never heard, designed the Mexican costumes. With money no object she has filled the stage with a succession of lovely garments which make you feel gay every moment you see them. It is designing at its best, for the costumes make the spirit of the show.

After that Mary Grant designed Billy Rose's revue, The Seven Lively Arts (1944), with Norman Bel Geddes, with an excellent press. Then two big musicals, with Howard Bay

64 Robert Coleman, Daily Mirror, June 17, 1942.


66 Ibid.

designing, *Marinka* (1945) and *Polonaise* (1945), brought her fine reviews. From then on Mary Grant transferred her work to Hollywood, where, among other pictures, she designed the clothes for the Burt Lancaster-Tony Curtis film "Sweet Smell of Success" with Susan Harrison.

Rose Bogdanoff was another of the active costume specialists who collaborated with many set designers, and she supervised, or "found" costumes as often as she designed. Miss Bogdanoff was known for the simple realism and naturalness of her costumes. Her most frequent collaborator was Howard Bay, with five shows to their credit. For John Steinbeck's *The Moon Is Down* (1942) and Sidney Kingsley's *The Patriots* (1943) Bay and Bogdanoff received their best reviews. About *The Survivors* (1948), one of the two shows she designed with Boris Aronson, George Freedley commented, "Rose Bogdanoff has composed a series of simple costumes which were nearer the play's content than the direction or acting." 68 Her costuming for the popular *Me and Molly* (1948), set by Harry Horner, was called "a highlight of the show." 69 Of those plays whose clothes she supervised or "found," the long-running *Junior Miss* (1941) was outstanding. Rose Bogdanoff's costuming practice swung between On- and Off-Broadway, and consequently she designed for a number of experimental groups whose productions were excluded from

69 Ibid., February 28, 1941.
this study.

Another costume design specialist who also supervised and often worked Off-Broadway was Emeline Clarke Roche. Mrs. Roche was known for her simple, serviceable costuming. Three times she collaborated with the usually self-sufficient Stewart Chaney. One of these, Jacobowsky and the Colonel (1944), was for the Theatre Guild, for whom Mrs. Roche did two other shows. Another play Emeline Roche did with Stewart Chaney, the successful Red Gloves (1948), marked her first association with the producer Jean Dalrymple. In years to come, Mrs. Roche was to design many a costume at City Center under the aegis of Jean Dalrymple. Emeline Roche's best press was for another Theatre Guild production, Papa Is All (1942), for which she designed both set and costumes. George Freedley said:

The Theatre Guild has mounted the play in good taste and high spirits and designed it for your entertainment. Emeline Roache's [sic] costumes and setting have a quiet charm and convinced at least one "foreigner" to the Pennsylvania Dutch country of their authenticity.70

The Male Animal (1940), Deep Are The Roots (1945), and Goodbye, My Fancy (1948) were three notable long-running plays for which Emeline Roche supervised or "found" the costuming.

Miles White was the most outstanding of the men who specialized in costume design alone. He was a native of Oakland, California, and majored in art at the University of

70George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, January 8, 1942.
California. He wanted to become a painter, but his good design ideas and his acquaintance with theatre people in New York brought his first commission to do costumes, for a night club revue at the Versailles. His "imaginatively unconventional" and "refreshingly different" combinations of color brought him immediate success, which led to a musical assignment.\(^1\) After Miles White did his first Broadway show, the short-lived musical comedy, Right This Way (1938), he went back to designing for nightclubs, Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe, and for ice shows, Norman Bel Geddes' It Happened On Ice (1940), for which he received excellent notices. White then costumed a hit musical show, Best Foot Forward (1941), with Jo Mielziner's sets, to good reviews.

Another instance of designer typecasting brought a fortunate turn to Miles White's career. After his ice show association White had twice designed costumes under the banner of Bel Geddes for Ringling Brothers-Barnum and Bailey Circus. The Theatre Guild decided to do The Pirate (1942) for Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne and asked Miles White to do the costumes because there was a circus in it. The rave notices for designing, for "the costumes, which are the most gorgeous seen along Broadway in years, . . . by Miles White,"\(^2\) he shared with scene designer, Lemuel Ayers.

\(^1\)Biographical note, souvenir programme for Early To Bed, June, 1943.

\(^2\)Brooks Atkinson, Times, November 26, 1942.
From then on his credits, a roster of outstanding musical hits, *Oklahoma* (1943), repeating the previous success with Lemuel Ayers, *Ziegfeld Follies* (1943), *Early To Bed* (1943), *Bloomer Girl* (1944), again with Lemuel Ayers, and *Carousel* (1945) with Jo Mielziner, brought him a reputation for costume design in musical comedy. Among the general reviews of *Oklahoma* which were excellent, George Freedley took time to say about the costumes:

Miles White demonstrates that his success with "The Pirate" was no flash in the pan for his costumes are taken from his brightest palette and out of the gaudiest fashion sheets of the turn of the century. They are bright and gay and go far toward setting the mood of the piece.\(^3\)

In the mid-Forties, Miles White had a whirl at films but came back to New York in this period to design more musicals, *High Button Shoes* (1947) and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949). *High Button Shoes* "with Miles White costumes and Oliver Smith setting . . . is notably handsome."\(^4\) George Freedley said that his "use of color and line is brilliant and shows almost to best advantage in the dancing numbers when the variety of costumes is displayed."\(^5\) Miles White himself was articulate on the special needs of musical comedy costuming:

When a designer designs the costumes for a musical

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\(^3\)George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, April 2, 1943.


comedy he is confronted by problems that are really quite different from those presented by a perfectly plain murder melodrama or a simple exercise in psychopathic aberration or a complicated light domestic comedy. Musical comedy costumes belong to a world apart. They must have a sense of gaiety; they must, in the cases of leading players, accentuate the spirit of the characters; and, if the musical is a period piece, they must be amusing interpretations of the actual fashions of the times. Above all the effect of gaiety is the main thing. It is also the most difficult to attain.  

Two other men specializing in costume design were Raoul Pène du Bois and David Ffolkes. Although both were by inclination total designers, of set and costume, each gained a name as well for his costume designing in collaboration with another designer for setting.

David Ffolkes' press was always impressive. For the musical play *Brigadoon* (1947) with sets by Oliver Smith he, "has created a festal array of kilts, plaids, and rich pastel homespuns." George Freedley found his costumes "completely captivating" and Ward Morehouse felt they brought "the highlands and heather to the Ziegfield's ample stage." "The costumes by David Ffolkes," for Shaw's comedy *Man and Superman* (1947), "are utterly befitting a resplendent period

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play, "80 and "carry out the mood delightfully."81 Again with set designer Oliver Smith, the revue, Along Fifth Avenue (1949), elicited for Ffolkes exclamations of "brilliant job of costuming,"82 and "a bright and optically rewarding song and dance carnival."83

Raoul Pène du Bois early acquired a penchant and a skill for designing musical comedy costumes:

With all their dash, and beauty of line and color, Du Bois' costumes are always eminently wearable. This is perhaps why they have been so greatly in demand for musical comedies, where dancers hold sway a great part of the time.84

The critics agreed. The "crystal horses . . . crystal girls, . . . diamonds and cut glass all over the place,"85 of Billy Rose's musical comedy spectacular, Jumbo (1937), made the costumes of Pène du Bois "brilliantly effective."86 "Most of the showmanship seems to be [in] Raouls [sic] Pène du Bois as creator of some brilliant costumes" for the pastiche

80 Howard Barnes, New York Herald Tribune, October 9, 1947.


82 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, January 15, 1949.


84 Caption to costume design sketches by Raoul Pène du Bois, Theatre Arts, XXV (February, 1941), 163.

85 Richard Lockridge, Sun, November 17, 1935.

86 John Anderson, Journal-American, June 1, 1938.
Victorian operetta, *The Two Bouquets* (1938), which were "done with wit." The critics were equally laudatory for *Leave It To Me* (1938), and for *Too Many Girls* (1939), both set by Jo Mielziner.

Raoul Pène du Bois designed both settings and costumes for the hit musicals *DuBarry Was a Lady* (1939), and *Panama Hattie* (1940). When their producer Buddy De Sylva went to Paramount Pictures he took Pène du Bois to work with him in Hollywood. But when Billy Rose contemplated the musical play *Carmen Jones* (1943), he borrowed Pène du Bois from the studio for four weeks during which time the Carmen costumes were designed. Then Pène du Bois left his assistant, Mary Grant, who had proven capable on his previous Broadway shows, to see the costumes made and to take care of the changes rehearsal always brings.

After the musicals, *Are You With It* (1945), which brought in disappointed costume reviews, and *The Firebrand of Florence* (1945), with poor general reviews but excellent scene (set by Mielziner) and costume criticism, Raoul Pène du Bois continued to design in this period, doing both set and costume.

Paul Du Pont, by sheer number of shows done, stands at the head of the men who both designed and supervised, or "found," costume. From time to time he also executed his own

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87 Sidney Whipple, *World-Telegram*, June 1, 1938.
and others' designs. One of his notable design-plus-execution jobs was Saroyan's *The Time of Your Life* (1939), called by John Anderson "pictorially effective." Du Pont worked with nearly all the well-known scene designers, not more than twice with any one, and provided costume for both the Theatre Guild, in Hemingway's *The Fifth Column* (1940), and for the Group Theatre, in Paul Green's *Johnny Johnson* (1936). Out of his generally good press a few reviews were outstanding. On the 1942 revival of *Porgy and Bess*, in which Paul Du Pont doubled as an actor in the role of the "second policeman," George Freedley commented: "Paul du Pont's choice of color for the costumes was most amusing and at the same time theatrically telling."89

Criticism of acting and criticism of costume were interwoven in the reviews of the well received *Diamond Lil* (1949) with Mae West, whom John Chapman called "the finest female impersonator since Julian Eltinge," weaving "flamboyant costume with stylish arrogance." Ward Morehouse reported that in "her playing of the unregenerate Lil she wears gaudy togs—lavenders, reds, blacks—and leers insinuatingly from beneath her big hat."92

89 George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, January 24, 1942.
Daily praised "Paul Du Pont's tawdry and outlandish costumes . . . [that] have caught the flavor of this sprawling, slummy kaleidoscope."\footnote{93}{Thomas R. Dash, \textit{Women's Wear Daily}, February 7, 1949.}

But George Freedley pointed to costume applause calling attention to bravura designing: "Paul Du Pont had a field day with the clothes particularly those for Miss West, which received a hand on every entrance."\footnote{94}{George Freedley, \textit{Morning Telegraph}, February 8, 1949.} The question of whether this sort of criticism was favorable or adverse, is moot. The following quotation applied to scene design but in the generic sense of design of visual environment, understanding costume creation as part of the mise-en-scène, pertained also to costume:

\begin{quote}
scene design is an art that must keep to the background while before the public eye. The artist, as he glows with inspiration, is compelled to remember that what he does is always subservient to something more important--the play itself. If he steps out into the limelight his personal brilliance may increase but his artistry dwindles.\footnote{95}{Tom Squire, "Designers' Impedimenta," \textit{Theatre Arts Monthly}, XXII (November, 1938), 804.}
\end{quote}

As a costume designer and supervisor, Ernest Schrapps has collaborated most frequently with Watson Barrett, who usually designs both sets and costumes. Of the six they did together in this period the very short-lived \textit{Romantic Mr. Dickens} (1940) received the best reviews. Robert Coleman
thought the mounting was "delightful." Two shows whose costumes Schrapps designed for the Theatre Guild are the Dorothy Heyward *Set My People Free* (1948) and the popular *Silver Whistle* (1948). In *The Corn Is Green* (1940), for which Howard Bay designed the sets, "Ernest Schrapps has clothed his actors in period costumes of rosily humorous aspects." In two popular shows that received fine reviews Ernest Schrapps shared costume designing credit, in each of which the other costume designer's name preceded Schrapps' in the credits. In the programme of *Catherine Was Great* (1944) with Mae West, credits before the cast read: "Costumes designed by Mary Percy Schenck and Ernest Schrapps."

In the *Dark of the Moon* (1945) programme, in upper case type just above the technical credits, was the legend: "Costumes designed by Peggy Clark and Ernest Schrapps." Both of the young ladies mentioned became union members and most successfully designed shows to their own credits.

The costume reviews for both of the preceding productions were far more effusive than for any other Schrapps' shows. George Freedley reported that for *Catherine Was Great* (1944) there was "a hundred thousand dollars worth of costumes and settings. Mary Percy Schenck and Ernest Schrapps designed a series of costumes for the cast, and especially the star,

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96 Robert Coleman, *Daily Mirror*, December 3, 1940.
97 George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, November 28, 1940.
which got hand after hand." Possibly the applause was operatic or stellar, in the nature of huzzahs for a public appearance rather than for bravura designing, or a combination of both—mass approval of that star in that costume, a merging of persona and mask. Louis Kronenberger wisecracked: "Mary Percy Schenck and Ernest Schrapps have designed for Miss West a vast array of fleshly gowns—roughly one to a lover." Rowland Field in the Newark Evening News praised the spectacle of the scene. "Lavish costumes adorn the star in her depiction [sic] of Catherine and they are truly something to see. Her regiment of richly caparisoned associates, too, are decorative." In the reviews for Dark of the Moon the critics pointedly singled out for costume comment only Peggy Clark. George Freedley voiced his appreciation of the play "while Peggy Clark created the costumes." Sidney Whipple thought that the chorus of witches are "bewitchingly adorned by Nature and by Peggy Clark, the costumer." At any rate, as designer, costume supervisor, or collaborator, Ernest Schrapps was credited with at least sixteen shows in the period.

98 Ibid., August 4, 1944.
99 Louis Kronenberger, PM, August 3, 1944.
100 Rowland Field, Newark Evening News, August 3, 1944.
101 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, March 16, 1945.
102 Sidney Whipple, World-Telegram, March 15, 1945.
John Hambleton came to New York from Kentucky to do costume designing for the theatre. George S. Kaufman, directing his own play, *Merrily We Roll Along* (1934), gave Hambleton his first job as costume supervisor, a "finding" assignment, with sets by Jo Mielziner. The next job of "brilliant costuming supervised by John Hambleton" was Clare Boothe's *The Women* (1936), also set by Mielziner. In three more productions, for which Jo Mielziner designed the sets, John Hambleton supervised the costumes—the Rodgers and Hart musical *I Married An Angel* (1938) with Vera Zorina, the well received *Stars In Your Eyes* (1939), and the revue *Sing Out the News* (1938). Hambleton did costumes for two Woodman Thompson designed productions, *The Ghost of Yankee Doodle* (1937) and *To-morrow's a Holiday* (1935).

Hambleton's next four very successful productions, *First Lady* (1935), *You Can't Take It With You* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Fabulous Invalid* (1938), represented a team of Sam Harris, producer, George S. Kaufman, director and coauthor (with the exception of *Of Mice and Men*), Donald Oenslager, set designer, and John Hambleton, costume supervisor.

Another designing duo was that of Mordecai Gorelik, a scene designer who tended to supervise costumes himself, and Paul Morrison, now executive director of the Neighborhood School of the Theatre, customarily a set designer, who did.

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costume for three Gorelik shows. According to Gorelik, "before the union insisted on a costume designer," the producer or director or scene designer would tell the actors to "go get yourself a costume that's all right." Shortly before dress rehearsal a costume parade would be held at which the designer, "whose prerogative it was to control costume," would pass on clothes. For Gorelik's famous lighthouse set in Thunder Rock (1939), for his Night Music (1940) set of the "unique curtain designs," and for his homely backyards of Arthur Miller's All My Sons (1947), Paul Morrison designed the clothes.

A small number of instances of foreign designers working in American productions appeared throughout the period. Two instances of foreign designing were Cecil Beaton's set and costume design for the two-day run of Cry of the Peacock (1950), by Jean Anouilh, and the earlier example of David Ffolkes and Richard II (1937). Originally the union was against foreign designers getting credit but as time went by the union became aware that it gained prestige by enrolling established foreign names, and so foreign designers were taken into the union on payment of the usual entrance fee. David Ffolkes who rather pioneered the westward trend in designing, explained:


105Abel Gorhan, New York Daily Worker, February 23, 1940.
For the great majority of English designers the American theatre holds a sort of magic. . . . There is a sort of enthusiasm about a designer's work which is not merely flattering but inspiring. Most important of all, the technical standard demanded of the Scene Designers' Union makes designing a real profession and creates of the designer a professional man with a proper place in the fabric of the theatre world.106

If the foreign designer's name was unknown, the union required supervision by an American designer. According to Gorelik this was "really necessary because the scenery had to be retouched, fireproofed, et cetera."107 Two examples of this supervision are W. Douglas Home's comedy, Yes, M'Lord (1949), a definitely English production brought to New York by the Shuberts, Lee and J. J., which credited costumes and settings to an American designer, Edward Gilbert, with no mention of technical credits at all; and, while the Gilbert Miller importation of Eliot's drama, The Cocktail Party (1950), credited Raymond Sovey with supervising setting and lights, Variety made no bones about noticing the "original British settings."108 Technical credits for costume, contemporary clothes, were mixed, partly New York and partly London suppliers.

In a less strained vein, Katharine Cornell invited the eminent English designer, Rolf Gérard, who had been

107 Gorelik, loc. cit.
apprentice to Reinhardt in Berlin and whose work had been much influenced by Christian Bérard in Paris, to design costumes and settings for her production of That Lady (1949). Before he left for England again, Rolf Gérard designed Cedric Hardwicke's production of Caesar and Cleopatra (1949), starring Lili Palmer, to even better reviews.

Another gracefully handled example of foreign designing in American productions was for the Valency adaptation of Giradoux' The Madwoman of Chaillot (1948). On the programme in boldface type was the legend: settings and costumes designed by the late Christian Bérard. Both costumes and scenery were reexecuted for the American production.

There was a small group of workers in the theatre who were known variously as costume consultants, or style consultants, or costume stylists. "A stylist is hired by a producer to select modern clothes for the stars of a play. The stylist does not design. She goes to the Fifth Avenue shops and selects the right sort of clothes." 109

Bianca Stroock, wife of James E. Stroock, late partner with Abram M. Blumberg in Brooks Costume Company was known among theatrical people as the "best costume stylist in the profession." 110 She worked with all the major set designers in theatre, and with some of the lesser ones, doing within

109 Maurice Zolotow, "How to Dress a Broadway Show," Saturday Evening Post, CCXVI (June 24, 1944), 74.

110 Ibid.
this period a minimum of forty shows. Eight plays with
Donald Oenslager marked her most frequent collaboration.
The seven with Raymond Sovey ran a near second. She dressed
four plays in sets of Frederick Fox and two for Stewart
Chaney. The single Robert Edmond Jones setting she styled
was the chic *The Philadelphia Story* (1939). Since producers
went to a well known style consultant in order to get
"fashionable shows,"111 money spent was apparent, and the
rarely offered criticism tended toward phrases like "costly
wardrobe"112 and "a fortune in finery."113 But on occasion
a discerning critic noticed that "in designing the costumes,
Bianca Stroock has departed from Broadway fashion by actually
suiting them to the characters and the play."114

Another well known style consultant, Margaret Pemberton,
wife of the producer Brock Pemberton, was notable as a
member of the active, successful Pemberton producing team.
The group, consisting of Brock Pemberton, producer; Antoinette
Perry, director; John Root, designer; and Margaret Pemberton,
clothes consultant, in the first half of this period presented
nine productions. *Personal Appearance* (1934) and *Kiss the

111Gorelik, *loc. cit.*

112Burns Mantle, review of "Pie in the Sky," *Daily
News*, December 23, 1941.

113Walter Winchell, review of "All That Glitters," *Daily
Mirror*, January 20, 1938.

114Brooks Atkinson, review of "The Hallams," *Times*,
March 5, 1948.
Boys Goodbye (1938) were among its more popular plays. After Antoinette Perry's death, the team reformed later in the period with Mrs. Perry's daughter, Margaret Perry, as director, to do less successfully two more shows. Margaret Pemberton infrequently worked with other set and costume designers, like Stewart Chaney, usually on a modern show. Mrs. Pemberton's scanty press was on the good side. Brooks Atkinson mentioned Vicki Cummings, the star of Mr. Barry's Etchings (1950), "who is ravishingly handsome in a smart little number provided by Margaret Pemberton, the boss' dynamic wife."115

Couturiers, or high fashion designers, continually were attracted to theatre, trying their hands for longer or shorter times at designing for the stage. Theatre Arts emphasized the place of fashion in theatrical production:

Fashion plays its most definitive role in the theatre. It is as integral a part of any production as the script, the actors or the setting. Designers who create fashions for the theatre are the top dramatists of their league. Their job is to set the character visually into the scene so that a rapport is established between actor and audience before even a line is spoken.116

Some couturiers, like Schiaparelli and Molyneux of London rarely designed for the theatre. Castillo of Elizabeth Arden carried his success with the gowns of Noel Coward's Present Laughter (1946) over to the primitive Greek costumes


116 Fashion feature, one-page caption, Theatre Arts, XXXV (June, 1951), 21.
that Judith Anderson wore in the Jeffers' Medea (1947). The Chicago-born Mainbocher, former editor-in-chief of French Vogue, from time to time created costumes—gowns of note for the stage, as in Coward's Blythe Spirit (1941), for Mary Martin in One Touch of Venus (1943), and for Tallulah Bankhead in Philip Barry's Foolish Notion (1945). Others like Adrian of Hollywood left one medium, the movies, for a postman's holiday taste of another, the Broadway stage, designing for Billie Burke in Mrs. January and Mr. Ex (1944). Another, Elizabeth Hawes of Fashion is Spinach fame, relinquished costume designing after a try at a less than successful play, A Room in Red and White (1936), and told about it:

The person hired to costume a theatrical production is all too often faced with a leading lady who insists upon wearing a satin gown for dinner in a Boy Scout camp, a director who knows that all debutantes always wear fox furs, a producer's wife who owns a piece of a dress business, and a set designer who forgets to mention that he's changing a couch from pink to red. . . . There are even producers who are surprised when their costumer asks to read the script.

Whether a costumer fails or succeeds never depends entirely upon him. Although they are overemphasized, Miss Hawes' observations articulate problems all designers meet. But the words of another fashion designer who managed better to cope with theatrical difficulties carried a strong rebuttal:

The art of the theatre is a collective art. Close collaboration with playwright, actors, directors and the artist in charge of the sets is essential if a

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117Elizabeth Hawes, "Theatre As a Mannequin," Theatre Arts, XXXIII (April. 1949), 57.
dress designer is to harmonize her contribution with the atmosphere of the play.\textsuperscript{118}

Of the high fashion designers, there were two who stayed in theatre; one, who was most prolific, Hattie Carnegie, and one, who was most theatrical, Valentina.

Valentina, "one of the country's top couturiers, . . . and designer for stars of the theatre, is as spectacular as they."

Valentina felt that the right costume can introduce the actress in a way that will attune the audience to the "moods" of the actress' interpretation. She said:

All plays, however commonplace their environment, should be classed as "costume plays." All costumes—modern or period—should be designed for living individuals rather than in terms of the abstract.\textsuperscript{120}

Designing for a specific actress in a specific role was Valentina's forte. She had designed for Helen Hayes in Anderson's \textit{Candle in the Wind} (1941) and for Ina Claire in Berman's \textit{The Talley Method} (1941). In Berman's \textit{No Time For Comedy} (1939), the Anouilh \textit{Antigone} (1946), and Guthrie McClintic's production of \textit{Antony and Cleopatra} (1947), for Katharine Cornell, "Valentina has designed costumes that act before a line is spoken."\textsuperscript{121}

In designing for Lynn Fontanne a more than fortunate

\textsuperscript{118}Valentina, "Designing for Life and Theatre," \textit{Theatre Arts}, XXV (February, 1941), 145.

\textsuperscript{119}Leota Diesel, "Valentina," \textit{Theatre Arts}, XXXVI (April, 1952), 39.

\textsuperscript{120}Valentina, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 140.

\textsuperscript{121}Brooks Atkinson, \textit{Times}, April 18, 1939.
costume collaboration was effected. As were many of Valentina's stars, Lynn Fontanne was a satisfied personal client who asked for her ministrations on stage, and got them, starting with the Robert Sherwood comedy *Idiots' Delight* (1936). Lynn Fontanne patterned her role, Irene, in *Idiots' Delight* on Valentina. Valentina was delighted with the performance and told all her friends, "you mus' go an' see me." In *There Shall Be No Night* (1940), Valentina costumed Miss Fontanne with distinction, but in *Amphitryon 38* (1937) Valentina reached the acme of her theatrical costuming.

Style should be one of the major components of theatrical clothes. Sometimes the style is attributable to the actress herself, or to the actor. The greatest exponent of style I know of is Miss Lynn Fontanne.

When these two qualities [style and theatrical distinction] are both there, it is usually a happy marriage between the player and designer. They need each other's best qualities to bring it off. I remember a play called *Amphitryon 38*, designed by Valentina, performed by the Lunts. It was, in that era, a joy to the eye as well as the ear. Valentina was a Russian woman who designed perfectly beautiful clothes that were never in fashion, always had great style.123

Hattie Carnegie also designed for the stars. During this period Carnegie was credited with nearly two dozen costuming jobs, all of contemporary clothing.

Costuming a modern drama such as "Susan and God,"

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122 Diesel, op. cit., p. 84.

presents far many more problems than the average theatre-goers could ever imagine or suspect. It requires a thorough knowledge of the script—a complete diagnosis of each character and an anticipation of the appropriateness and likes and dislikes of that character's taste in clothes.124

Among the undisputed stars, for whom Hattie Carnegie has designed costumes, were Ina Claire in Sidney Howard's Ode To Liberty (1934), Katharine Cornell in Flowers of the Forest (1935), by Van Druten, and Gertrude Lawrence in Samson Raphaelson's Skylark (1939) and in Rachel Crothers' Susan and God (1937).

High fashion designers who designed for the star, and often for supporting characters, and who constructed in their own workrooms, became part of the producing team in this period. The new element was that more and more often, instead of purely a star and couturière relationship existing as it had earlier in the century, the scene designer or costume designer if there was one, collaborated with the fashion designer to the extent of setting tone and balance of the costuming, working towards the visual unity that was so much sought after.

The costumers, the fine craftsmen who were the executors of designs, made real the designer's dream. Most of them could design and did so when need be, but construction was their craft. Kiviette and Mahieu from another period were still operating, but infrequently. Hélène Pons was

still as active as ever. But it was to one old hand, Karinska, and to one newcomer, Edith Lutyens, that sketches were given for the elegant designs that called for historical cut and the precise shaping of another era for their proper effect.

There is no limit to what we can create on the stage. But we could not do what we do were it not for the excellence of the craftsmen who carry out our work. . . . The loveliest costume drawings in the world would amount to nothing as costumes were they carelessly made.

The relation between the designer and the craftsmen is close, and it must be a good one.

The selection of the fabric, its truth to your choice of color, the cut, fit, hang and drape of the costume, although closely supervised, are really in the hands of the costumer. It isn't just dressmaking, even the finest dressmaking, that does the trick. It's the skill, the costumer's interest and feeling for the job, and endless patience for dealing with the actor's temperament and idiosyncrasies.125

Edith Lutyens, who later was married to Norman Bel Geddes and became a producer as well as a costumer, came to America at the beginning of World War II. The Motleys were about to design a ballet, "Dim Lustre," and asked Miss Lutyens if she would execute it. Edith Lutyens had no money, but had a Negro girl who sewed for her. Elizabeth Montgomery said if Miss Lutyens joined the garment workers' union she'd give her the job. "Liz hated all shops, etc."126

125Aline Bernstein, "The Craftsmen," Theatre Arts, XXIX (April, 1945), 208.

that beginning followed a good many more with Motley, among which were notably the Vera Zorina Tempest (1945), Pygmalion (1945) with Gertrude Lawrence, South Pacific (1949), and Anne of the Thousand Days (1948). Among the plays Edith Lutyens constructed costumes for from David Ffolkes sketches was the "captivating" Brigadoon (1947). Bathsheba (1947), for Stewart Chaney, was "exquisitely costumed." For Katharine Cornell's production of Antony and Cleopatra (1947) Miss Lutyens executed the designs of John Boyt and was noted for her stylized construction of Cleopatra's wig. Again she fitted Miss Cornell to the costumes of Rolf Gérard in That Lady (1949), a production whose "remarkable beauty lies in its texture and luminosity."

The term costumer applied also to the supplier of costume from stock, costume rental houses, as well as naming the person who executes the designs from sketches or models. Eaves Costume Company and Brooks-Van Horn also execute and so are costumers in both senses of the word.

The technical assistants in costume were another group of workers in the area of theatrical design. Technical assisting could be a preliminary step in the direction of full-fledged designing.

Another gambit not without its uses is to take a

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127 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, March 15, 1947.
a job as assistant to an already established costumer. This gambit may produce valuable contracts and experience. You may find you are functioning chiefly as an errand boy, but this has the advantage, as you go from jewelry resource to fabric center, of helping you build up your own collection of Important Trivia so necessary to your own future jobs.130

The costume assistant had no connection with the producer but was hired by the designer by the week rather than by the show usually to do the legwork. Edith Lutyens Bel Geddes described the assistant's duties as: "—material research, sometimes sketches, make your color charts, all details typed out, samples, color things—"131 Many of those who ultimately reached the goal of specializing in costume design and of doing their own shows served their apprenticeships as technical assistants to a costume designer. Julia Sze, costume designer to Mielziner on Death of a Salesman (1948) assisted David Ffolkes on Man and Superman (1947). Mary Grant of Mexican Hayride (1944) fame, was assistant to Raoul Pène du Bois on Two for the Show (1940) and Liberty Jones (1941) among others. Mary Percy Schenk, the colleague of Ernest Schrapp on Catherine Was Great (1944), was Donald Oenslager's costume assistant for Eastward in Eden (1947). The able technical assistant to Lucinda Ballard on I Remember Mama (1944), Happy Birthday (1946), and Another Part of the Forest (1946) was Anna Hill Johnstone, who went on past 1950

130Volland, op. cit., p. 6.

to design stage costumes on her own, and then went into films. Before she designed costumes Rose Bogdanoff had been another member of the McClintic-Cornell producing team as technical assistant on costume to Jo Mielziner.

A curious custom in costume designing was the multi-designer approach to revues. Vincente Minnelli, himself a director and designer of both sets and costumes, discussed this practice:

A revue is an even more collaborative artistic entity than a play. . . . In earlier days the collaboration of all these contributing artists was extremely loose. Variety was emphasized at the expense of harmony. . . . Although variety is essential to a revue, it should be variety within harmony—something that can be achieved only by establishing first an "idea of production" that would be the basis of the entire show.\textsuperscript{132}

Minnelli was generally referring to the art of all the collaborators—the composers, lyricists, scenic artists, and sketch writers—but this loose tendency toward multiple designing was exemplified in the costume designing of four revues of the first season of this period. The Shuberts' \textit{Life Begins at 8:40} (1934) credits costume to seven designers, two among them, Raoul Pène du Bois and Irene Sharaff, are included in this study. Credits for Eddie Dowling's \textit{Thumbs Up} (1934) listed four designers, of whom Pène du Bois was one. \textit{Parade} (1935) from the Theatre Guild was credited to Irene Sharaff among four other costume designers. Five

\textsuperscript{132} Norris Houghton, "The Designer Sets the Stage," \textit{Theatre Arts Monthly}, XX (October, 1936), 784.
designers were employed on the Earl Carroll Sketch Book (1935).

The critics commented, but except for the fact of the comment non-committally, on the multiplicity of designing. John Anderson found the performers of Thumbs Up "in dazzling costumes, designed, apparently by a committee. . . ."133

Walter Winchell accused the costume designers of Life Begins at 8:40 of having "held a convention to dress the revue. . . ."134

Although Vincente Minnelli, with the instincts of a total designer, held no brief for multi-designing, he was able to accept as possible and necessary the emerging costume design specialist:

The costumes for his revue Minnelli would rather design himself, but he feels that it is at the same time quite possible for someone other than the setting designer to create costumes as long as the two work hand in hand and as long as the costumer is able to carry out in his creation the "idea of production."135

A growing emphasis on costume design and recognition of the costume designer as a contributing artist in the theatre was characteristic of the period. Older procedures still prevailed, certainly in the late thirties and early war years, but as the period progressed the job of costume designing was subject to experimentation and grew in importance. In the course of this time of transition a number of

134Walter Winchell, Daily Mirror, August 28, 1934.
135Houghton, op. cit., p. 788.
different kinds of designers evolved. There was the old established set and costume designer who continued to do both as long as he could. Then later there was the artist who remained a set designer alone. Others of the designers concentrated on costume, making way for the costume design specialist. Among other workers connected with costume design were the stylists, the couturiers, and the costumers, as well as technical assistants in costume.
CHAPTER III
THE DESIGNER AS A PROFESSIONAL

It has been said that a man who works with his hands is a workman; a man who works with his hands and his head is a craftsman; and when that man also works with his heart, he is an artist.

Donald Oenslager

During the course of this study of costume from 1934 to 1950, a picture began to emerge of a newly developing artist in the theatre, the costume design specialist. This chapter attempts to describe that specialist by discussing his immediate antecedents in theatre practice; his training, his working procedures and self-set standards; his relationship to the union; his recognition by reviewers in newspapers and by producers in programme billing; and his rewards.

In earlier chapters mention was made of the person who was credited in programme or review with costume design. Notice needed to be taken of just who this individual was. He could be the designer of both sets and costumes, or an artist who specialized in costumes alone. He might be the costume supervisor, or "finder," or perhaps the costumière, or costumer, the individual who might also design as well as construct.
A "found" show is not one you just happen to stumble across in the street, like what we used to call "found money." No, the expression refers to the method of obtaining the clothes with which to dress the show. Sometimes, usually for monetary reasons, you must shop for the clothes and buy what you can locate in the stores, rather than have the costumes made to order. Occasionally there is a taste reason involved.¹

Some of those practitioners who ultimately reached the goal of specializing in costume design had served their apprenticeship as a constructor in a costume shop, or as a "finder," working under the guidance of the union scenic artist who established the tenor of the design. Many, like union designer Virginia Volland, still enjoyed doing a "found" show although "the designed show is certainly the quickest way to fame and possibly fortune."²

During the earlier period from 1915 to 1934 and in the beginning of this study there were no costume design specialists. The young designers of the new stagecraft, working for unity in scenic environment, preferred to and usually did design both costumes and sets but were customarily credited only with set design. The scenic artists were struggling also for the recognition that increasingly came to them in the commercial theatre of the twenties. But with the entrance of the scenic designers into the stage painters' union in 1923 the artists' position in the theatre


²Ibid., p. 36.
became an established fact. Sometimes voluntarily and sometimes bargained for, recognition came too from the producers in the shape of programme billing:

The designers—Robert Edmond Jones, Lee Simonson, Norman Bel Geddes, Jo Mielziner, Cleon Throckmorton, and others—had their names advanced from the bottom to the top of the programme.3

But so far he was noticed only as a set designer. Not until after the beginning of the period of this study was the costume specialist recognized. In 1934 Eustis4 considered in his chart of production personnel no other designer than a scenic artist, although he lists costumers and dress shops. By 1936 the United Scenic Artists had established a costume designers' section of Local 829. But as late as 1934 Fortune magazine in its publication of expenses, "production and operating costs," for an anonymous, large musical had cited scene designer's fee and set building costs, costume expenses in detail, but made no mention of costume designer.

One of the few exceptions to this dearth of costume notice was the acclaim accorded the production design for The Man Who Married A Dumb Wife (1915) by Robert Edmond Jones.

... a good play and good acting remain the essence of real theatre. But the canvas and paint, the silks and cottons in which A [sic] Man Who Married a Dumb Wife was set and costumed ushered in a renaissance in American scene designing which was to elevate the

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designer from the role of hack to that of a creative artist, to make his contribution vital to the integration of a production, and to bring about in no indirect fashion a larger theatrical renaissance.\(^5\)

Whether the larger theatre renaissance later occurred remains food for scholarly debate but certainly the place of costume design was greatly enhanced.

At first the designer of the new stagecraft planned settings, costumes, and lighting for each production. But as his work extended beyond the slowly disappearing little art theatres, the physical labor of supervising all three in the final stages of production became too much for one man. So, although most designers in theory deplored the dividing up of the unity of visual production, in practice they found it necessary to split the jobs into set design and costume design, and later beyond the span of this study to separate lighting from scenery design. While he bowed to its necessity Jo Mielziner regretted the artistic schism, remarking that: "For the first ten years of my career I always designed the costumes as well as the scenery. . . ."\(^6\) Aline Bernstein who had started out doing costumes, then both, then tended toward costume specialization as the need arose, said finally:

I will no longer design costumes for a play where I do not design the scenery as well, for the costumes on the actors have to move back and forth before the background and in and out of the light with perfect harmony.\(^7\)

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\(^5\)Eustis, *op. cit.*, pp. 82, 83.

\(^6\)Jo Mielziner, *Designing for the Theatre* (New York, 1965), pp. 43, 44.

\(^7\)Eustis, *op. cit.*, p. 335.
These two exponents of total designing had different philosophic approaches to production designing. Jo Mielziner decided the color scheme of the clothes first and then the background; for Mrs. Bernstein the setting came first and then the costumes. In his essay on Robert Edmond Jones, Donald Oenslager remembered that "with Jones, the actors and their costumes came first; then he designed the settings around them."

Some of the designers, like Donald Oenslager, reserved the right to decide from production to production, and chose according to time schedules and the needs of each particular play. "If it is a period play, Mr. Oenslager designs and supervises the execution of the costumes." 

No one in the profession wished to split apart the total designing of scenery and costume. At first, before the rise of the costume design specialist, much the same people designed costumes for one another's sets.

In these days of rigid labor set ups and Equity rulings, four weeks for rehearsal and the piling of contract upon contract, the designer has no hours to waste, no matter how exalted his undertaking. He may even have to pass up the right to do a play's

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8 Norris Houghton, "The Designer Sets the Stage," Theatre Arts Monthly, XXI (February, 1937), 118, 125.


10"Setting by Donald Oenslager," The Theatre Annual, IX (1951), 71.
costumes, although they form an integral part of the scenery as he has planned it.\textsuperscript{11}

The set designer's special privilege was to design or at least supervise the choosing of the costumes. At one time the union set designer was not allowed to begin work until a costume designer's contract had been filed. But time in set designing was of the essence, "so a way out" was for the set designer to take the costume design contract for the sake of expedience until a costume person could be hired.\textsuperscript{12}

The costume designer emerged as an individual, separate from the set designer in job as well as frequently in person, and evolved for himself standards and procedures. He struggled to find recognition. The first voice of approval came from among his fellow designers when the United Scenic Artists formed a costume design section in 1936. Of course many of the assenting members were in themselves both costume and set designers. Of the one hundred and thirty-one costume designers and the ninety-one set designers charted as having designed productions dealt with in this study, thirty-two were the same individuals who at least part of the time did total designing, and part of the time did either costume or sets in complement to other designers. Of the ninety-nine remaining costume designers most were costume

\textsuperscript{11} Tom Squire, "Designers Impedimenta," \textit{Theatre Arts Monthly}, XXII (November, 1938), 804.

\textsuperscript{12} Mordecai Gorelik, personal interview, Carbondale, Illinois, May 14, 1966.
design specialists alone. The union required that the set designer be examined also in costume and in lighting, whereas the costume designers were given an entrance test in costume alone.13

Not only the union but the theatrical world noticed the appearance of the costume specialist. The producer Brock Pemberton, whose own wife Margaret was one of the experts of whom he speaks, was quoted as saying this about "finding":

Until a few years ago little attention was paid to modern clothes worn by actresses. The usual procedure was for the producer to budget their wardrobe and let them shift for themselves. The result was apt to be ludicrous and horrible. Nowadays experts reconcile line and color to personality, mood, and setting.14

In addition to advocating character designing in costume, Aline Bernstein continued to support the idea of one artist designing for the total scenic environment:

The costume must aid in the actor's characterization; it must be the clothing of the character the author has written. The scenery is still, and the costumes move before it in light. So the relation of the two should be perfect. I believe it should be the work of one mind, certainly in a dramatic production.15

The designer's job began with reading the script, determining the locale, place and time, visualizing

13Volland, op. cit., p. 55.
14Eustis, op. cit., p. 190.
the players, and deciding whether to do it in the time
allowed to design. According to Charles Le Maire, a Broad-
way designer who later moved to Hollywood, the next step was
synchronizing idea with the producer and the director.
After that came research, absorbing sources by just looking,
then concentration on images of what the characters are
doing on stage. Next came the sketches, before or sometimes
after finding the fabrics. Then a check with producer and
director was in order before handing over the drawings to
the costume manufacturer. When the muslins were ready, the
designer passed upon them then waited for final fitting and
seeing the finished product on the stage.16

The costume drawing in itself was a small part of the
designer's job. Many designers felt that next to color, and
certainly inextricably bound up with it, was the choice of
fabric.

There is more involved in successful costume
designing for the theatre, or TV, or the movies,
than the ability to create a handsome sketch of a
chic dress or a magnificent toga. . . . It is
worth while to look closely at the nongraphic, as
well as at the more tactile, requirements for the
part.17

Among the non-graphic attributes of a designer was his
ability to choose fabrics:

It is we believe necessary to do one's own

16Josephine D. Paterek, from a letter from Charles
Le Maire, unpublished material on the designers, Theatre
Collection.

17Volland, op. cit., p. x.
shopping . . ., for the fabric plan is as much an integral part of the artist's scheme as his idea of colour or line, and by its very nature a secret thing that cannot easily be communicated.18

In Paul Denis'19 defining of theatrical jobs as he guided and advised the would-be careerist in show business, he pointed out that the costume man must design for a specific use. He advocated that not only did a designer have to know everything about fabric, design, and color but that in addition he must have a practical knowledge of show business. Not only must the gown look well and flatter the wearer but must also fit in the show in which the character appears.

Of all the designers Robert Edmond Jones most strongly espoused this idea and expressed it in this way:

If we are to accomplish anything in any art we must first see what our problem is before we can proceed to solve it. What we do in the theatre depends upon what we see. If we are to design for the theatre we must have the clearest possible image in our minds of the nature and the purpose and the function of the theatre.20

Although both practitioner and critics warned from time to time against putting too much stress on the designer's sketch and too little on the non-graphic elements of designing, nevertheless the artist's drawing remained the visualization, the plan, the actual chart for executing the


19Denis, op. cit., p. 137.

costumes. The rendering for scene and costume design continues only as a camera art but one often sought by the connoisseur.

Scenic design is double edged: it is an art and a craft, an authoritative creation and a subordinate contribution. Its evocative power is potential rather than actual, requiring for its realization the magic of the stage: space and light and movement. Translated in those special and dynamic terms, the drawings suddenly assume a strange and fascinating life transcending the plane dimension of the picture.

It is primarily a technical document accurately executed as a scale drawing which may be read and realized in theatrical workshops. At the same time it is a genuine work of art which conveys in essence and in spirit the poetic climax of the play.21

Although the sketch can be an art, the designer's creative job was not finished upon handing it over with selected fabrics to the construction shop. Approval of the muslins, or the first fitting was followed by further supervision until the final fitting produced the result of the designs as planned.

A designer's work is far from completed with the submission of finished sketches and the purchase of fabrics; the execution of the costumes still remains, and it is perhaps the most arduous part of the entire assignment. The hard mundane fact is that a competent designer must be, at least vicariously, a costume cutter, fitter and seamstress as well—and the less vicariously the better, since a designer should be able to turn out a finished garment, actually as well as theoretically.22

Aline Bernstein, whose work began in the less hurried

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22Motley, op. cit., p. 15.
atmosphere of the little art theatre, strongly believed that the making of costumes must be tied up together with the designing of them. She always had a hand in the execution, often actually cutting and sewing, or at least making careful patterns for the work.\textsuperscript{23}

Broadway journalist Maurice Zolotow summarized popularly the attributes necessary to the costume designer's doing his job well:

The guiding element in the whole process of costuming a show is the designer. A designer does more than design. He chooses the material, he selects the embroidery and other decorations. He supervises each of the successive fittings. He follows every stage of the process. The designer must not only have a rarified sensitivity to the sheen of colors and the variety of fabrics but he must also have the dramatic flair—he must know how to design a costume that fits the thematic mood of a play and that blends with the setting. The successful costume designers of New York are few—less than twenty members of Local 829 of the United Scenic Artists, A.F.L.\textsuperscript{24}

Many designers felt very strongly about another facet of the costuming job, that of teaching the actors, helping the performers to enhance their performance, first by designing the best possible costume and second by teaching them to wear it to greatest advantage. Motley felt that the actor should see the costume designs as soon as possible and usually laid out a little exhibition at the first rehearsal or reading. The actor's feelings and ideas about his part

\textsuperscript{23}Houghton, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 125.

\textsuperscript{24}Maurice Zolotow, "How To Dress a Broadway Show," \textit{Saturday Evening Post}, CCXVI (June 24, 1944), 74.
should be embodied in the costume design to help him get the
color of character he wanted.25

The "magnificent costume designs" of Robert Edmond
Jones were enjoyed as pure painting. But he made clear by
pinning them with swatches of fabrics and lace and braid,
that the sketches were not just indications of what the cos­
tumes were going to be but plans for garments "meant for
actors to act in." The following quotation from an early
essay expressed his viewpoint:

Costuming is not dressmaking. It is a matter of
understanding the dramatist's inner idea, of knowing
how the actors carry out this intention in their
movements and of arranging drapery to make these
movements seem more expressive and more heroic.
The problem of costume is the problem of the man
who wears it and what he is trying to do and say in
it.26

Jones designed to express in costume the essence of
the actor's role. He painstakingly taught the actor and
encouraged him to use the costume to best effect. Jo Miel­
ziner remembered the example of his teacher:

Another example of Bobby's desire to stimulate
the actors' imaginations was his conversations
with them at their first costume fittings—long
before satin and laces were ready to take the place
of muslin and pins. Each actor was shown the
beautiful drawing for his costume, and then Bobby
discussed with him the problems of movement and
attitude and style imposed by the modes and manners
of the period.27

25Motley, op. cit., pp. 37, 38.
26Jo Mielziner, The Theatre of Robert Edmond Jones, ed.
27Ibid., p. 25.
Costume designers tended to feel very close to the actor and his work. Many of the specialists had been or had had thoughts of being actors. For the very practical reason of learning designing from the viewpoint of the actor rather than through the purely pictorial approach of the usual young designer, Jo Mielziner was advised by his actor brother Kenneth McKenna to take a try at small parts. Mielziner subsequently was a bit player with Jessie Bonstell's stock company in Detroit and with the Theatre Guild in New York. Among other costume designers who were at one time or another actors were Kate Drain Lawson, technical director for the Theatre Guild and former wife of playwright John Howard Lawson; Paul Morrison, designer and actor with both the Theatre Guild and the Group Theatre; Paul DuPont and Raymond Sovey; Peggy Clark, now a lighting expert, and Virginia Volland, author of Designing Woman, a book on commercial costume designing. Aline Bernstein, who called her autobiography Actor's Daughter, always dreamed of following in the footsteps of her father, Joseph Frankau. She carried something of an actor's approach to designing inasmuch as characterization for her was the important element in stage clothes.28

The scenic artists, inclusive of both setting and costume designers, set their standards for themselves. As Motley said: "Designing is an exacting profession. We do

28Houghton, op. cit., p. 118.
not recommend it for the faint-hearted or the indolent."29 The scenic designer, of all artists, must work with a time schedule firmly in mind; production dates were rigidly fixed and had to be adhered to. Scholarly research was a necessary part of the designer's work. He had to be able to draw and to build colour schemes.

We have said that most men can learn to draw, and although truly great colourists are probably born, not made, we are convinced that the dedicated artist can develop an effective colour sense.30

As well as his technical skills, the stage designer required a theatrical sensibility. In addition to his knowledge of art and of design the scenic artist must understand what the play means, what the director is driving at. Robert Edmond Jones defined the ultimate creative action of the designer in this way:

A stage designer is, in a very real sense, a jack-of-all-trades. He can make blueprints and murals and patterns and light-plots. He can design fireplaces and bodices and bridges and wigs. He understands architecture, but is not an architect; can paint a portrait, but is not a painter; creates costumes, but is not a couturier. . . . These talents are only the tools of his trade. His real calling is something quite different. He is an artist of occasions.31

For the costume design specialist, the same framework of artistic knowledge, plus a variety of skills catalyzed through a histrionic sensibility, resulted in the creation

30Ibid., p. 19.
31Robert Edmond Jones, op. cit., p. 69.
of costumes. Jones refined his analysis of the scenic designer's genius for mere specific application to costume design:

In learning how a costume for the stage is designed and made, we have to go through a certain amount of routine training. We must learn about patterns, and about periods. We have to know what farthingales are, and wimples, and patches and caleches and parures and godets and appliques and passementerie. We have to know the instant we see and touch a fabric what it will look like on the stage both in movement and repose. We have to develop the brains that are in our fingers. We have to enhance our feeling for style in the theatre. We have to experiment endlessly until our work is as nearly perfect as we can make it, until we are, so to speak, released from it. All this is part of our apprenticeship. But there comes to every one of us a time when the problem of creating presents itself.32

For the designer according to Jones the act of creation took place in relation to a live show, a play that was being produced, a specific occasion. Before finding the opportunity to apply his creativity to the Broadway profession he needed to develop his art, to acquire knowledge and experience in all the variety of skills and crafts that made up his designing tool kit. Many costume designers had a background of art training like the Motleys. Some, like Stewart Chaney, studying playwriting at Yale and influenced by George Pierce Baker and Donald Oenslager to shift attention to stage design, came through other doors to theatre.33

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32 Ibid., p. 87.

33 "Tributary to Professional," Theatre Arts Monthly, XXII (July, 1938), 530.
A few, like Jo Mielziner, trained by his father in figure painting, have both an artistic education and theatrical experience. Donald Oenslager advised the would-be designer to practice his craft in the tributary theatre:

The designer can learn his craft by going to a theatre school. Also stage design classes are given in the drama departments of certain colleges and universities. For some years I have given such classes at Yale. Or the designer might learn his craft the hard way by working in a community theater or by working backstage in a summer theater.

Paul Denis praised the educational value that the tributaries had for Broadway artists:

These non-professional theatres, operated by colleges, settlement houses, school drama departments, and by brave, energetic lovers of the theatre, are wonderful tributaries to the professional theatre. They have sent fine budding actors, playwrights, directors, scenic and costume designers to Broadway and the movies.

Between 1934 and 1950, the job of costume designing became a unit in itself and the designer who did the job became a costume specialist, his propensity as a free-lancing artist increased. Late in the preceding period of Paterek's study and early in the time of the present work the professional artists who were to become the costume design specialists could carry out their creative activities in a number of capacities. The future costume design specialist

34 Houghton, op. cit., p. 118.


36 Denis, op. cit., p. 85.
could have been hired by the individual show to design setting and costume. Or he might be a staff designer for a producer such as Robert Edmond Jones was in the twenties for Arthur Hopkins, and as he was costume designer during 1912-1913 for the producing organization of Comstock and Gest.  

But by the beginning of the period of this study the big producing firms had mostly disappeared. The costume designer could be an employee of a costume house, as Billi Livingston was for Brooks Costume Company and Paul DuPont for Eaves Costume Company. The costume executors Kiviette and Mahieu also severally worked for Brooks. A union ruling discouraged this sort of employment and the practice had been almost discontinued by the end of the period. A costume designer might also work as assistant to a scenic designer as Rose Bogdanoff did for Robert Edmond Jones for years.  

A future costume design specialist might also be the proprietor of a designer-executor establishment like Hélène Pons and Edith Lutyens, and Mahieu and Kiviette. Such combinations continued to exist beyond the period of this study.

Another worker in costume who might become with more training and experience a costume design specialist was the assistant hired by the costume designer. The costume assistant was engaged not by the show but by the week to do the

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37Donald Oenslager, The Theatre of Robert Edmond Jones, p. 146.

38Ibid.
leg work. The job was to find material, do research, make charts, get samples and match colors, type out all details. Sometimes the assistant would sketch but never get name credit, and often had to see to accessories. Toward the end of the period the union required that only union members could be hired as assistants. Such a ruling defeated any possible apprentice system. Nevertheless Virginia Volland advised neophyte designers today to "take a job as assistant to an already established costumer." 

After he feels he has learned enough theatre technique to work in the professional theater the young designer will inevitably find himself knocking at the union door in order to take an examination for admission to that worthy body. The professional stage designer must pass an examination and become a member of Local 829 affiliated with the paper-hanger's and decorators of America.

The United Scenic Artists, Local 829, was the designers' union from the beginning of the period with a nominally separate costume section established in 1936. There was also the Theatrical Wardrobe Attendants' Union, Local 764, IATSE, for wardrobe women and dressers, the Theatrical Costume Workers' Union, Local 38, ILGWU, for

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40 Volland, op. cit., p. 6.


42 Ella A. Malin, editor, Publications Program, ANTA, letter to writer, June 29, 1966.
construction of stage clothes in costume shops and houses.\textsuperscript{43} All the costume workers in theatre with the exception of the top assistants or supervisors in costume construction belonged to a union.\textsuperscript{44}

Early in the period there was a growing union sentiment in the theatrical field, and unionization gave to show people an increasing strength.\textsuperscript{45} Nevertheless the scenic artist, costume as well as set, held dichotomous feelings toward his union. The designers were well aware of the protection the union offered.

\ldots The Scenic Artists Union \ldots has continued to protect its members from shady or outright crooked practices. Although there are a few regulations that management resents on the whole there are few abuses of power on either side.\textsuperscript{46}

The union required that the designers do no sketches for the projected play until a contract was signed. The designers were recommended on previous sketches or on reputation for already staged work. This rule prevented a former abuse to which the designer had been subjected, that of doing his sketches then having them preempted without pay. The minimum wage the union set up protected all the workers to a certain extent but tended to discourage the beginner:

\begin{itemize}
\item[b] Edith Lutyens Bel Geddes, letter to writer, July 8, 1966.
\item[c] Abel Green & Joe Laurie, Jr., Show Biz from Vaude to Video (New York, 1951), pp. 196, 343.
\item[d] Mielziner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6.
\end{itemize}
Too, the minimum wages the union has established are high, and this ultimately is no protection for the "little man" or the aspirant. A producer is not likely to hire an unknown talent when he can engage an experienced designer for practically the same fee.47

The costume designer was paid by the sketch and could negotiate according to reputation and skill for both fee and credit billing in programme and advertising. The sketch for each star or featured player commanded a minimum of fifty dollars. Each supporting player brought twenty-five. A "finding" fee was still fifty dollars for each featured or star costume, but the selection for supporting player dropped to twenty dollars minimum. For chorus costumes the first charge was twenty-five with each repeat, or fitting fee, at ten dollars apiece. The recent trend to avoidance of duplication even in "repeat" costumes insured the designer a full fee for each ensemble sketch. The designer was paid through the union, in three separate parts on three specified dates, minus the union's one per cent.48

The rule that required all workers in design to be members of the union did protect the supposedly better qualified artist but in turn has made the reinforcement and reinvigoration of new blood necessary to any art or craft almost impossible.

The wage level has, as a matter of fact, killed any real apprenticeship system. Under current union

47Ibid.

48Volland, op. cit., p. 19.
rules there is no such thing as an "apprentice
designer." If a designer wants to take a young
man into his studio, the apprentice must be a
member of the union and rules guarantee him an
hourly wage that almost no designer can afford
to pay a young helper.\textsuperscript{49}

Another complaint the designer had against his organi-
zation was that the special union set up of a majority of
scene painters with a minority of scenic artists, designers
of sets and costumes, in protecting its own, tended in its
zeal to strengthen the inferior craftsman at the expense of
weakening the superior master journeyman. "The fact is that
scene designers should have broken away from the United
Scenic Artists years ago and formed a guild of their own."\textsuperscript{50}

Meilziner felt too that union working rules became so
limiting that the artist's ability to organize and carry out
his ideas in minimum time became almost as important as the
exercise of his creative talent.

Like many creative people designers are rugged
individualists, so involved in their own work that
they make very poor "organization men." In spite
of the economic protection it has brought, the union
has never really understood the designer, who is
interested primarily in the creative elements of a
production.\textsuperscript{51}

Aside from page one billing in the programme and
recognition of both job and specialist by the critics, the
several systems of awards that sprang up served most to
insure the place and prestige of the costume designer. In
the legitimate theatre there are four meaningful awards,

\textsuperscript{49}Mielziner, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{51}\textit{Ibid.}
those of the Village Voice known as Obies (O.B.'s--Off Broadway), The American Theatre Wing's Antoinette Perry Award, or Tony. Billboard's Donaldson award, established in memory of W. H. Donaldson founder of The Billboard Magazine, and Variety's Poll of Critics.52

The series of awards were phenomena of the latter years of the period. But away ahead of its time, in 1937, Stage Magazine featured a single page of costume awards:

STAGE AWARDS THE PALM [in] FASHION

to Kitty Carlisle for the high buttoned shoes in White Horse Inn.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

to the W P A galleries for Doctor Faustus costumes.
to Vincente Minnelli for the maroon and white patterns in the opening scene of The Show Is On.
to Jo Mielziner for the 1800 dresses in The Wingless Victory.
to William Weaver for the colorful period costumes in Frederika.
and to Hélène Pons for her execution of practically all the year's theatre costumes.53

The Donaldson Award was the earliest establishing both set and costume awards in the 1943-1944 season. Motley won the first annual with contemporary costumes for Lovers and Friends. Next season was Lucinda Ballard's with I Remember Mama. Motley won again the third year for Pygmalion. The 1946-1947 season saw Cecil Beaton carry away both set and


53Feature page, Stage Magazine (June, 1937), p. 50.
costume with Lady Windermere's Fan. In 1947-1948 David Ffolkes' costumes for Man and Superman were winners. Next year The Madwoman of Chaillot won a posthumous award for Christian Bérard. The final season of this period brought the laurels to As You Like It by English designer James Bailey, the same year he failed his union examination. The Donaldson awards were discontinued in 1955.

In 1947 Lucinda Ballard was honored with the first Tony in costume for the stage clothes in her several current plays: Happy Birthday, Another Part of the Forest, Street Scene, John Loves Mary, and The Chocolate Soldier. Mary Percy Schenck's costumes for The Heiress won the next year. Kiss Me Kate from Lemuel Ayers took the 1949 prize. In 1950 Aline Bernstein received the Tony in costume for Regina.

Variety started its scene recognition in 1942 but waited until 1956 to make costume awards. The Obies started in 1955-1956, beyond the years of this study.

Many of the designers were winners more than once. For example Miles White achieved the Donaldson Award for costume three times: in 1945 for Bloomer Girl, for High Button Shoes in 1948, and in 1950, for Gentlemen prefer Blondes. In that same year for Bless You All Miles White won the costume Tony.

At the beginning of the period the designer was at a peak of public notice. "Not for some years has the scene designer been featured so much in the headlines of theatre
news as he is today."54 He was gaining a reputation as an unusual artist:

He must be practical as well as inspired, efficient and effective, a business man and an aesthete. Probably none of the other arts demands that its craftsman be so all-round equal to any emergency.55

So, too, the scenic designer, set and costume, was becoming known in the theatre world as a leader.

The influence of these designers quickly extended far beyond their own work in stage decor and left its creative work on the acting, producing and even the playwriting of those intensive years.56

Although the greater part of the designers were men, costume design was an art at which women seemed to excel. The following quotation was written by the actress Peggy Ashcroft as part of the foreword to Motley's book. Miss Ashcroft had known the Motleys since she played in their first play in 1931, John Gielgud's production of Romeo and Juliet.

Theatre design is, to my mind, an art quite on its own. . . . But I think theatre designers have to master more technical difficulties. They have to appreciate exactly what are the play's necessities, the producer's [the director's] conception, the actors' problems; they are, in fact, servants of theatre as are the actors. Perhaps for this reason the interpretative and essentially partner-like quality necessary for this work is often found at its highest in women. Certainly in our generation Motley [consisting of three women—Sophie

55Squire, "Designers Impedimenta," p. 804.
Devine, Margaret Harris and Elizabeth Montgomery], Tanya Moiseiwitch and Jocelyn Herbert are unsurpassed.)

This interpretative quality in costume and scene designing has been noticed by producers as well as actors:

What the director has stumblingly tried to say, the designer says in clear and eloquent terms.
The designer is much like the professional letter writer who composes beautiful missives for the unpoetic swain.58

The above passage was written in praise of the designer's job by a man who had the perspicacity to retain the greatest of modern designers, Robert Edmond Jones.

In the decade and a half between 1934 and 1950, the modern designer's job split of necessity into fractional wholes, one of which, that of the costume design specialist, evolved as a profession in itself, with its own practices and privileges, recognitions and rewards.

57Motley, op. cit., p. 5.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRITICS

A man must serve his time to every trade
Save censure--critics are all ready made.
Byron

This chapter will inquire briefly into the background of journalistic criticism at the beginning of this period of study, and will proffer short curricula vitae of the journalists. It will consider the relative quantity of costume criticism, the nature of its increase throughout the period, and the gradual improvement of its placement within the review.

The critics? The New York critics are tired men. They're well intentioned and for the most part, intelligent, but they're damn weary. They see too many plays.1

In this way Lee Shubert reflected onto the critics the general disillusion in theatre in the early thirties by setting them up as the butt of blame for depression woes. The critics might have sung with W. S. Gilbert: a critic's "lot is not a happy one." For from all sides the critic was assailed as the major cause of plays failing before they had

a chance to catch on naturally:

... Authors, actors and producers of this town are smoldering with vexation and accusing the critics of standing between plays and their natural audiences.²

Dramatic criticism, which has had a history of not ever being free from attack, in 1934 was in special disfavour, and not without some cause. The position of the drama critics was strong. The public accepted the journalist's day-after-opening review of a play as a pronunciamento. The review's effect was that of an immediate judgment upon the worth of a play. Usually a show did not succeed without some favorable comment from the critics. The production needed a measure of approval to survive the first two crucial weeks at the box office. Sometimes a producer might be able to keep a show running despite adverse criticism but usually the tenor of first night reviews decided the fate of a play.

A set of "rave" notices from the drama critics spells at least some measure of success for a new play and usually brings the producer of a play, immediate capacity business. Weak notices from the drama critics almost invariably means death to a play, or, at best, a lame engagement and financial losses. An outright "panning" will cause a show to close almost immediately.³

That the same situation, perhaps even intensified, existed at the end of the period of this study was stated in 1952 by critic Walter Kerr:


³Shepard Traube, So You Want To Go Into The Theatre? (Boston, 1936), p. 211.
It is generally recognized that, at the present time, the New York theatre is at the mercy of eight or nine daily newspaper reviewers. The play which gets nine good notices the day after it has opened is almost certain to be a smash hit. The new play which gets nine bad ones is almost certain to close the following Saturday night. When, as often happens, there is a split decision in the press, a favorable balance—say, five to three—means that the show has a fair chance of earning back its investment, especially if it is bulwarked by the presence of stars. When a mixed vote goes against the play, its chances are nearly as negligible as if all the reviews had been bad. In New York today the verdict is returned within twenty-four hours, and it is virtually absolute.4

Not since the Restoration days of Pops' Corner had the audience so hung on the critics' word and judgment for reception or rejection of a play. Throughout the period dramatic critics were a powerful force on Broadway. Their published opinion was almost theatrical law. The inception and growth of this anomalous situation was not of long standing; it dated back but a few years. In the late teens and the twenties, along with the rise of the designer and the sudden appearance of American playwriting, a new profession of journalistic criticism had developed. Before that time there were few recognized newspaper reviewers, and those there were lacked standing and prestige.5

Arthur Hopkins tells the story of the enthusiastic review of one of his early productions, A Successful Calamity,


starring William Gillette. Hopkins was flattered enough by the criticisms to announce in the Sunday papers his gratitude and that of his cast. Gillette, one of the old time stars, the aristocracy of the theatre, who never thanked a dramatic critic, never spoke to one, coldly admonished Hopkins for his action. Hopkins who was taken aback at first, later explained:

To them critics were outsiders, authorities who had served no apprenticeship in a field that is not easily appraised, men who could only enter the front door. They had no vise for the stage door, the only sesame to a position of informed theatre appraisal.6

The change from the firm attitude of the old actor-managers who completely ignored the presence of newspaper reviewing, to the state of enslavement in which the producer of the thirties and forties found himself was a vicissitude that demanded explanation. The actual practice of dramatic reviewing had become no different. Vital or venomous, newspaper criticism had always existed, but only in that present day had audiences taken it as the barometer for attending a play. It was the audiences that had changed. They had given up their prerogative of choosing a play to see. They had reneged on the right to decide. They preferred letting the critic make up their minds for them. Audiences from time remembered had militantly defended their privilege of patronizing or not. The cause of this unprecedented caution and caginess was not immediately apparent but Walter Kerr

proposed a possible explanation. He believes that the audience is in the nature of a burnt child, so often subjected to ill-fated experiences in the theatre that it had now relinquished its privilege of choice for the comparative security of assurance. Audiences have put the critic into the position of paid taster, to protect them from the poison of a deadly evening in the theatre.

Critic William Hawkins affirmed the idea:

It becomes quite clear that the bulk of the Critic's readers are interested in a simple, blanket opinion which makes clear the subject of the show and its overall quality... But the drama critic acquired this great influence without having any wish for it. Because of this undesired power, the critic became the point of much bitter complaint and felt constrained in the honest evaluation of his job. Some critics believed that if the burden of proof were to be lifted from their backs and audiences were to make up their own minds theatre could be healthier. Criticism then could be "perfectly free to say what it pleased, without bearing the whole responsibility for the financial state of the theatre and all its members." Other critics, more in the journalistic tradition, considered that:

The Critic is not necessarily an expert on the theatre. It is not always advisable for him to be an expert... What the newspaper intends to

7Kerr, op. cit., p. 26 ff.
provide through its critic is a fair shopping service which will help its readers to decide where, or whether, to pay the often outlandish prices asked for theatrical attractions.\textsuperscript{11}

John Mason Brown sought to enjoin the two viewpoints by showing that commingled in the daily critic's job are three aspects. The first is that of the reporter, whose "function is news not judgment." His watchwords are "accuracy, speed, interest," and his goal is "to reach by information." Any tactful opinion he might express is in the nature of a guess at the general reaction. The second position, that of the reviewer, is a "compromise between the news and editorial departments." He is a "reporter with opinions" and the fact that he signs his name "shows that he is speaking for himself as well as his newspaper." His business concerns that play, that night, written of in "terms of his . . . own reaction." The third aspect is that of the dramatic critic who is more interested in "the idea than the fact," or the event itself. His incentive is not in the dateline, but in the "first rate" which is his "constant standard of comparison." He is "an essayist, not a journalist." "He is fired by his own curiosity rather than by the desire to satisfy someone else's curiosity." His method is "constantly comparative, . . . to judge one play . . . against the background of its time."\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11}Hawkins, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{12}John Mason Brown, \textit{Upstage} (New York, 1940), pp. 211 ff.
In "A Defense of the Professional Reviewer" Joseph Wood Krutch has assimilated the work of these three aspects of daily criticism into a model for a journalistic review:

An ideal review contains then, at least three things, essentially distinct things, though ordinarily they are so mingled that the reader is hardly aware that they are distinct. Such a review is, first of all, a report of an item of news—such and such a play, by such and such an author, was first performed at a certain theatre with a certain cast and deals, tragically or comically or farcically, with certain situations. With this news report—this simple account—is mingled an impressionistic recreation of the work itself, complete enough to entertain and to convince a reader. Complete enough, also, to make possible the final element, namely, a judgment based on whatever genuinely critical convictions the reviewer may have relevant to the play under discussion.13

In this triune of offices expected of the daily reviewer was housed the springboard for much of the complaint leveled against him. The occupational hazards and limitations of the one role were lambasted for the discrepancies of the others. Neither the play's production personnel nor readers, possibly future audience members, could expect all the attributed of any one office nor even some of each of the combined three every time a play was reviewed.

Certainly one of the limitations confronting all three aspects of journalistic reviewing was that of time. John Mason Brown epitomized: "Drama critics must be . . . prompt in their discoveries."14 The nature of news is its


immediacy, and nebulous impressions of play, players, and production had to be compressed into a readable style within the hour of final curtain. Many of the assailants of dramatic critics blamed the hurried judgment that had to be made for its apparent faultiness. William Hawkins answered that particular attack from his own experience:

There are certain mechanical difficulties under which a newspaper critic works. . . . The first one, . . . is that of time. The artist so often believes that with more time the Critic would have come to a different conclusion. The honest answer is that he almost never would. He might write better, be harsher or more gentle as the spirit moved him, express himself more vividly, or be clearer about his reasons. . . . For years I have gone back to see shows. . . . Often the degree of my feelings has altered, but I have never reversed my conclusive mind.

Brooks Atkinson proposed in 1942, as a double antidote to the complaint of harsh criticism and to the occupational drawback of riotous first nighters, "to 'premiere' shows at matinees." This measure was intended to eliminate annoying interruption by those who had dined too well and also to afford the critics a few additional hours to compose their reviews. Managers dropped the proposal but did ameliorate matters somewhat by advancing opening night curtain to eight o'clock. Another of the hazards inherent in a job that

15 "Three in One; Or, The Ideal Critic," Theatre Arts Monthly, XXI (June, 1937), 479.


17 Abel Green & Joe Laurie, Jr., Show Biz from Vaude to Video (New York, 1951), p. 349.
merges the pursuits of three is that often the function of one may not be mutually compatible with the functions of the others. The reviewer's opinion is inadvertently influenced by audience reaction; the reporter records the facts of the situation including the audience's reaction as he sees it. But the dramatic critic's job precludes any evaluation of what that audience might have seen and felt. In the face of this disparity of roles the daily drama critic is met with the task of climbing a chimney wall. A third occupational difficulty is the seeming necessity of being thoroughly learned in all avenues of theatre.

He is faced with the sorry dilemma of speaking not only intelligently, but also authoritatively as a playwright, an actor, a scenic artist, a director, an electrician, a costume mistress, and a member of the audience.

About this point there is a good bit of disagreement. Shepard Traube, the producer and director, established what a critic need not know:

A fine critic of painting does not have to be a great painter himself to understand and praise great painting or to attack bad painting.

The same analogy holds true in the theatre. ... The ability to write a play or to act does not necessarily go hand in hand with the ability to criticize.

Brooks Atkinson, the dean of journalistic critics, took a definite stand on the side of reporting when he said, "... newspaper reviewing is not a form of the higher

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18Brown, Upstage, p. 224.
19Ibid., p. 211.  
20Traube, op. cit., p. 216.
criticism; it is a practical form of news reporting."\textsuperscript{21}

Indeed, the bulk of critics on the New York daily papers began as working newsmen. Shepard Traube, in advising those who want to go into the theatre, said:

\textit{... The best way to become a drama critic is to start as a newspaperman. ... You may start as a reporter ... or ... as a re-write man. ... Before you can become a critic on most papers, you must first serve your apprenticeship as a newspaperman.}\textsuperscript{22}

To this bit of advice Paul Denis adds a qualifying note:

\textit{On New York ... papers, the drama critic has enormous prestige. ... Drama critics on big-city papers must have college educations. ... Most New York drama critics have lectured or written books and magazine articles.}\textsuperscript{23}

Despite the acknowledged disparity of the newspaper critic's functions, and the disagreement as to the qualifications for his job, theatre people realized the immediate importance of the critic's position and attempted to structure an ideal critic, or ideal criticism. John Mason Brown, reputedly the most erudite of the critics,\textsuperscript{24} summed up one of his discourses on reviewing with this definition:

\textquote{Criticism is not so much concerned with the final bestowal of a diadem as with a rational explanation or recreation of the qualities justifying or distinguishing its possible recipient.}\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{21}Atkinson, \textit{loc. cit.} \textsuperscript{22}Traube, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 208.
\textsuperscript{23}Paul Denis, \textit{Your Career in Show Business} (New York, 1948), pp. 157, 158.
\textsuperscript{24}Morehouse, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 298.
\textsuperscript{25}Brown, \textit{Broadway in Review}, p. 110.
Walter Kerr, a teacher who became playwright and eventually a reviewer, expressed the same idea in this way: "The true identity of the critic is that of analyst and interpreter . . . to state objectively what has happened subjectively."26

In a discussion on the relationship between a playwright's development and the way his productions are reviewed, Ralph L. Collins, by indirection defined certain reviewing standards:

... One would like to know how consistent the critics have been, how often they have recognized and encouraged talent, whether they have helped to improve standards of taste, and, if so, how. . . .27

Many people expected much of the critic. But none expected more than Arthur Hopkins, the producer who carried over the ideas and the ideals of the New Stagecraft as a blueprint for the newer criticism. In the following passage Hopkins has gathered the accusatory terms leveled at critics and affirmed their use to his own lofty purpose.

... The dramatic critic is the sentry.

By loving the theatre I mean I would have him jealous of it, ready always to resent and resist its misuse, utterly without sympathy or regard for all that he felt false and penny-snaring in it, cruel to those who have no regard for it, callous to all the cheap devices that have cluttered up a potentially fine institution, castigating producers who impose spurious wares, slaying directors and actors who obviously bring no thought or honesty

26Kerr, op. cit., p. 22.

to their work, discontented with all that is unreal, deteriorating and emaciating.28

John Mason Brown states the same idea in succinct and simple fashion: "The splendor of the critic's dreams for the theatre's possible perfection is not only the best thing about him but his major excuse for being."29

So, at the beginning of the period, in 1934, critics found no favour in the world of the theatre. The reviewers were blamed for the ills of the time. The theatre remembered the great critics of the past, William Winter of the New York Tribune and James Huneker of the New York Sun, and found those of the present dark in their shadow. William Winter had left also a body of non-journalistic criticism and "the most important influence on American dramatic criticism came from the work of James Gibbons Huneker."30 In contrast to the murky thoughts that Broadway held about the critics many of the men writing in 1934 belonged to the generation of younger critics bred in the "new atmosphere of aesthetic judgment"31 created by the venerated Huneker.

Brooks Atkinson had been graduated from Harvard in 1917. After a year of teaching English at Dartmouth College he entered journalism and became in 1926 dramatic critic of


29Brown, Broadway in Review, p. 18.

30Hughes, op. cit., p. 408.

31Ibid.
the New York Times. Atkinson, whose "qualities as a philosopher and poet enrich his viewpoint as a critic," achieved "literary distinction" as dramatic critic for the Times throughout the 1934-1950 period. His continuum of reviewing was broken twice. During 1942-1944 Brooks Atkinson served as overseas war correspondent in China, and in Moscow in 1945-1946.

Lewis Nichols, veteran Times reviewer, "rendered valiant service" as drama critic of the New York Times during Brooks Atkinson's absence, and then "turned to the free-lance field."

John Mason Brown, of all the critics, has "a scholar's knowledge of the theatre" since he "has tried his hand at playwriting, scene designing, acting and directing," and "'knows the ropes' by actual experience." He too was graduated from Harvard, and became a college teacher of theatre as well as a journalist. Much of his criticism has been published in book form. John Mason Brown served as associate editor and drama critic for Theatre Arts Monthly for four years before he became in 1929 reviewer for the New York Post. He held this position until 1941 when he changed to the New

32"Three in One; Or, The Ideal Critic," p. 480.


34Morehouse, op. cit., pp. 296, 297.

35"Three in One; Or, The Ideal Critic," p. 481.
York World-Telegram. After a year John Mason Brown, "whose exhilarating lectures on the drama have given him a following from the Harlem Ship Canal to Puget Sound" moved to the dramatic editorship of the Saturday Review of Literature and out of the realm of this study.

Robert Burns Mantle, who "was a steadying critic, fair-minded and unsensational, and was always aware of his responsibility to his readers," is well known for his annual volumes of Best Plays, initiated in 1919. Burns Mantle was graduated from normal college but in 1898 began his work as a critic in Denver, continued it in Chicago and New York, until in 1922 he became drama critic for the Daily News, which position he filled until his retirement from reviewing in 1943.

John Chapman, "self-styled drama reporter," who had done sporadic reviewing previously on the Daily News, succeeded Burns Mantle. He attended the University of Colorado and Columbia University, and started his journalistic

36 Morehouse, op. cit., p. 249.


38 Morehouse, op. cit., p. 296.


40 Morehouse, op. cit., p. 298.
career in Denver before coming east to the Daily News. The outspoken, crusading Chapman had been a reporter since 1920 on the News, its drama editor since 1929, and has held the position of drama critic from 1943 to the present. In 1947 John Chapman carried on as editor of the Burns Mantle Best Plays series.41

The critic on the New York Herald Tribune at the beginning of the period was the very influential Percy Hammond who had come from Chicago in 1921 to write reviews noted for freshness of language and style of diction.42 After his death in 1935 dramatic criticism on the Herald Tribune was taken over by Richard Watts, Jr., who applied his easy, forceful, and clear reporting43 to the position until 1941. Howard Barnes, who had been the Herald Tribune's drama editor since 1928, continued reviewing until 1945. At that time Arthur Folwell, called the dean of New York dramatic editors when on the old New York Tribune, carried on until William Zinsser took over in 1950.44

Richard Watts, Jr., attended Columbia University and had served as reporter and film critic for the New York

41 Hughes, op. cit., p. 415; Rigdon, op. cit., p. 350; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 138.

42 Hughes, op. cit., p. 415; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 403.

43 Morehouse, op. cit., p. 298.

44 Hughes, op. cit., p. 415; Rigdon, op. cit., p. 904; and Sobel, op. cit., pp. 354, 838.
Herald Tribune before he succeeded Percy Hammond as drama critic in 1936. Watts left the drama desk of the Herald Tribune in 1941 to spend two years with the Office of War Information. In 1946, Richard Watts, Jr., brought his "consumming devotion" back to theatre as drama critic for the New York Post where he has exercised his "extraordinarily perceptive judgments" ever since. Between the reign of John Mason Brown and Richard Watts, Jr., for five years the critic's desk of the New York Post was staffed until her death in 1946 by Wilella Waldorf, earlier a second string reviewer.

Robert Garland, who had been educated privately in Maryland and abroad, was a playwright and "resolute champion of theatre." He had been a dramatic editor and a critic in Baltimore before he joined the New York World-Telegram as drama reviewer in 1928. Garland held that position until he became public relations counsel for the New York Federal Theatre Project in 1936. For a year, 1936-1937, Douglas Gilbert reviewed for the World-Telegram. Then Sidney Whipple, a staff correspondent for the United Press, held the position until John Mason Brown's year at it in 1941-

45 Morehouse, op. cit., p. 298.

46 Hughes, op. cit., p. 415; Rigdon, op. cit., p. 904; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 838.

47 Hughes, op. cit., p. 415; Morehouse, op. cit., p. 298; Moses and Brown, op. cit., p. 380; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 366.

48 Sobel, op. cit., p. 844.
1942.⁴⁹ Next, Burton Rascoe, playwright, wrote for the paper until William W. Hawkins, Jr., a second stringer, became dramatic critic in 1946. Hawkins stayed with the World-Telegram until its merger in 1949-1950 with the New York Sun, where he remained as critic for the union.

The reviewer on the New York Sun in 1934 was Richard Lockridge, murder mystery story writer and novelist as well as dramatic critic. He attended Missouri University and George Washington University, and had been a reporter in Kansas and rewrite man on the New York Sun before he became dramatic critic in 1928.⁵⁰ When Lockridge resigned from the Sun in 1942, Ward Morehouse continued the assignment until amalgamation with the World-Telegram. Morehouse, who began his career in Georgia and in 1926 became a roving reporter and theatrical columnist on the Sun, is a recognized theatre historian and biographer as well as theatre critic.⁵¹

For the first two years of this study the New York Journal and the New York American were separate papers. The critic on the American was Gilbert Gabriel, "alive to ideas and extremely responsive to all the sensuous elements of a

⁴⁹The New York World-Telegram wanted a name writer and "reportedly offered John Mason Brown $25,000 a year to become its drama critic." Denis, op. cit., p. 158.

⁵⁰Hughes, op. cit., p. 451; Moses and Brown, op. cit., p. 384; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 494.

⁵¹Hughes, op. cit., p. 451; Rigdon, op. cit., p. 693; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 553.
production."52 Gabriel, an alumnus of Williams College, was an author and a former reporter and drama critic on the New York Sun. He was known for his "sharp judgments and vivid phrasing" and as a writer whose prose frequently achieved "a sheer brilliance."53 When the Journal and the American merged in 1936, the Journal reviewer, "the brilliant" John Anderson remained as critic for the newly formed New York Journal-American. Anderson, a graduate of the University of Virginia, had joined the staff of the New York Evening Post in 1918, had become its reviewer in 1924, and drama critic of the Journal in 1928. John Anderson, the author of two books on the history of the American theatre, was known as an "extraordinarily sharp and outspoken commentator on the state of the drama."54 At Anderson's death in 1943 the drama critic's column for the Journal-American was filled by the "raciness and vitality" of reviews by Robert Garland, late of the World-Telegram and the Federal Theatre.55 James O'Connor held the post of critic for the five years from 1945 until the end of the period.

The New York Daily Mirror was started in 1924.

52 "Three in One; Or, The Ideal Critic," p. 481.

53 Morehouse, op. cit., p. 296; Moses and Brown, op. cit., p. 380; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 363.

54 Hughes, op. cit., p. 415; Morehouse, op. cit., p. 236; Moses and Brown, op. cit., p. 375; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 49.

55 Morehouse, op. cit., p. 298; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 366.
Robert Coleman founded its drama department and maintained it with equal "alertnes: and enthusiasm" until the paper's demise nearly forty years later. Robert Coleman, educated at the University of Georgia and at Columbia University, opened his journalistic career on the *Morning Telegraph*, where he wrote play reviews, originated the Broadway news type of column, and began his vociferated interest in the tributary theatre. Robert Coleman was known for sincere reviews free of pretension and affectation.56 During the early period of this study reviewing stints on the *Mirror* were taken from time to time by others of Coleman's staff: Walter Winchell, who later relinquished play reviewing for the influential profession of a syndicated columnist; Bernard Sobel, a university English professor and later show business historian, and publicist.57

Kelcey Allen, the "amiable critic of *Women's Wear,*" had joined the editorial staff of the New York *Clipper* in 1893 when he was eighteen. In 1914 "the kindly critic" Allen was appointed drama reviewer for *Women's Wear Daily*, which place he held until, in 1947–1948, Thomas R. Dash, associate editor, became play critic. Kelcey Allen, "raconteur and prophet," was admired along Broadway as "one

56 Hughes, *op. cit.*, pp. 412, 413; and Rigdon, *op. cit.*, p. 364.

of the theatre's first wits.\textsuperscript{58}

Throughout the whole period of this study Arthur Pollock faithfully covered the play openings for the Brooklyn \textit{Daily Eagle} until the last season, 1949-1950, when he reviewed for the \textit{Daily Compass}. George Currie, the Sunday editor who infrequently acted as pinch hitter for Pollack, wrote reviews for the \textit{Eagle} the last year.

\textit{Variety} sent a medley of staff reviewers to cover the drama's first nights. Each of the columns was signed by a coded four-letter by-line. The late Jack Pulaski, editor and critic, who reviewed regularly for \textit{Variety} from 1934 until his death in 1949, is identified as \textit{Ibee} (born Isme Beringer Pulaski).\textsuperscript{59} The next longest coverage of play criticism was made by Hobe Morrison, coded as \textit{Hobe}, from 1936-1943 and then from 1947 through 1950. Morrison had started as a reporter in 1930 on the Philadelphia \textit{Record}, then became drama editor in 1934. He joined the New York city staff of \textit{Variety} in 1937 to cover theatre and radio. From 1944 until 1947 Hobe Morrison was connected with the radio department of the advertising agency of Young and Rubicam.\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Kauf}, or Wolfe Kaufman, served as drama critic from 1937-1937. Nat Kahn, as \textit{Kahn}, and Arthur Bronson, or \textit{Bron}, signed many reviews

\textsuperscript{58}Green and Laurie, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 349; Morehouse, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 225; and Sobel, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 43, 663.

\textsuperscript{59}Rigdon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 1074.

\textsuperscript{60}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 697.
from 1944 through 1950. A dozen or more other staff members reviewed for Variety from time to time during the period. The by-line Abel, which appeared at the foot of play criticism two or three times a year throughout the period, belongs to Abel Green, present editor of Variety. A lyric writer for popular songs and author of books about show business, Abel Green, who attended New York University, has been editor of Variety since 1933.61

To the drama critic's post on the short-lived (1940-1948) New York evening paper PM Louis Kronenberger, author, critic, and later university professor of drama, brought his "lively sense of the theatre and a literary background that was frightening in scope."62 A Doctor of Letters from the University of Cincinnati, Louis Kronenberger had been a publisher's and a periodicals editor before he began to apply his ability to assay "the contents of a play . . . presenting . . . its merit or its insufficiency . . . in sharp and stimulating prose" to drama criticism. Kronenberger had begun to review plays for Time magazine in 1938, and continued to do so through the lifetime of PM.63

Although not of immediate New York City origin three other papers offered regular dramatic reviewing of interest

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61 Rigdon, op. cit., p. 499; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 824.
63 Ibid., p. 298; Rigdon, op. cit., p. 602; and Sobel, op. cit., p. 473.
to Broadway. Edgar Price wrote the dramatic criticism for the *Brooklyn Citizen* and Rowland Field for the *Newark Evening News*. John Beaufort, spelled occasionally by E. C. Sherburne, reviewed Broadway productions for *The Christian Science Monitor*, published in Boston but read nationally.

George Freedley, theatre historian and librarian, and dramatic critic on the *Morning Telegraph*, was known as "one of the most alert and best informed of our critics."64 Graduated from the University of Richmond and with a Master of Fine Arts degree from Yale Drama School, Freedley had had wide experience in theatre before becoming drama critic for the *Morning Telegraph* in 1940. From 1928 until 1931 he was actor and stage manager for the Theatre Guild. He began to organize the Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library in 1931 and was appointed its Curator in 1938. During the years he wrote daily reviews for the *Morning Telegraph*, George Freedley continued as Curator of the Theatre Collection and interested himself in other theatre activities. From its reactivation in 1946 he was "one of the leading spirits in ANTA,"65 on its board of directors and serving as chairman of the governing committee of ANTA's Experimental Theatre. With Sam Jaffe in 1944 Freedley founded and co-directed Equity Library Theatre.66 He remained as reviewer for the *Telegraph* until, in 1947, he

64 Hughes, *op. cit.*, p. 482.
became that paper's drama feature writer, a post George Freedley held until his recent death, in addition to his library duties and his other widespread theatre activities.\textsuperscript{67} Leo Mishkin, the \textit{Morning Telegraph}'s motion picture editor, filled in on the daily reviewing until, in 1949, Whitney Bolton returned to the \textit{Morning Telegraph} as drama critic.

Whitney Bolton, columnist and radio commentator, had attended the University of Virginia before he served as a drama reporter on the New York \textit{Herald Tribune} from 1924-1928. From 1928 until 1938 he wrote dramatic criticism for the \textit{Morning Telegraph}. After a hiatus of eleven years during which he was employed as publicist and assistant producer in the films, Whitney Bolton returned to the \textit{Morning Telegraph} as drama critic.\textsuperscript{68}

The New York drama critics, maligned and admired, feared and respected, were a medley of men with a motley of talents. Out of that mixture the shape of American theatre was formed, as one of their number, Ward Morehouse, pointed out:

\begin{quote}
The men who hold the daily-reviewing jobs in the New York field . . . vary in writing ability and in keenness of critical judgment, and they are all occasionally intemperate in their praise as in their abuse, but over the course of a season the plays that these men have liked are generally the plays that are worth seeing.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{67}Hughes, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.3461, 472; Rigdon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 465; and Sobel, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 358.

\textsuperscript{68}Rigdon, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 307.

\textsuperscript{69}Morehouse, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 297.
In 1934 costume criticism was poor and infrequent. Mrs. Paterek found that costume review was generally neglected during the twenties and early thirties. Critics confined their notice for the most part to musicals or to those flagrantly visual productions known as costume pieces. The nature of criticism was bound by visual splendor or the vast size of the costume bill.

In a discussion of a critic's techniques of reviewing written in 1930, John Mason Brown sketched the structure of the dramatic review. The absence of costume consideration altogether from the resume, although settings were touched upon, clearly indicated costume's unimportance.

His [the critic's] usual method is to begin with a sentence that expresses his own feelings in the color of its adjectives, even while it states the facts in its who, when, where, and what. This is followed with a detailed plot summary. . . . Then comes a paragraph on the acting, and perhaps, a slight sentence on the direction and the setting, and, if the reviewer has something of Pepys in him, a final bit of news which says who was there, and what someone behind him said during the intermission.

Even when the visual aspects of the production were observed, costume or setting, the comment's position in the review was routinely placed in the last sentence or paragraph. Since the hierarchy of newsworthiness in journalistic


writing starts at the top of the column, the least important news, and that most likely to be eliminated for lack of space, is graded down to the bottom. In such a system the relative insignificance of the costume review caused it to lead a risky life.

An analysis and charting of the incidence of costume review among the bulk of reviews in this study disclosed certain reviewing trends. At the beginning of the period in 1934 costume was reviewed only infrequently, usually upon the occasion of a big musical or a classic costume play. During the first three years of the period, as a direct result of the depression, the total number of plays produced in New York fell sharply. Rising costs and increased risk in production, kept the trend descending through the whole period, with but a short sally upward during two mid-war years. In the second and third year of the period's depression slump, costume reviewing held to a small rise. Then, with the resurgence of the theatre in the late thirties, in 1937-1938, the incidence of costume reviewing rose precipitously and in spite of the steady decrease in total productions held that height through 1939-1940. After a comparative lapse during the early war years, in 1942-1943, costume reviewing soared again to the peak year of 1945-1946, the year of the musicals. With only a bit of a drop in 1946-1947, the frequency of costume reviewing, in contrast to the continuing descent in total productions, lifted steadily to the end of the period in 1950.
Of the sixteen newspapers consulted over the period from 1934 to 1950, it was possible to make complete costume review records for ten. Those ten papers were the New York Times, the Herald Tribune, the World-Telegram, the Sun, the New York Post, the Daily News, the Daily Mirror, the New York American and the New York Evening Journal in 1936 amalgamated into the New York Journal-American, the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, and Variety. For two papers, Women's Wear Daily and the Morning Telegraph, there was a coverage of eleven and ten consecutive years, respectively. For another two papers, the Christian Science Monitor and the Newark Evening News, a series of nine years each was recorded in entirety. A sequence of eight years for one paper, PM, and one of seven years for another, the Brooklyn Citizen, made up the total. The blocks of costume criticism recorded from these six newspapers covered the latter years of the period.

Tabulations in the course of this study counting frequency of costume mention in the reviews for each paper showed a definite hierarchy among the reviewers. The New York Times critics, Brooks Atkinson and Lewis Nichols, led the field in number of costume reviews. This calculation does not include the totals of George Freedley, of the Morning Telegraph. During Freedley's eight years with the Telegraph the frequency of his costume reviewing rapidly accelerated. The number of costume reviews written by George Freedley in those eight years exceeded the amounts totaled for sixteen years for each of the other critics, save that
of the Times which surpassed Freedley's by only four. Tying for second place after the Times in number of costume mentions were the Mirror, with critic Robert Coleman, and the triple manning of the Journal-American, John Anderson, Robert Garland, and James O'Connor. A duet of Variety, with its many reviewers, and the News, represented by Burns Mantle and John Chapman, contended for third largest amount of costume criticism. (Variety's yearly record of costume reviewing doubled itself in the last two years of the period above the signature of Hobe.) Of the remaining papers that reviewed for the full sixteen years, the critics of the Post, the World-Telegram, and the Herald Tribune clustered together in the next place, with the Sun only a short distance behind. The Eagle limped in last. All of the reviewers, including those of the shorter papers, mentioned costume in their reviews much more frequently toward the last few years and at the end of the period. A numerical increase in costume criticism was certainly seen.

Generally, the critic's estimation of the relative worth of scenic design, including costume, and his knowledge-ability of how to evaluate it, remained low well into the period of this study. Howard Bay complained about critical inadequacy in reviewing sets and costumes in Theatre Arts:

No living soul writes about scenic design for musicals except the daily drama reporters who, as often as not, touch on the scenic investiture only in the last paragraph with: "sumptuous," "colorful," "resplendent," or "eye-filling." (Future
historians should be acquainted with the curious local usage of the phrase "eye-filling" as an intended compliment.)

Even toward the end of the period when both the amount and the quality of scene and costume criticism had notably improved, some theatre minds were still unsatisfied:

... Drama, music, acting and dancing are regularly reviewed and given the attention they deserve. The design, however, is usually dismissed with some casual remark.

The casual remarks applied to costume criticism were often of the meaningless variety such as "eye-filling," or baselessly overexpressive terms, like "sumptuous" or "re-splendent," or in many cases ineffectual, as if the reviewer felt constrained to say something about costume, but was not quite sure what, or how to evaluate it. Costumes for the well-received, multi-designed revue, Life Begins at 8:40 (1934) were dismissed with "... and the clothes are downright first rate." The musical Say When (1934) "... is also aided by most of Clark Robinson's settings, by Charles LeMaire's costumes." The Brooklyn Eagle has nothing better to say about Raoul Pène du Bois' costumes in Billy Rose's spectacular musical Jumbo (1935) than "... and the clothes

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73 Dr. George Amberg, "Design for Theatre," Theatre Arts, XXXII (Spring, 1948), 40.

74 Robert Garland, World-Telegram, August 28, 1934.

75 John Mason Brown, New York Post, November 9, 1934.
... are ... all comely. ..."76 Of The Old Maid, Pulitzer Prize play of 1934-1935, the Journal records, hardly in keeping with the play's calibre, that "it simply sits there with its pretty clothes on."77 Desperately trying to find something to say about This Our House (1935) which lasted but two performances, critic Richard Lockridge hit upon this inanity: "... The costumes are much prettier than usually worn in murder plays."78 Such lamely phrased criticisms are found throughout the period but are proportionately more noticeable in the earlier part.

Notable also about costume criticism early in the period was that the designer was seldom identified. Even so name-conscious a reporter as Walter Winchell in reviewing New Faces of 1936 fails to mention Stewart Chaney, the designer: "The costumes and stage designs are agreeable."79

Earlier that season Brooks Atkinson in praising the "animated costume designs" of Parnell (1935) recognized that the stage clothing had been designed but did not recognize the designer, Stewart Chaney.80

78 Richard Lockridge, New York Sun, December 11, 1935.
A type of costume criticism that is characteristic of the early part of the period is the actor-centered observation. The old idea of costume as being part of the actor's kit bag and relating to him directly, both financially and as part of his equipment, still prevailed. The wider application of costume, as a component element contributing to the unity of the production, relating to the play itself, that the New Stagecraft extolled, had not yet been assimilated. At the beginning of the period, actor-centered comment was the predominant kind of costume criticism.

The point of such criticism might be the costume's ability to flatter the actress, as in Percy Hammond's comment on Ethel Barrymore in *L'Aiglon* (1934): "... looking very beautiful in the becoming millinery of her role." Here costume criticism was still attached to the actress although costumes and settings were created by the unmentioned Aline Bernstein, a designer of long-standing repute.

The intent of actor-centered criticism might also be to emphasize the actress' ability to wear clothes. Brooks Atkinson stated as much in the review for *At Home Abroad* (1935). He said: "Miss [Ethel] Waters ... can also wear costumes. Mr. Minnelli has taken full advantage of that ... dressing her in gold bands and a star-struck gown of blue." Since he could hardly overlook the fact that

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Vincente Minnelli designed sets and costumes as well as staged the show, the reviewer mentioned the designer, yet costume criticism was still centered in the actress.

In the *Times* review of *Ode to Liberty* (1934) although Brooks Atkinson made an implied recognition of the unsuitability of the costume to the play, he couched it in terms of the actress' impressive appearance in the clothes: "... And Miss [Ina] Claire's gowns and furs made stunning nonsense of her inquiry into the Communist faith." 83

Another old idea, that of an actor's worth residing in the fashionability of his wardrobe, was reflected in Jack Pulaski's terse comment on *Say When* (1934): "... sports clothes earlier in show quite up to date." 84

Even when criticism seemed like straight-forward costume appraisal, the phrasing of the review often indicated an actor-centered viewpoint. For the musical *Anything Goes* (1934) Joe Bigelow in *Variety*, praising "costuming [as] first rate both for principals and girls," 85 related clothing directly to the actors. The use of the word dressed in the "handsomely set, beautifully dressed" comedy *Cross Ruff* (1935) implied an actor-centered angle on costume.

The next most prevalent kind of costume criticism was

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84 Ibee, *Variety*, November 14, 1934.
85 Bige, *Variety*, November 28, 1934.
that focusing on expense. The amount of money spent on costumes was usually taken as a positive evaluation of their merit. Percy Hammond states the idea succinctly in his laudatory review for *George White's Scandals* (1935): "... dress as costly as Mr. White's capacious purse could buy."87

In a reverse fashion the apparent lack of expense in preparing costumes might be used as a negative criticism of the play as a whole. Jack Pulaski in reviewing *Parade* (1935) said the "show has just one dress suit, that being on the guy who introduced her [Eve Arden, a featured player]."88 This criticism is still actor-centered, implying either that the producer had hired cheaply actors who did not own dress suits, or else that he had not spent enough on the production to dress the actors properly.

Amount of money spent was used also as an indirect criticism of the suitability of the costymes, as in the Post's review of *A Journey by Night* (1935): "... Poverty has in no way curtailed her [the leading actress] wardrobe."89

Sometimes early in the period a reviewer recognized casually that the costumes were stage clothing of another time and place. In the Revolutionary War drama, *A Point of Honor* (1937), Wilella Waldorf noticed that the play had "some

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nice period costumes."90 Variety evaluated the authenticity of costumes in For Valor (1935) by observing mildly that the "... German ... staff ... [was] in dress uniforms which looked prewar."91

By the later part of the thirties the reviewers commenced to be more conscious of costume. They began to associate costume design with set design, which had been recognized since the development of the new stagecraft. Reviewers started to mention costume designers by name, at first only the very well known ones, but increasingly more often as a matter of custom. Critics now praised costume in its own right, as design in itself, as an element of visual production, as an intrinsic part of the play's total effect in performance.

Brooks Atkinson of the Times was noticed as initiator of many of these costume observations. In a review for Virginia (1937) he wrote: "Irene Sharaff's costumes are joyously imaginative in design and color."92 For the same play John Anderson observed: "Irene Sharaff has cloaked it all in costumes that are distinguished in design as they are beautiful in color and right in taste."93

Brooks Atkinson praised the costumes as a visual

90 Wilella Waldorf, New York Post, February 12, 1937.
91Ibee, Variety, November 27, 1935.
contribution to the play in *As You Like It* (1937): "The costumes by Lucinda Ballard and Scott Wilson have the lively impudence of a mask and are bold in color scheme. Visually, it is an interesting, sometimes very beautiful, production."94

In a review for *The Sea Gull* (1938), designed by Robert Edmond Jones, Brooks Atkinson related the costumes' effect to the meaning of the play as a whole: "... and costumes that capture the somber mood of this ode to man's loneliness and indifference." Nearly every reviewer mentioned the designer of this show by name, a tribute both to his costumes and to his renown.95

Not only was the designer often identified by name now but sometimes even by reputation. Brooks Atkinson in the review for the musical *I'd Rather Be Right* (1937) comments that "Irene Sharaff has done the costumes with her usual vivacity."96

By the season of 1938-1939 it had become the reviewing fashion to notice the costumes and sometimes the designer. Certainly for a costume play, a classic, or a period piece, more than mere mention of the costumes was de rigueur. In the face of a production like *Hamlet* (1938), designed by the newly important David Ffolkes, a theatre news reporter might

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be hard pressed trying to say something knowledgeable. Variety's reviewer managed the following: "His costumes also ingeniously combine decorative beauty with workmanlike competence."^97 Because this was a representative review in a usual situation, it may be worthwhile putting it under the microscope, as an illumination on the reviewer's viewpoint and apparent qualifications.

"His costumes also ingeniously combine decorative beauty with workmanlike competence." Surely designing ingenuity comes higher priced than managing to combine both beauty and whatever is meant by "workmanlike competence." The competence might be either the designer's or the actor's in wearing the clothes. If the reviewer meant that the actors can work well in these clothes the review makes sense though badly phrased. Because the first qualification for a sharp Variety reporter is that he write with clarity that explanation is expendable. If "workmanlike" is meant for the designer it becomes redundant since designing decoratively and beautifully surely insures competence. No, the incompatibility within the criticism is not to be explained by mechanics of writing but by the content itself. The conclusion reached is that the reviewer was attempting to appear to say something informed about costume, and failing. If the reviewer pushed such an attempt beyond clarity he must have felt an inadequacy in his costume information, and

^Hobe, Variety, October 26, 1938.
sensed in the environment a need to be knowledgeable about costume design.

Certainly by the season of 1938-1939 all the reviewers were conscious of costume design, and were attempting to evaluate both costume and its creator. The designer had been recognized for his work and by his reputation. Then early in 1939 appeared the first review praising the designer as an artist on his own, big enough to carry a show. In a review for the highly-praised *The Hot Mikado* (1939) Hobe Morrison, the same reporter who had so much trouble appearing informed about *Hamlet* six months earlier, wrote: "But the real glory of the occasion belongs to . . . Nat Karson for his inspired and inspiring costumes and sets. . . ."98

Shortly afterward in a review for *My Heart's in the Highlands* (1939) John Anderson first commends costume as a director's tool:

> The Group's production is superbly done. It meets the play on its own level, and enhances its theatrical values enormously, not only in the amusing scene designs by Herbert Andrews but in Robert Lewis' direction, which achieves the startling effect now and then of making all the performers resemble Mr. Lewis, and capturing in gesture an accent which Mr. Andrews gets, in one instance, in dressing the boy and his father exactly alike.99

As the costume designer's prestige increased, his ability to achieve as a star performer emerged. Beyond

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carrying a play, as the review for *The Hot Mikado* suggested, he could also dominate it. Brooks Atkinson made first mention of a play as a vehicle for the designer. "'Liliom' is a designer's holiday. . . . Nat Karson has dressed it in costumes that admirably suit it."^100

Then the critic noticed that the designer's job can be overdone; he can be carried away on a designer's field day. Brooks Atkinson criticized Lucinda Ballard on *The Three Sisters* (1939) for overdoing, for failing to forward the theatrical purpose in her designs. "But the costumes, extremely beautiful in themselves, throw the play out of focus by their cosmopolitan splendor."^101

The analysis this study made of journalistic costume reviews indicated that, although the quality of costume criticism had started out poorly at the beginning of the period in 1934, by the end of the thirties reviewers were becoming more and more aware of the costume designer, of his job, and of costume's place in the production of a play, and criticizing accordingly.

In the season of 1940-1941 a new reviewer, George Freedley, began to write dramatic criticism for the *Morning Telegraph*. Although immediately the number of his costume reviews surpassed all but those of Brooks Atkinson, an analysis of Freedley's criticisms showed that Freedley for

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^101 Ibid., October 16, 1939.
the first year paid much more critical attention to the sets. He wrote analytical, thoughtful evaluations of setting as a production element. However, starting in his second year as critic, 1941-1942, George Freedley initiated some new practices in costume design review.

First, and most importantly, a study of all his reviews showed that Freedley always used the designer's name. No other reviewer always mentioned the designer by name; some did frequently, some never did. A usage began early was the association, whenever possible, of costumes with sets. A first year criticism of Retreat to Pleasure (1940) said: "Paul duPont's costumes harmonize gracefully with Mr. Oenslager's backgrounds, and make an attractive picture."102

Another practice George Freedley started soon was actively working against dismissal of costume review in one word or in a single phrase. The analysis of Freedley's reviews contraindicated that his approach to criticism was a routine one for the sake of getting along with it. If Freedley chose to talk about costume he discussed it as something of importance in the production as a whole, relating costume to setting, and to the meaning of the play. About the musical fantasy Cabin in the Sky (1940) he wrote: "The scenery and costumes by Boris Aronson are colorful, expertly designed and add a great deal to the pleasure of the

102 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, December 19, 1940.
evening."\textsuperscript{103} Into the design review of \textit{Suzanna and the Elders} (1940) Freedley incorporated an analysis of the play's shortcomings:

He [the director] was certainly aided in the production by the costumes and setting of Stewart Chaney (almost dependable designer) but after all he too was misled by the lack of central idea in the play and its performance.\textsuperscript{104}

Another innovation this study found George Freedley bringing to costume reviewing was considered negative criticism. Heretofore instances of unapproving costume review had been infrequent and for the most part had consisted of single-word dismissals like "dowdy"\textsuperscript{105} or a short phrase such as "... [the actress] lives down the regrettable costume she wears..."\textsuperscript{106} The dearth of negative reviews may have been due to general neglect of costume consideration and specific critical ignoring of inadequate costume. Freedley made a practice of analyzing and accounting for poor as well as for good costume. In the review for \textit{As You Like It} (1941) he took the designer to task for costuming Rosalind "unbecomingly" and sought cause for the total lack of good design:

Whether it was his idea or the director's, I have no way of knowing, but Mr. Ayers' costumes had little meaning. There was no unity of style or period. The

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{103}Ibid., October 27, 1940.
  \item \textsuperscript{104}Ibid., October 31, 1940.
  \item \textsuperscript{105}Variety, review of "But Not For Love," December 4, 1934.
  \item \textsuperscript{106}John Mason Brown, review of "Abide With Me," New York Post, November 22, 1935.
\end{itemize}
mixture was hopelessly confused. So much so that while one admired an individual design, one was forced to decry the toute ensemble.107

A study of all the reviews showed that, at the beginning of the period as it had been earlier, mention of either setting or costume was customarily dealt with in the last paragraph. During 1940-1941, his first year with the Morning Telegraph, George Freedley discussed costume, usually with setting, in the lead paragraph of four reviews, and twice in the second paragraphs. Gradually over his eight-year period of reviewing Freedley's treatment of costume (often with setting) in the lead paragraph increased to the peak year of 1947-1948. Concommittantly the number of costume criticisms in the last paragraph by actual count decreased to zero in 1946-1947, with one end-paragraph mention in each of the last two years. Calculation indicated that as Freedley moved placement of costume criticism from the routine end of the review to a more contemplative treatment farther up the column, other reviewers followed suit. By the end of the period, positioning of costume criticism was found throughout the review. Costume mention was neither routinely at the end nor necessarily featured at the beginning but handled, according to the judgment and evaluation of the critic, as another production element within the body of the review.

To what extent George Freedley's example of reviewing

107George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, October 22, 1941.
influenced the general picture of costume criticism is hardly resolvable. Certainly, after Brooks Atkinson's initial increase in kind and quantity of costume consideration, George Freedley carried on the effort. Freedley's innovations were more frequent notice of costume design as a production element, consistent mention of the designer by name, attempt at a more knowledgeable consideration of costume design, and analytical negative criticism. To a greater or lesser degree his fellow dramatic journalists incorporated Freedley's practices into their costume criticism. Whether newspaper critics in general would have developed these usages or not without Freedley's continuing example is indeterminable. Certainly his reviewing activities at the least gave them a push and at the most was instrumental in their acceptance.

The critic's new recognition of the costume designer, identification of him by name, and awareness of him as a creative artist occurred simultaneously with the emergence of the costume design specialist. The costume designer was acknowledged as an entity when his name was credited with the job in the billing before the cast. Which aspect of the fact came first, the individual himself doing the work, his programme crediting, or his identification by critics is difficult to determine. The truth of the matter might better be served by ascribing the phenomenon to no one of them but by acknowledging a mutually spiraling effect among the three.
CHAPTER V

KINDS OF CRITICISM

To many people dramatic criticism must seem like an attempt to tattoo soap bubbles. John Mason Brown

The preceding chapter made some consideration of the relative quantity of costume criticism, of its increase throughout the years of the period, and of the gradual improvement in its positioning within the body of the review. The present chapter intends to explore the qualities of criticism in the period. Although the mere mention of costume was indicative in itself and considered of importance in the previous chapter, for purposes of this chapter costume criticism was taken to mean any discussion of costume that was by nature appraising or evaluative.

Out of the welter of costume criticism a myriad of reviewing attitudes presented themselves. At first the quality of the thousands of units of review criticism seemed overwhelming in its variety. Each individual review held a viewpoint all its own. But certain similarities began to appear and they grouped and regrouped themselves into still larger sections. Upon complete organization, it was found
that the individual units could be catalogued among six general kinds of costume criticism, each with several subheadings.

Inherent in all the costume criticisms by very fact of inclusion in a play review was the assumption that here were discussed stage clothes pertinent to a definite production. The six groupings of kinds of criticism extended that implied association with a production to include each a different qualifying viewpoint in reviewing.

By far the greatest amount of specific criticisms considered costume as existing for its own sake, its beauty, colour, design, its humour, its freshness. The next largest grouping of criticism mentioned costume in its immediate relation to the production: to the actor or actress, to the author, producer, and director, to the play itself, to the show's general success. Balancing this group was a section of criticism that, while negative to costume, intended its rebuke ultimately for other production factors than dress. Another section of the reviews spoke of costume in relation to the audience, its entertainment, its visual pleasure. A block of criticism treated of the designer's part in the costuming, his kind of work, his artistic attributes, his rewards. And last, some few reviews centered around the reviewer himself, revealing, inadvertently or otherwise, his personal involvement.

The six groups with all their subsections will be discussed using examples of criticism illustrative of each.
I. COSTUME FOR ITS OWN SAKE

In the first category, that of criticism considering costume for its own sake, colour was the characteristic most often commented upon. The next most important section was of beauty and ugliness. The subsection of humour considered wit and satire as well. The contemplation of design in costume provoked knowledgeable criticism from the reviewers. Last, the critics noticed freshness and simplicity in costume, as well as the power of costumes to be dramatic in themselves.

Beauty

Observation of beauty ranged from Arthur Pollock's simple statement about Carmen Jones: "Raoul Pene du Bois' costumes are beautiful,"¹ through John Chapman's evaluation of the costuming in Antony and Cleopatra: "It is a beautiful thing to see . . .,"² to George Freedley's consideration of Cyrano de Bergerac:

Lemuel Ayers has designed a superbly beautiful production. . . . His decor and costumes are almost incredibly beautiful; it is rich realization of all that is fine and imaginative.³

Early in the century Gordon Craig had critically

³George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, October 10, 1946.
allied the contemplation of beauty with its obverse, ugliness, as follows:

But Beauty is so vast a thing and contains nearly all other things—contains even ugliness, which sometimes ceases to be what is held as ugliness, and contains harsh things...4

The critics did not always discriminate ugliness as one of Gordon Craig's "harsh things." The reviewer for a period comedy, Years Ago, felt that costume's ugliness handicapped the cast: "John Boyt has designed some horrendously ugly clothes in which the actresses manage to survive."5 How costumes for Show Boat affected the actresses' silhouettes for the worse was analyzed by George Freedley:

Lucinda Ballard's costumes are authentic in appearance, though the individual ones seem even uglier than the period demanded. She was particularly unsuccessful in dressing Julie (Carol Bruce) whom she made completely angular, and Magnolia (Jan Clayton) who seemed an attenuated window dummy in her dresses.6

Robert Garland, in My Dear Public, emphasized the contrast of ugliness in the costume with worth in the performance: "In what is probably the ugliest costume ever worn by anybody on the stage . . ., [Rose Brown sings well]."7

Another aspect to the discussion of beauty versus

5George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, December 5, 1946.
6Ibid., January 8, 1946.
ugliness was brought up by scenic designer Ralph Alswang in an interview in *Theatre Arts* complaining of incompetent criticism of scenery in which visual environment he included costume:

People do not bother to look for the motivation behind a set; they tend to accept its terms as they never do plot or dialogue or even costumes, though costumes often suffer from the comment "Yes, but they should have been more attractive." The usual remark is that a set is not beautiful or harmonious enough. They look for beauty but beauty doesn't have a damn thing to do with it. A handsome set may well be a bad one. . . . If they're responding to the play it's better than if they were distracted by something they considered independently beautiful.8

Upon occasion the critics felt that, although the costumes might be ugly, an absence of beauty correctly expressed the meaning of the play, and accordingly reviewed the costumes positively. George Freedley praised the unbeautiful designs of *The Next Half Hour* for such a reason: "Edward Gilbert's setting and Mary Percy Schenck's costumes were as magnificently ugly as the play demanded."9

Whether an unlovely effect was intentional or not was sometimes doubtful. Two of the critics gave the benefit of the doubt to costumes for the musical extravaganza *Around the World in Eighty Days*. William Hawkins decided that the designs were suitable for the needs of the show:

The costumes Alvin Colt has designed are sometimes

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awkward to the point of being ugly, and the colors have a way of disliking each other's company. But the general effect reminds one of old posters of a grotesquely dressed period.\textsuperscript{10}

George Freedley dealt out his bare acceptance with the left hand: "Alvin Colt's costumes were garish and unamusing. When cariacaturing an ugly period, great taste and imaginative [are] essential."\textsuperscript{11}

For another play, Dear Judas, Freedley's criticism expressed an adverse impression of the costumes, and by taking a stand on the uncertainty of the designer's intention he withheld his usual benefit of the doubt: "Mary Percy Schenck's costumes and masks are horribly ugly and depressing. Whether this effect was intended was not clear."\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Colour}

In the section on costume for its own sake, the attribute of colour outranked in frequency of mention all the others. Brightness, variety, brilliance, patterns, and effects of colour were all touched upon. Using designing for Shakespeare as a springboard, David Ffolkes discoursed from a designer's viewpoint upon the use of colour in all costume production:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10}William Hawkins, \textit{World-Telegram}, June 1, 1946.
  \item \textsuperscript{11}George Freedley, \textit{Morning Telegraph}, June 3, 1946.
  \item \textsuperscript{12}\textit{Tbid.}, October 7, 1947.
\end{itemize}
There are two factors of almost equal importance that govern any designer engaged upon the happy task of designing costumes for Shakespearean productions. The first (which also applies to any production) is, to use an expression of the late Bernard Shaw, "the magic of color." . . .

By the "magic of color" the moods of the play are expressed in visual terms; it is also the means whereby an artist expresses himself and stamps his work with his own individuality. He can, by a mere stroke of his brush, express a sudden mood of exuberance in a blaze of color that dazzles and sings, or with an equal stroke imply sorrow in considered monotones.13

Reviews on colour ran from a simple statement that ". . . costumes are . . . colorful"14 through recognition in The Burning Deck that "the actors look nice . . . wearing clothes with plenty of color in them,"15 to the observation that "the stage pictures [of the revue Chauve Souris] were one bouquet of color after another. . . ."16

Late in the period the reviewers not only commended the presence of colour but objected to its absence. Jack Kaufman complained of the musical comedy costumes for Toplitzky of Notre Dame that they were "not outstanding because of some rather drab coloring."17

conversely praised the clothing for the comedy *Clutterbuck*: "... And costumes by Alvin Colt are festive, a welcome contrast to some of the drab backgrounds and habiliments that have afflicted our eyes in this semester."\(^{18}\)

The panorama of colour recognition roughly climbed an ascendant scale of sophistication. From the level of merely noticing colour in costumes the reviewers stepped up to describing the colours. From there an awareness of colour patterns or design ensued, at times with comment on the effect. The escalation of colour appreciation continued until dissatisfaction with various colour usages was expressed, representing on the part of the critic a knowledgeably negative criticism.

As a step beyond the simple observation of the presence of colour, Lewis Nichols described the costumes for *Mexican Hayride* as "reds and greens and browns."\(^{19}\) In *Follow the Girls* Burton Rascoe pictured colour as a cause of audience approbation: "One costume number— that of bridesmaids in slightly varying hues of petal pink, rose, mauve and lavender— brought an outburst of applause."\(^{20}\) One particular scene in the 1943 *Ziegfeld Follies* so struck the reviewers that two of them were inspired to report the colours. Robert Garland explained the relationship of colour

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and theme:

It will take a careful reference to coffee in a song called "Come Up and Have a Cup of Coffee" as a starter and work the stage up to a brilliant study in browns in costumes so artfully designed by Miles White that it is easy to forget what the number is about in the visual pleasure of merely looking at it.  

John Beaufort was impressed enough by colour in that same Follies to describe two other scenes as well as the coffee one:

. . . A variety of handsome ensembles in the costumes and scenic effects. An arrangement of pink and green in one of the numbers dazzled the eye, and another, all in gleaming and quilted chocolate browns soothed it. Yellow and gray formed another agreeable harmony.

Taking the next step in colour discrimination the reviewer recognized patterns of colour. The most elementary of colour schemes is that of the spectrum, and Burton Rascoe's criticism of The Firebrand of Florence praised its use: "The costumes by Raoul Pène du Bois are sumptuous orchestrations of the primary colors, red and yellow, with all the chromatic variations." A Herald Tribune reviewer, commenting upon the variety of colours in Are You With It?, set the imagination agog by reporting that "... some of the costumes actually run the gamut of the spectrum from red hat down to violet shoes." Another reviewer, William Hawkins,

22John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, April 2, 1943.
24Otis L. Guernsey, Jr., Herald Tribune, November 12, 1945.
pointed out that he had not been consciously aware of the colour patterns of Bathsheba until the assemblage of actors for their bows:

The play has been exquisitely costumed and set by Stewart Chaney, with a warm richness of color that does not obviously reveal its luxury until the final line up of all the characters for the curtain call.25

With recognition of colour pattern came also a realization of intent or meaning conveyed by colour design. Reviewing Eastward in Eden, a play about Emily Dickinson, George Freedley said: "Donald Oenslager has designed two settings and many costumes of rich and somber beauty, reserving the purity of white for Beatrice Straight as Emily."26 The brilliance of the visual beauty and magnificence of colour in the designs for the McClintic-Cornell production of Antony and Cleopatra was praised by the critics, but one, John Beaufort, explicated the use of colour patterns for carrying out the designer's meaning:

What might seem almost a technical aside—though it is more than that when the stage is full of contending partisans—is John Boyt's scheme of costumes: red for Antony's men, blue for Caesar's and green for Pompey's. Like the program at a football game, it helps a much occupied spectator identify the players.27

Reviewers not only perceived success and lack of it

26George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, November 20, 1947.
in colour handling but located the areas of insufficiency. Specific techniques of using colour in costume design were both hailed and disallowed by the critics. In his review of Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston George Freedley praised brightness of colour: "... Walter Florell chose the brightest colors from his palette to decorate the ladies and even to freshen up the gentlemen," but in costumes for Count Me In the same reviewer decried brightness: "Irene Sharaff has chosen only the reddest and least becoming reds (and blues) from her palette." Both Lewis Nichols ("... the costumes, which resemble nothing so much as the rainbow this side of the pot of gold . . .") and Jack Pulaski ("... a varied color scheme carried out strikingly in the costuming by Raoul Pene du Bois . . .") welcomed the variety of colours used in Carmen Jones; but Arthur Pollock disapproved of a variety of costume colours for The Show Is On as being too "strikingly colored—even to the point of glaring at times." The technique of using humour in colour design was a specific noted by the critics both in the observance and in the breach. Of Porgy and Bess George Freedley remarked

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28 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, September 8, 1945.
29 Ibid., October 10, 1942.
31 Ibid., Variety, December 8, 1943.
that "Paul duPont's choice of color for the costumes was most amusing. . . ." 33 Burton Rascoe deplored that "the costumes by Walter Florell," for Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston, "are garish and absurd without being funny." 34

The critics admired harmoniously blended colour schemes as they shrank from those combinations that were noisily bizarre. Gilbert Gabriel expressed his approval of the "subtley [sic] vivid coloring" of the costumes for The Show Is On, explaining that ". . . throughout the show there is this sense of a patrician taste. . . ." 35 A number of the reviewers of Barefoot Boy with Cheek expressed the outrage afforded their sensibilities by the less than subtle costume colours. George Freedley offered the designer shelter behind the script's inadequacies: "Alvin Colt tried to make up for it [a poor script] by throwing a series of paint buckets at the costumes which turned out to be tasteless, neither sufficiently satiric nor realistic to mean anything." 36 Although the New York German language daily was not one of the papers systematically culled for costume criticism, this one review of the same show was pertinent

33 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, January 24, 1942.
34 Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, September 7, 1945.
36 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, April 5, 1947.
and amusing enough to warrant inclusion:

Bezüglich der Kostüme (Alvin Colt) erhebt sich die Frage: Müssten die Studenten soche übertrieben buntfARBigen Jacken tragen, die mehr an das Milieu eines Zirkus als an das eines College erinnern? 37

That colour impressed the critics to such an extent throughout the period deserves more than a cursory observation. Two possible contributive factors are offered. In the first place, to an untrained eye or even from the professional view, colour may be the most quickly recognized and the most easily understood of costume design characteristics. Lucy Barton, educator in costume design and writer of costume texts, suggested as much in an article:

Indeed, color is the costumer's most rewarding medium. . . . Now, there is no doubt that the beginning "appreciator" responds first to color, for almost anyone takes that in. . . . Sometimes the designer is justified in using it purely for the delectation of the audience. Audiences respond to it. 38

Second, the critic's easy recognition and willing acceptance of colour as a costume design element might be taken as a reflection of recovery from a three-quarter century of Victorian and Edwardian drabness in dress. The urban historian Lewis Mumford told of the change in colour usage brought about by the pall of black smoke that enshrouded the age of steam power:

37 New Yorker Staats-Zeitung, April 7, 1947.

The enfeeblement of elementary taste-discrimination extended to other departments than food: color-discrimination became feeble, too: the darker tones, the soberer colors, the dingier mixtures, were preferred to pure, bright colors, and both the Pre-Raphaelites and the Impressionist painters were reviled by the bourgeoisie because their pure colors were thought 'unnatural' and 'inartistic.'\textsuperscript{39}

By the beginning of the time period of this study, a new age and the viewpoint of a new society had encouraged audiences, and in turn criticism, to respond joyfully again to a natural pleasure in colour.

Design

A third subheading under costume for its own sake was that of design. As they did with colour criticism, the reviewers held to a hierarchy of awareness of design itself in costumes. They observed design both as abstract pattern and as an exponent of idea in theatre. A minimal criticism consisted of mere appreciation of the existence of design in the costuming. In another step up criticism considered some of the components or attributes of costume design. On a more advanced level critics recognized designers' devices in projecting the play's meaning. Then criticism evolved to commenting upon the negative aspect, lack of design, or costuming that failed to convey meaning.

At the first level is Brooks Atkinson's simple statement that costumes for the tragedy \textit{Jeremiah} "are well

designed."40 Robert Garland mentioned costume's "integrity of design"41 in the Katharine Cornell production of Romeo and Juliet. John Anderson saw outstanding design in Virginia, a musical play: "Irene Sharaff has cloaked it all in costumes that are as distinguished in design as they are beautiful in color and right in taste. . . ."42

To John Beaufort the costumes of Medea presented more than flat design in abstract. He was made aware that the art of costume design exists also in the dimension of time and observed that: "Clad in Castillo's handsomely flowing costumes, the players create a pattern of dramatic movement."43

In his review for The Voice of the Turtle John Chapman noticed that purpose in the costume design was carried out by the designer in "picking pretty things for Miss Sullavan to wear-- . . . smart without being smarty, expert without being tricky."44

In an analysis of the costumes of Billion Dollar Baby John Chapman extended his explanation of design effects to the self-conscious degree of saying:

The costumes by Irene Sharaff are superb. They look like caricatures of the flapper dress of the

Tasteless Twenties, but I have a sickening feeling that they aren't caricatures at all, but very accurate examples of what the well-clad female wore in the days when I was young and had no judgment whatever.45

For the highly praised musical comedy Bloomer Girl two critics parlayed the interaction of theme and costume design into a play on words. George Freedley remarked that "Miles White has taken the hoop-skirts of the period and of the plot and combined them with the bloomers of the title to make both humor and beauty."46 And Burton Rascoe rejoiced that "on the credit side, too, are the costumes by Miles White who spread himself in the hoopskirt numbers."47

In his review for Brigadoon William Hawkins reached a more advanced state of criticism when he pointed out the designer's artistry in using authentic costume elements most effectively for both pure design and the play's atmosphere:

The costumes of David Ffolkes continue the show's balance between native consistency and liberal design. He uses plaids frequently without letting the pattern become monotonous.48

A yet higher level of criticism was reached when the reviewer not only noticed the design but analyzed it as a device to forward the play's meaning. In the comedy Happy Birthday the leading lady, played by Helen Hayes, saw the

46George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, October 7, 1944.
47Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, October 6, 1944.
world rosier and rosier the more she imbibed. Ward Morehouse recognized the costume designer's device to help director and actress convey this idea and pointed out the "... imaginative contrasts in the Lucinda Ballard costumes --costumes, when seen are similar to those of the first act, with their color heightened and their lines sharpened." He went on to say that "plain costumes become dazzling" under the influence of the main character's drinking.

William Hawkins commented upon the designer's use of proportion in design as a director's tool: "Raoul Pène du Bois has made clever costumes that diminish the figures of the dancers for this [a children's dancing class scene]."

The design of Irene Sharaff's costuming for Maurice Evans' streamlined, so-called G.I., version of Hamlet gained the praise of most reviewers. Many recognized that costume was devised to pull the production out of the past yet not subject it to the harsh light of contemporary reality. George Freedley as usual came neatly to the point: "Irene Sharaff has composed a series of costumes which get away from the traditional doublet and hose, yet suggest no period, merely a picture effect which is not unattractive." Rowland Field described the means of achieving the design:

The new "Hamlet" has costumes by Irene Sharaff

49Ward Morehouse, World-Telegram, November 1, 1946.
50William Hawkins, World-Telegram, December 17, 1948.
51George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, December 15, 1945.
which are unusual but not disturbingly tricky. The officers of the guard seem to be wearing U. S. Army greatcoats and overseas caps and Hamlet goes around in double-breasted lounge suits. . . .

This costuming is obviously unusual, but it is most pleasant and not the least intrusive. It is not modern dress, but near enough to it to remove "Hamlet" from the Elizabethan period and make it a comfortable sort of no period at all.52

The critical ability to recognize poor design was less frequently manifest. Critics from time to time were aware of something wrong with design but failed to analyze beyond comments upon confusion of meaning or diffusion of style. Many of the reviewers of Walter Florell's costumes for Mr. Strauss Goes to Boston expressed disappointment but none had a critical explanation beyond Wilella Waldorf's "All [sets and costumes] a trifle confusing."53 Brooks Atkinson criticized unity of meaning as well as style when he suggested that the costumes in St. Helena "lack a vital point of view."54 In reviews of the 1946 revival of Gilbert Seldes' adaptation of Lysistrata one critic cryptically found the actors "attractively costumed in robes designed to harmonize with Aristophanes' basic idea,"55 while another judged that "Rose Bogdanoff's costumes are riotously colorful,

52Rowland Field, Newark Evening News, December 14, 1945.
54Brooks Atkinson, Times, October 7, 1945.
55Ibid., October 18, 1946.
but are of no help to the unity of the production."\textsuperscript{56} In one instance a critic tried to explain lack of singleness in a design. John Mason Brown took issue with the chief exponent of visual unity in the New Movement, Robert Edmond Jones, on the wholeness of his design for \textit{Othello}, and attempted an analysis:

Mr. Jones' costumes are beautifully executed. \ldots But his production lacks a definite unity in its visual style. It changes in manner and method as it goes along.\textsuperscript{57}

\textbf{Humour}

In addition to beauty and colour under the heading of costume for its own sake critics were cognizant of humour in costume design. George Freedley was especially appreciative of the comic touch in costume. He found the costumes for \textit{Carib Song} "amusing,"\textsuperscript{58} \textit{The Beggars' Opera}, "outrageously funny,"\textsuperscript{59} and \textit{The Would-Be Gentleman} "in high good humour."\textsuperscript{60} Witty and satiric were other adjectives of approval used by critics. Gilbert Gabriel admired the Theatre Guild production of \textit{The Taming of the Shrew} because "it wears costumes as full of comicality as grace."\textsuperscript{61} But

\textsuperscript{56}Robert Coleman, \textit{Daily Mirror}, October 18, 1946.
\textsuperscript{58}George Freedley, \textit{Morning Telegraph}, September 29, 1945.
\textsuperscript{59}\textit{Ibid.}, December 28, 1946.
\textsuperscript{60}\textit{Ibid.}, January 11, 1946.
\textsuperscript{61}Gilbert Gabriel, \textit{New York American}, October 1, 1935.
another show was censured because the designer did not manage to maintain the equilibrium of grace and humour. Richard Lockridge complained of the revue *On Your Toes* that "... a good many of the costumes, while amusing enough as burlesques, are a trifle hard to look at."62

Critics remained aware of the close connection between the actress and what she was able to do with the costume provided. The *Daily News* praised "Vera Hurst wearing some preposterously amusing costume. ..."63 Brooks Atkinson divided credit between Brenda Forbes' acting and "Her extraordinary costumes ... [which] all contrive to make one of the best comic performances of the season."64 The *Herald Tribune* critic held a similar view: "... And costume departments have helped out with ... suitably out-of-date dresses worn with innocent gayety by Miss Forbes."65 Even a couturier like Adrian bent his serious designing to the special comic technique of Billie Burke. George Freedley wrote that "Adrian has designed a series of sumptuous and ridiculous gowns for Miss Burke which satisfied a smart first night crowd."66 John Chapman also commented to the same effect: "... And Hollywood's Adrian has made some

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beautiful and smartly funny clothes for Miss Burke."  

In another dimension of criticism reviewers pointed out the elements of design that made the costumes comic. The *World-Telegram* review analyzed *One Touch of Venus* in this way:

The gowns worn by Miss Martin are by Mainbocher, but real genius was shown by Paul duPont and Kermit Love in the costumes they designed for Miss Laurence. One of them which has a front that has no relation to the back is one of the funniest things I ever saw in my life; it got more and heartier laughs than all the lines by the Messrs. Nash and Perelman put together.  

Nearly all the reviewers recognized and commended Millia Davenport's costumes in the Mercury Theatre's *Shoemaker's Holiday*, for their comic cleverness as well as for their contribution to the play's intent. John Mason Brown wrote: "In achieving his desired result, Mr. Welles [the director] is helped by Millia Davenport's unprudish costumes."  

Brooks Atkinson said: "For costumes there are some free-hand sketches in broad comedy investiture by Millia Davenport."  

Burns Mantle considered that in these designs there appeared "... such costuming vulgarities as probably made the 'prentice clowns the delight of seventeenth century pit rowdies." But Arthur Pollock felt that "Millia

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Davenport . . . has done the costumes . . . with reticence, molding some of them for laughter."72

Among the critics wit was recognized less often than were other forms of humour, as there well may have been less wit used in designing. In one of two reviews that mentioned wit as an attribute of costume there is no certainty that the word wit stood for the idea of humour rather than for keenness of intellect. Gilbert Gabriel reported that throughout the designs for The Show is On there was apparent "a fine wit transmitted to paintbrush and pencil."73 In the second instance a comparison with other reviews of the play offered no indication that the reviewer might not have been indulging in a play upon words, rather than describing humour, when he called the costumes "pretty and witty."74

Critics were alert to satire in costume design, as well as to expressions of bitter humour through caricature and burlesque.

Robert Garland noticed the gentle gibe in The Day Before Spring: "Miles White's costumes are often colorful and satiric."75 Although satire hardly seems an attribute of costume that is possible to achieve by mistake or


73 Gilbert Gabriel, New York American, December 26, 1936.

74 Arthur Pollock, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, November 18, 1939.

accident, George Freedley's review of *Polonaise* expressed doubt of the designer's purpose: "Mary Grant's costumes were amusing and slyly satiric, though I was not sure whether that was intentional or not." Freedley was much surer about costumes for the comedy *Topaze*: "... And Audre's costumes are brilliantly satirical and are worthy of a better revival than this one." In his review of *Billion Dollar Baby* Howard Barnes pointed out the mockery inherent in the very designs: "Incidently, the Irene Sharaff costumes themselves constitute a brilliant burlesque of fashion designing." But his colleague of the *Christian Science Monitor* differed in opinion, or may have missed the point altogether: "Even the costumes are satirical. This is carrying things pretty far as some of the clothes were on the ugly side to start with."

**Freshness and Simplicity**

Two attributes of costume under the heading of costume for its own sake critics noticed to a lesser degree were simplicity and freshness. At various times throughout the period there appeared fads or fancies in critical

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76George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, October 9, 1945.
77Ibid., December 30, 1947.
discrimination of costume. A new attitude in the reviewing of costume would be broached by a critic, then caught up and taken on by other reviewers. The idea of simplicity in costuming was such a fashion and had its rise and fall in the seasons of 1946-1947 and 1947-1948. George Freedley may have been the initiator as well as the perpetrator of the approbation of "simplicity" in costume criticism, as he was of "amusing." Lucinda Ballard's costumes for the musical Street Scene he called "realistically simple." For The Survivors Freedley used the criterion of simplicity to make a judgment comparing the acting and directing of The Survivors with the costume design: "Rose Bogdanoff has composed a series of simple costumes which were nearer the play's content than the direction or acting." Brooks Atkinson extended his observation of simplicity in the visual design of Joan of Lorraine to comment on philosophy of production as a whole: "The improvised form endows the play with the idealized magic that dramas generally acquire when they use scenery and costumes sparingly."

Attesting to the worth of Brooks Atkinson's philosophy was a tradition handed down among costumers:

I am indebted to the great Madame Freisinger for teaching me the value of simplicity in the theatre. I learned from her not to torture materials into

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80 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, January 11, 1947.
81 Ibid., January 21, 1948.
meaningless folds, but to preserve the long flowing line, the noble sweep. "Let us keep this production noble," she would say to me.83

Freshness as a criterion for costume was of long standing. Before the emergence of the costume specialist and the new emphasis on costume design, costumes of whole productions, especially those with large choruses like musicals and operettas, were retired to the producer's warehouse or to the stacks of a costume house. Sometimes upon the producer's revival of the same show, or of one with a similar setting, the old costumes, often unrefurbished or even uncleaned from the long grime of storage, were used in the new production. Reviewers were aware of such manoeuvres and criticized accordingly. In the bad, bad reviews of the musical farce Hairpin Harmony several critics complained of second-hand sets and costumes. Robert Coleman thought: "Donald Oenslager's set and Mahieu's costumes look familiar. Could it be reincarnation . . . ?"84 Wilella Waldorf identified the set as defaulting on the current performance:

The setting looked a bit dingy and as we sat there contemplating it, in an effort to keep from seeing and hearing what was going on in front of it, the thing began to look too familiar. We're not sure but we rather think it's the Fifth Avenue mansion Mr. Oenslager designed for a turkey called "Pie in the Sky" nearly two years back.85

83Robert Edmond Jones, The Dramatic Imagination (New York, 1941), p. 34.
84Robert Coleman, Daily Mirror, October 2, 1943.
85Wilella Waldorf, New York Post, October 2, 1943.
Although no reviewer was able to pinpoint the origin of Mahieu's costumes, Arthur Pollock did, by inference, estimate their probable age: "And what clothes! A more disharmonious assortment of costumes has not been seen on a N. Y. stage since the Spanish-American War."^6

On the other hand George Freedley's review of the musical Blossom Time was negative, but he went on to comment that the "costumes are fresh-looking, within reason, though they seemed the same as the ones I saw at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in April, 1942."^7 His colleague, John Chapman, offered the same faint praise but more bluntly: "It isn't sleazy, as it could have been. The costumes are clean..."^8

As the importance of costume design increased with the evolution of the musical form, Broadway tolerated revived costuming less and less. The need for the word "fresh" meaning clean and unfaded slowed down and "fresh" began to be used in the sense of new and original in idea and design. Robert Garland mentioned both scenery and costumes for Finian's Rainbow as "fresh and effective."^9 For the revue Inside U.S.A. Brooks Atkinson found "the costumes

^6Arthur Pollock, Brooklyn Daily Eagle, October 2, 1943.

^7George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, September 6, 1943.

^8John Chapman, Daily News, September 6, 1943.

by Eleanor Goldsmith are lovely and fresh."  

**Drama**

Critics felt too that under the heading of costume for its own sake costumes could be dramatic in themselves. Hobe Morrison in *Variety*, noticed that "John Derro's costumes are," as well as being decorative, "dramatically suggestive." And Richard Watts, Jr., praised, in addition to the settings and lighting, the costumes of *Antony and Cleopatra* for being "dramatically satisfying in themselves, in addition to their pictorial excellence."  

Robert Edmond Jones believed in costumes being dramatic in themselves, that they were creations of the theatre, and that their quality was purely theatrical.

How is he dressed? (And now I am speaking as a costume-designer.) The man is in rags. Just rags. But why do we look at him with such interest? If he wore ordinary rags we wouldn't look at him twice. He is dressed, not like a real beggar, but like a painting of a beggar. No, that's not quite it. . . . There is a curious importance about this figure. . . . We are looking at something theatrical. These rags have been arranged—"composed" the painters call it—by the hand of an artist.  

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II. COSTUME RELATED TO THE AUDIENCE

Another relatively small body of criticism pertained to costume in relation to the audience. This section was subdivided into criticism speaking of visual pleasure experienced by the audience and criticism concerned with the observance of stage fashion.

Visual Pleasure

Some critical comments were dedicated to the pure pleasure or entertainment value of the costume. For Last Stop George Freedley remarked that "Rose Bodganoff's well-designed costumes add much to the pleasure of the evening." The same reviewer pointed out that the musical Beat the Band offered "stunning sets and costumes" which add to the evening's fun." In his review of Papa is All Freedley suggested that the intention of the visual production was for the audience's pleasure: "The Theatre Guild has mounted the play in good taste and high spirits and designed it for your entertainment."  

Narrowing down the idea of visual pleasure to its sensory locus, critics specified costume's delight to the eye: "... And Lucinda Ballard's costumes [for Annie Get Your Gun] are lavish and joys to the eyes." The Eagle's

94George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, September 7, 1944.  
95Ibid., October 16, 1942.  
96Ibid., January 8, 1942.  
critic asserted that in *One Touch of Venus* "The costumes make friends with the eye."\(^{98}\) From a mere delight to the eye the idea progressed to the appeal of costume as a feast for the eye. Thomas R. Dash expressed the concept thus: "Optically it [*All For Love*] is a lavish banquet as Billy Livingston has outdone himself in the gayety and color of the costumes."\(^{99}\) The metaphor of feast for the eyes resulted in the curious but critically fashionable approbation of "eye-filling." Robert Coleman praised "Billy Livingston's eye-filling costumes"\(^{100}\) in *Something For the Boys*, and the *Eagle* reviewer exalted *The Merry Widow* because "... Walter Florell's costumes are eye-filling."\(^{101}\) The critical concept of eye-filling carried its metaphor to an illogical and empathically disturbing conclusion. The Brooklyn *Citizen* innocently informed its readers that "Billy Livingston's costumes" for *Laffing Room Only* "will knock your eyes out."\(^{102}\)

**Fashion**

Critics noted what was fashionable in costume and by inference pointed out its value to the production. In the

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\(^{98}\) Arthur Pollock, Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, October 8, 1943.


\(^{100}\) Robert Coleman, *Daily Mirror*, January 8, 1943.

\(^{101}\) Robert Francis, Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*, August 7, 1943.

\(^{102}\) Edgar Price, Brooklyn *Citizen*, December 26, 1944.
chic modern romance Lovers and Friends Brooks Atkinson lauded the last-word creations of Motley, who are better known as designers of period clothes:

The settings and costumes are by Motley, and they are good, and while evening audiences may not care so much, the matinees probably will find a certain amount of envy over the dresses.  

Because One Man Show boasted gowns by Valentina and lingerie by Elizabeth Arden the Daily Mirror reviewer was constrained to remark that: "Miss Cummings wears some gowns and sheerer things that had the ladies oh-ing and ah-ing and the men gaping."  

A couturier's functioning as designer of Mrs. January and Mr. Ex. led George Freedley to relate his comment on costume to the expectations of a fashion-conscious audience: "Adrian has designed a series of sumptuous and ridiculous gowns for Miss Burke which satisfied a smart first night crowd."  

Robert Edmond Jones condemned such pandering to the audience as defection from the play's true intent. He advised:

The costume-designer should steer clear of fashionableness. That was the only fault of the admirable production of Hamlet in modern dress. It was so chic that it simpered. I remember that in the closet scene, as the Queen cried out, "O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain;"

104 Robert Coleman, Daily Mirror, February 9, 1945.  
105 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, April 3, 1944.
and her son answered,
"0, throw away the worser part of it
And live the purer with the other half,"
a voice near me whispered, "I wonder if she got that
negligé at Bendel's?" And the programme told us
that Queen Gertrude of Denmark did, indeed, get
that negligé at Bendel's. And furthermore, that
Queen Gertrude's shoes came from the firm of I.
Miller, Inc., and that her hats were furnished by
Blank and her jewels by Dash, and so on.106

But high fashion in certain plays paid off at the box
office and the practice of dressing actresses of star quality
in modern plays with the last cry in style prevailed. For
instance, barely a year after The Women opened on December 26,
1936, Margaret Pemberton recostumed the hit comedy for
$10,000 to bring 'the fashions up to date.107

An artistically more acceptable connection with
fashion was the critical suggestion that the costumes
pleased the audience enough to become fashionably sought
after. In reviewing Bloomer Girl John Chapman praised the
designs of "Miles White, whose costumes should make women
jump right into the biggest hoopskirts they can get made."108
Brooks Atkinson in his criticism of The Country Wife advised
that the "ladies look charming in sweeping costumes that the
smart shops of this town ought to imitate as soon as
possible."109

107 Kelcey Allen, Women's Wear Daily, November 9, 1937.
In spite of critical acclaim the theatrical designer's goal was not to arbitrate fashion, but to project the truth of the play as Robert Edmond Jones protested. Luďmila Vachtová expressed the similar viewpoint of Professor František Tröster of the Prague Academy of Arts in the introduction of his book on costume design:

"The theatrical costume designer is neither tailor nor fashionable arbiter elegantiae. He does not create dresses for society, beach or sport but defines the ideas of his Ophelias, Cyranos, Chimènes Don Juans. Fashion—or rather a general prevalence of taste in a given historical period—naturally affects theatrical costume; on the other hand, ... theatrical costume affects fashion. ... While under the influence of the performance of Diaghilev's Russian Ballet the one desire of ladies of fashion was that their gowns were at least a little à la Bakst or à la Benois. ... Let us recall the revolution in the headdresses, materials and fashion lines, caused in Paris by the performance of the Peking opera."

In the section on costume related to the audience, critics agreed that a part of costume's purpose was to add to the visual entertainment of the evening but disagreed as to the suitability of fashion in costume as a theatrical factor.

III. COSTUME RELATED TO OTHER PRODUCTION FACTORS

In the second large grouping of kinds of criticism, costume's relation to the production, the interdependence of

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costume and performer accounted for the bulk of comments. Critics were interested also in the director and producer's use of costume, in costume's faithfulness to the play and to the author. Costume attributes such as authenticity and mood were considered as production factors. Reviewers evaluated costume as a general aid to the show's success and compared its worth with other production elements. Costume was even criticized in regard to programme credits.

The Performer

Critics have continued to be engrossed in the combination of actress and costume. During the years of this study reviews ran from a simple observation that the actress' moods in The Moon Vine, "... become her [Haila Stoddard] as prettily as the clothes Lucinda Ballard has designed for her, ..." to extravagant praise for both designer and actress. For The Perfect Marriage George Freedley wrote: "Valentina has designed a series of gowns for Mariam Hopkins which make her look positively glamorous and obviously won feminine approval at the opening." The ministrations of a good costume designer could often enable an actress to maintain her reputation even in the face of a disastrous play. Although The Eagle Has Two Heads received poor reviews George Freedley applauded both actress and designer: "Aline

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111 Burns Mantle, Daily News, February 8, 1943.
112 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, October 28, 1944.
Bernstein's costumes are handsome and make Miss Bankhead even more beautiful than ever."\textsuperscript{113}

Upon occasion the low calibre of a play channeled criticism into high acclaim of any one deserving production element. Two reviewers of the play \textit{Slightly Scandalous} found the beauty of the star and her costumes praiseworthy in an otherwise poor show. George Freedley estimated that Janet Beecher was "Looking handsomer than ever in a series of breath-taking costumes by Adrian."\textsuperscript{114} The \textit{Sun} reviewer concurred by adding, ". . . and Adrian has designed some stunning gowns for Miss Beecher to wear."\textsuperscript{115} Although both leads were panned for poor acting in \textit{Antony and Cleopatra}, most of the reviewers praised both the costumes and Tallulah Bankhead's beauty in wearing them. \textit{Variety} said, ". . . she is electric with brilliant costuming. . . ."\textsuperscript{116} The \textit{Daily Eagle} critic felt, ". . . she is very easy to look at . . . no way lessened by the beautiful costumes designed for her by Jo Mielziner. . . ."\textsuperscript{117}

Critics recognized not only the obvious enhancement that good costuming brings to an actress but also the

\textsuperscript{113}Ibid., April 10, 1947.
\textsuperscript{114}Ibid., June 15, 1944.
\textsuperscript{115}Herrick Brown, The \textit{Sun}, June 14, 1944.
\textsuperscript{116}Land, \textit{Variety}, November 17, 1937.
\textsuperscript{117}Robert Francis, Brooklyn \textit{Daily Eagle}, November 11, 1937.
affinity of certain kinds of costume for the acting valence of a particular performer. In his review for Madame Capet Brooks Atkinson analyzed the particular ability of Eva LeGallienne to realize a sense of being from costume:

Costume parts out of a decorative period suit Miss LeGallienne's acting. They help to release her from the constriction and the monotone that often take possession of her in roles of drabness. As Marie Antoinette she wears a whole wardrobe of lovely gowns and headdresses that set off her slender beauty and grace.118

Describing the costumes in Kiss Me Kate the World-Telegram inadvertently disclosed an effect of costume beyond enhancement of the actor. At other times designers had been criticized for costumes which called attention to themselves rather than forwarded the point of the play, but William Hawkins merely reported the occurrence:

Lemuel Ayers ... ignites the stage with glowing, heady Italian colors. The costumes are happily complimentary to the players, and at least two of Kate's flamboyant gowns drew gasps from the premiere audience.119

The same reviewer, for the musical play My Romance, revealed a costumer's device for flattering the star:

The leading lady needs some dazzling gowns for entrances and spotlights, and if some of the girls' fur trimming looks like sheepskin lining, remember it only makes Miss Jeffreys look more glamorous by a contrast she does not need.120

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120 Ibid., October 20, 1948.
A cutting commentary on the use of an actress might make of costume to bolster her aging popularity came from George Jean Nathan in his review of Gayden:

Fay Bainter . . . rested her acting largely in staring wall-eyed into space to indicate puzzled meditation and in changing her dresses every now and then to indicate nothing but the determination of an actress who hasn't been around for a long time to impress an audience that she was still attractive despite the advancing years.121

Reviewers recognized that actors, too, enhance their personal appearance through proper costume. Brooks Atkinson acknowledged that while he was playing Othello Paul Robeson's "height and breadth [were] accentuated by the costumes he wears."122 Writing on Caesar and Cleopatra Robert Garland asked his readers to:

Take my word that, in the costumes, against the backgrounds of Rolf Gérard, Cedric Hardwicke is "Bernard Shaw in a toga" and Lilli Palmer is "your Cleopatra, Dollabella's Cleopatra, everybody's Cleopatra" and the sexiest Cleopatra you could wish to see.123

Costumes were also criticized for hurting the performer, of being bad for him. At times it was a question of their being unbecoming. Rowland Field found the revue Small Wonder presented "some of the most unbecoming costumes seen

on Broadway in many a year."^124 Five years earlier the same reviewer had expressed similar disapproval of the poorly received *Hairpin Harmony*: "The costumes of the principals and the musicians—there is no chorus—are quite the most garish and unbecoming regalia seen on Broadway in many a season."^125 Again, at other times, the complaint was of costumes which actually acted against the actor. George Freedley's review of *The Firebrand of Florence* suggested that: "Raoul Pène Du Bois has created a series of dazzling costumes which decorate the ensemble, but mostly make the principals look ridiculous."^126 On another occasion George Freedley observed that "Raoul Pène Du Bois has used his palette on the settings and costumes until the actors pass almost unnoticed."^127

Often a critic's discontent with costume was on the grounds that it handicapped the actor. Michel Saint-Denis, the British director, strongly adhered to the tenet of functional costuming:

A costume is first of all made to be worn by an actor. It should help the actor to act physically, without trying to impose a character upon him. Otherwise the actor is imprisoned by his costume. A designer should know what it feels like to wear a costume and to have to act in it. A

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good costume makes you feel free and carries you further into the character at the same time. 128

George Freedley assailed what he called the "handsome costumes" for Bathsheba: "Perhaps they are authentic but they don't always allow the freedom of movement the characters required, particularly the ones of King David." 129

John Beaufort subtly chastised the set and costume designer of Caesar and Cleopatra for a like difficulty: "Mr. Gérard's costumes are full of color and brilliance. The long-gowned actors' only quarrel with him should be for giving them stairs to contend with." 130

Where to lay the blame for one of the criticisms of Mae West's Catherine Was Great was harder to determine. Variety snidely punned: "As for Miss West's assortment of gowns, they are plentifully ample. Star is using stilted footwear, lending the impression she stomps rather than walked." 131

That costumes work well for the actor was a basic premise, one Lucy Barton, educator and designer, offered as a criterion for costume appreciation:

... No costume is a good costume which ceases to be functional. ... For functionalism is that quality of a stage costume which enables an actor

129George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, April 15, 1947.
131Variety, August 9, 1944.
to do what he is supposed to do and look right doing it. 132

Whether actors wore costumes well or poorly was a matter of some concern to the critics. The comment on Frederika that "Dennis King wears picturesque costumes with becoming dash . . . " 133 expressed the reviewer's pleasure and that in The Country Wife that "the actors dressed to kill in the colors and flounces and laces and satins of the 17th century are more at home in such raiment than might be expected" showed his happy surprise. 134

When the actor failed to wear costume well, as in Bright Rebel, the critics trounced him thoroughly:

There is no more sense of style in the acting than there is in the writing. The costumes are worn stiffly as costumes instead of clothes, and the whole effect is rather wryly laughable and amateur. 135

A large portion of the heavy weight of critical disapproval of the tragedy Jeremiah fell onto the shoulders of actors inadequate in handling costume:

Most of the lesser parts are acted with clear evidences of that inner uncertainty which so often infects actors when they have to wear beards. There is clearly something about a beard which takes an actor's mind off his work. 136

133Richard Watts, Jr., Herald Tribune, February 5, 1937.
Costumes were frequently appraised for their workability as worn by the actor. Brooks Atkinson recommended David Ffolkes' simple approach to a complicated historic design in Hamlet: "... And his Elizabethan costumes, unpretentiously sketched and agreeably colored, are good garments for the working actor."137

Aline Bernstein was particularly known for lovely, realistic, and actable period clothes. For Regina Brooks Atkinson mentioned "acting costumes by Aline Bernstein,"138 and the Journal-American noted that "Mrs. Bernstein's costumes have both the beauty of costumes and the look of wearable clothes."139 But, to Valentina, the theatrical couturière, Brooks Atkinson paid the famous ultimate tribute for aid to the actor—, "... And Valentina has designed costumes that act before a line is spoken."140

Actor's Trademark

Some actors, particularly the comedians who prosper on the presentation of a semi-public personality, have built that personality partially within a framework of costume props. Among such actors were Jimmy Durante, Ed Wynn, and Bobby Clark.

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138Ibid., November 1, 1949.
Of Durante in *Keep Off the Grass* Brooks Atkinson said:

Mr. Durante's comedy flourishes with change of costume... He needs costume to evoke a little variety. They have done well by him this time, presenting him in loud vaudeville garments with huge checks and swagger cuts.141

The indefinite "they," without antecedent, could refer to the producer, in this case the Shuberts, to the designer, Nat Karson, or a combination of both. Critics did not distinguish to what extent actor's art or designer's concept was accountable for costume. But a comedian like Durante who "needs costume" must have had a say in working out his own.

Ed Wynn certainly was the initiator of his own costume concepts. His show business reputation grew around his collection of costume hats. Wynn at the age of twenty-six was billed as "The Boy with the Funny Hat."142 Brooks Atkinson's review of *Hooray For What!* acclaimed that:

Ed Wynn is back, waddling through a whole costume closet of merry-andrew clothes... Ed will be back in a minute with a costume more fantastic than the last...143

And John Anderson marveled at the "... usual Wynn madhouse of overcoats and hats."144 To what extent Raoul Pène du Bois, the designer of *Hooray For What!* or the director and set designer, Vincente Minnelli, were responsible for the Wynn

141Ibid., May 24, 1940.
costumes is a matter for speculation.

The case of the comedian Bobby Clark, whose conventional costume uniform was a pair of penciled-on spectacles, is clearer. In addition to his etched eyeglasses Bobby Clark made antic hay out of whatever zany costume was provided him. Ward Morehouse rejoiced that "Bobby is back with . . . his outrageous costume changes,"\textsuperscript{145} in the musical \textit{As the Girls Go}. Brooks Atkinson cheered that "Bobby goes skylarking through a whole wardrobe of jack-in-the-box costumes,"\textsuperscript{146} while the \textit{Daily Eagle} review recounted that "Bobby appeared in his raccoon coat and his racoon covered cane."\textsuperscript{147} Thomas R. Dash likened Bobby Clark's clothes to those of the master costumer himself: "He is always emerging in hilarious raiment almost out-Wynning the be-costumed Ed Wynn himself."\textsuperscript{148}

Critics acknowledged and perpetuated the comic convention of costume trademarks.

\textbf{The Author}

"... A good production of any play might be defined as a production which expresses the playwright's commanding

\textsuperscript{145}Ward Morehouse, \textit{The Sun}, November 15, 1948.
\textsuperscript{147}George Currie, Brooklyn \textit{Daily Eagle}, November 11, 1948.
image. . . ."¹⁴⁹ Critics were of like mind and spoke it accordingly. Many, believing with Lucy Barton that "the business of costume . . . is to help the audience understand the playwright's intent,"¹⁵⁰ found a direct connection between author and designer. The Post reviewer saw "captured . . ." in the settings and costumes by Motley for He Who Gets Slapped, "the tragic cheapness, tawdriness and drabness Andreyev wanted to portray."¹⁵¹ For The Father, Robert Garland accepted the setting as "properly Strindbergian as are, I fancy, Eleanor Goldsmith's costumes."¹⁵² Make Way For Lucia represented one of the rare occasions when Lucinda Ballard designed both costumes and sets. Critics praised her humorous insight into the author's intent:

In designing the costumes and the scenery, Lucinda Ballard shares Mr. Van Druten's enthusiasm for the characters and the period. She has dressed the men as well as the women in comically ostentatious clothes.¹⁵³

At other times reviewers named the script as costume's controlling factor. In an article Jo Mielziner showed the designer's approach to finding author's intent in the script:

In designing Arthur Miller's dynamic play, Death

¹⁵¹Vernon Rice, Evening Post, March 21, 1946.
of a Salesman, I first had to work on a careful analysis of the manuscript to determine the author's basic intent in each scene of the play.154

Hobe Morrison felt that "the spirit of the script" was caught by Aline Bernstein in settings and costumes for The Happy Time.155 In an analysis of designer's technique William Hawkins praised the way Rolf Gérard carried out the play's intention in costumes for Caesar and Cleopatra:

The production here, done by . . . Rolf Gérard . . . is basically simple and all in favor of the script. When luxury or pageantry are called for there is color with a vengeance, and the colors move from the saturated pastels of Easter eggs to majestic tones, as the play acquires maturer implications.156

George Freedley recognized and commended one designer's avoidance of the temptation to be clever at the expense of the script: "Peggy Morrison's costumes are homely and pleasant, carefully avoiding the 'smart' which would be wrong for this play."157

Robert Edmond Jones has summed up the idea of costume rightness in this way:


155Hobe, Variety, February 1, 1948.


157George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, January 14, 1948.
But a stage costume has an added significance in the theatre in that it is created to enhance the particular quality of a special occasion. It is designed for a particular character in a particular play—not just for a character in a scene in a play, but for that character, in that scene, in that play—and accordingly it is an organic and necessary part of the drama in which it appears.  

As costume designing as a production factor increased in prominence even the "rightness" of costume might be disproportionately noticeable, and critics went out of their way to explain why they approved. George Freedley lauded the proper behavior of designs for The Rivals:

Watson Barratt created costumes and settings of the period with grace and beauty which excited admiration without emphasizing themselves as to distract from our enjoyment of the play.  

A like commendation was afforded The Playboy of the Western World: "John Boyt's settings and costumes are right without being quaintly conspicuous."  

The trend toward disapproval of overproportionate production in costume advanced until it became a criterion that costumes were right when they passed unnoticed. The designer in setting his own standards verified this critical approach:

... Scene design is an art that must keep to

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158 Robert Edmond Jones, "Designing a Stage Costume," Theatre Arts, XXIV (November, 1940), 793-94.

159 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, January 16, 1942.

160 Howard Barnes, Herald Tribune, October 28, 1946.
the background while before the public eye. The artist, as he glows with inspiration, is compelled to remember that what he does is always subservient to something more important—the play itself. If he steps into the limelight his personal brilliance may increase but his artistry dwindles.161

An example of such criticism was this one for Sophie:
"... And the costumes by Rose Bogdanoff are unobtrusively right."162 But the subsequent history of A Streetcar Named Desire would suggest that factors beyond mere soft pedaling of costume production accounted for this review: "Lucinda Ballard has designed a series of costumes which are so right as to almost go unnoticed."163

The critics realized too that, should production emphasis on visual values be disproportionate and tend toward a designer's "field day," the balance of even a good show could be upset, and, in the case of a poor one, really good designing would make the play look worse. The fairly long-running As You Like It belongs in the first category. Among the moderately well-reviewed accounts of the play, all outstandingly laudatory of setting and costume, the Herald Tribune piece indicated some imbalance in production results: "Even the brilliant settings and costumes by James Bailey merely serve to accentuate the lack of dramatic and comic

162 Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, December 26, 1944.
163 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, December 5, 1947.
power of this revival." An example of the second case, in which emphatic designing really showed up an otherwise poor production of a good play was brought out in the review of *Antony and Cleopatra* by Brooks Atkinson: "By setting it and costuming it with all the splendor of Egyptian royalty Mr. Mielziner has unwittingly accented the jangled inadequacy of this sluggish revival." The critics felt both were fine plays but that production factors were of disproportionate quality, and affected the equilibrium of the whole.

Even the popular hit *Up In Central Park* was overbalanced by the strength of its visual values, as Lewis Nichols explained in his review:

Into the costumes [by Grace Houston] and Howard Bay settings Mr. Todd [the producer] has thrown all his fortunes; they are opulent and beautiful, but they also serve to accent the barrenness of much of the material.

In the instance of a poorly criticized revue *All For Love*, which nevertheless ran for three months, unusually splendid scenery, and costumes by Billy Livingston, were acclaimed by all reviewers. Among them Hobe Morrison assailed an imbalance in production quality:

When the outstanding thing about a revue is the beauty of the scenery and the costumes it's a dismal comment on the entertainment quality of the

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Again and again during the 22 scenes the decorative settings and stunning costumes put to shame the tedious comedy, monotonous music and, with few exceptions, commonplace dancing.167

In support of the foregoing observations but not necessarily in agreement with their contentions, Howard Bay, in an article on designing for the musical stage, presented as fact "that the designers have matched and surpassed the books of their shows. . . ."168

A more encouraging but less often expressed view of the relationship of costume and play occurred in a notice for The Searching Wind: "... And the costumes by Aline Bernstein are worthy of the fine drama which they decorate."169

The Director

The fundamental aim of interpretation is to grasp the commanding image, to sense the total form as the author felt it. Thus, the interpretation of a play is a problem like the playwright's--discovering the pattern or form of action that embodies the intended meaning.170

The critics looked at costume also as a director's tool, an interpreter's agent. A simple aspect of that view was expressed in John Mason Brown's review of The Shoemaker's Holiday: "In achieving his desired result, Mr. Welles is


169Howard Barnes, Herald Tribune, April 13, 1944.

helped by Millia Davenport's unprudish costumes." George Freedley observed another approach to costume approval when he wrote that Motley's costuming for Tyrone Guthrie's direction of *He Who Gets Slapped* "... is enormously effective and is well suited to Mr. Guthrie's stylized production of this mystic Russian drama." But the genius of costume as a production element was developing beyond mere "help" and being "well-suited." Costume was establishing itself as an intrinsic part of the form.

The establishment of the style is the director's duty. Unified style is all-important, and it can be achieved only when the director and the designer share a clear understanding of the author's intentions. After that, the execution must be meticulously controlled, with all the elements that make up a production—the sight, the sound, the performing, the tempo—blended by a single point of view. The designer alone cannot create a style. He may achieve it in the stage picture by itself, but if it is not in harmony with the style of the director or of the actors it is wrong.

On the production of *Macbeth* Brooks Atkinson commended the cooperation between designers and the director Margaret Webster: "Lemuel Ayers' costumes were both decorative and highly dramatic. Together the designers caught and executed most brilliantly the director's intention." Richard

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Lockridge recognized the same play's commanding image and further explained the achievement of director and designers toward it:

... Seeking to capture the rigors of the Scottish scene, she [Miss Webster] has allowed Samuel Leve to design settings which are dignified, but cold to the point of austerity. She has muted the pageantry, and permitted Lemuel Ayers to design his costumes in comparative homespun.175

Julius Caesar at the Mercury Theatre used the element of costume to a prime degree for embodying the director's intended meaning. The World-Telegram reviewer explained at some length how costume carried the metaphor:

As we have indicated this "Julius Caesar" is in modern dress. Yet it is in costume, for the military use of uniforms, the Sam Browne belts, the shoulder ornaments and boots dominate the street dress worn by the minor actors and the "crowds" on the streets of Rome.

... Shocked ... when curtain rises to disclose ... the type of military uniform affected by a Mussolini or a Hitler. ... But when you have recovered from this first surprise (which is as soon as the first words are uttered) you accept the situation and continue to accept it to the end.176

There is no billing for costume design on the programme for Julius Caesar, and technical credits name only Eaves Costume Company for uniforms and Bergdorf-Goodman for a gown, so the assumption is that costumes were the conception, specifically as well as theoretically, of the director, Orson Welles.

175Richard Lockridge, The Sun, November 12, 1941.
176Douglas Gilbert, World-Telegram, November 12, 1937.
A unique example of the director's projection into costume was *My Heart's In The Highlands* designed by Herbert Andrews. The *Journal-American* critic John Anderson had this to say about the play's image:

The Group's production is superbly done. It meets the play on its own level, and enhances its theatrical values enormously, not only in the amusing scene designs by Herbert Andrews but in Robert Lewis' direction which achieves the startling effect now and then of making all the performers resemble Mr. Lewis, and capturing in gesture an accent which Mr. Andrews gets, in one instance, in dressing the boy and his father exactly alike. 177

**The Play's Success**

At times critics who were conscious of costume's part in the total form did not ascribe the result to planning of director, nor to inspiration of author or script, yet mentioned its contribution to general success. George Freedley praised Aline Bernstein's costumes for *The Willow and I* for adding "considerably to the quality of the production." 178

As part of the success of the musical comedy *Hold It!* William Hawkins found:

One of the important contributions to the show is the costuming of Julia Sze, who plasters the stage with uninhibited splashes of bright color that give the whole thing the air of a circus. 179

Critics reviewed *King Henry IV* as excellent and agreed that

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the designer's efforts had a large part in making it so. Richard Watts, Jr., wrote: "The settings and costumes of David Ffolkes are brilliant adding immeasurably to the effectiveness of the production."\textsuperscript{180} John Anderson said: "The settings and costumes are beautiful in design and color and give a magnificent background to . . . production."\textsuperscript{181}

On the other hand critics also noticed discrepancies between elements of production and the vehicle that was presented. In one instance Robert Garland gave costumes their due while he lamented over the play: "All Robert Stevenson's careful costumes can not make of The Closing Door something it is not."\textsuperscript{182} In discussing the interdependence and cooperation necessary for good theatre Jo Mielziner recently expressed much the same idea. Referring to scenery as a visual environment that included costume and lighting he said that there is "no such thing as succeeding all by yourself." The "best sets" he considers are for the best plays, and there is "never a good set with a bad play."\textsuperscript{183}

\textbf{Comparisons With Other Factors}

As the production element of costume became more

\textsuperscript{180}Richard Watts, Jr., \textit{Herald Tribune}, January 31, 1939.
\textsuperscript{183}Jo Mielziner, Lecture to Southern Players, Carbondale, Illinois, February 20, 1967.
prominent, a favorite approach to costume reviewing was making comparisons. Costume was criticized as better than play, than set, better than everything else, and at times worse than anything.

A pleasant sort of comparison was found in the good reviews of The Hot Mikado, among which one critic singled out the designer for extra praise: "But the real glory of the occasion belongs to Nat Karson for his inspired and inspiring costumes and sets."184

As the separate costume specialist became active, critics made comparisons between setting and costuming. In his critique of A Story For Strangers George Freedley evaluated the worth to the play of the setting and of the costumes of the different designers: "Millie Sutherland has costumed the play with much more understanding of the author's problems."185 Ward Morehouse's review of The Winter's Tale succinctly settled the difference between settings and costumes designed by the same man: "The costuming of Stewart Chaney is better than his settings."186 Another aspect of design comparison occurred in the reviews of Wuthering Heights (1939), staged as well as designed by Stewart Chaney. The notices were generally poor, but all sported criticism

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of scenery and costume that was pointedly good. The critics were kind but managed to get across the idea of shoemaker-stick-to-your-last.

Often the reviewer considered the costumes better than the show they dressed. Criticizing Portrait in Black, Howard Barnes called "the Helene Pons costumes for Miss Claire . . . worthy of more theatrical excitement than you will find at the Booth."\(^{187}\) In regard to settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers, Lewis Nichols allowed that: "They have brightness and humor and obviously are ready to clothe a far brighter figure than that of 'St. Louis Woman.'"\(^{188}\)

Upon occasion the critic found against the play itself, to the gain of costume prestige. Variety pronounced that Lee Simonson's settings and costumes for Madame Bovary "are much better than the script."\(^{189}\) The "elegant garments" provided by Bergdorf Goodman and Valentina for the short-lived Message For Margaret were thought by Brooks Atkinson "smarter than the play."\(^{190}\) The World-Telegram reviewer wrote off the unfortunate comedy Yr. Obedient Husband in favor of its costumes by Mielziner:

The costumes of course are of the romantic period that permitted men to strut their stuff in gorgeous satins and full-bottomed wigs and as a consequence


\(^{188}\)Lewis Nichols, Times, April 1, 1946.

\(^{189}\)Edga, Variety, November 17, 1937.

\(^{190}\)Brooks Atkinson, Times, April 17, 1947.
there are scenes that glitter far more brightly than the dialogue.\textsuperscript{191}

Such praise can be heady stuff for a young designer. In his autobiography Norman Bel Geddes evaluated criticism of this sort in the light of a clearer viewpoint. When he was a beginning designer Bel Geddes had gone down to Philadelphia for an out of town opening of an opera he had designed. During the tryout a veteran critic volunteered an insight into the practices of reviewing:

Van Vechten sat down beside me just before curtain. "You are going to get good notices," he said. . . . "This awful story and Cadman's uninspired music are going to get you good notices, even though you don't deserve them. They have to say something about somebody."\textsuperscript{192}

Good reviews by default then were part of the critical configuration. In some critiques the impression was that the designer deserved at least some credit. Robert Coleman avowed that: "The best thing about 'Cry of the Peacock' is the stunning rococo setting and period costumes, circa 1912, by Cecil Beaton."\textsuperscript{193} Fellow reviewers of \textit{The Ivy Green} substantiate the opinion of Howard Barnes that: "Stewart Chaney's handsome reconstruction of Tavistock House and his colorful period costumes are the chief assets of a dull and trifling show."\textsuperscript{194}

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\textsuperscript{191}Sidney Whipple, \textit{World-Telegram}, January 11, 1938. \\
\textsuperscript{192}Norman Bel Geddes, \textit{Miracle in the Evening} (New York, 1960), p. 193. \\
\textsuperscript{193}Robert Coleman, \textit{Daily Mirror}, April 12, 1950. \\
\textsuperscript{194}Howard Barnes, \textit{Herald Tribune}, April 6, 1949.
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In other instances both the off-hand wording and the
general tenor of the reviews relayed the idea that critics
were groping for something to say and happened to hit upon
design. Robert Garland's phrase for the costuming in Jenny
Kissed Me was that it was "less hard to take" than the play
itself. 195  Scarcely more positive was Howard Barnes' view
on The Last Dance: "Give a nod to the Ralph Alswang settings
and costumes. They are easier to take than anything else in
a woeful stage offering." 196

The critical approach of comparing competitively
factors within the show itself carried a sense of desperation
on the part of the reviewer. Brooks Atkinson, after praising
at great length Irene Sharaff's costumes for the mediocre
musical comedy Count Me In, summed it up in this way: "When
the costume designer carries off first honors things are in
poor proportion." 197

Another favorite comparison of the reviewer was to
other times and other places. This usage was handled loosely,
much as references to statistics and percentages are bandied
in casual conversation. A common attack was the employment
of a superlative plus a time phrase such as "one of the most
beautiful visual backgrounds seen on the stage in recent

195 Robert Garland, Journal-American, December 24,
1948.


197 Brooks Atkinson, Times, October 9, 1942.
years";\footnote{198} "by far the most imaginative and winning articles of show clothing you have seen in years";\footnote{199} or being specific about it: "... the best revue-decor job seen on Broadway in 10 years..."\footnote{200}

One reviewer so far forgot himself as to indulge twice in superlatives of time and quality within the span of ten days. For the well-reviewed comedy Foolish Notion the Brooklyn Citizen critic wrote: "And Mainbocher has dressed her [Tallulah Bankhead] in some of the most stunning gowns these eyes have ever beheld."\footnote{201} For the poorly-received musical The Firebrand of Florence the same reviewer mentioned that: "Mr. DuBoises [sic] dressed the show in some of the most beautiful costumes these tired eyes have ever feasted upon..."\footnote{202} Among the major crises of journalistic reviewing such a minor gaffe doubtless escaped notice.

One comparison that offered a more realistic reference among the memories of musical comedies was that made by Robert Coleman of Nellie Bly: "The costumes and settings by Karson are among the loveliest seen on Broadway since the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{198}{Burton Rascoe, review of "Dream With Music," World-Telegram, May 19, 1944.}
\footnote{199}{Whitney Bolton, review of "Great To Be Alive," Morning Telegraph, March 25, 1950.}
\footnote{200}{Scho, review of "Star and Garter," Variety, July 1, 1942.}
\footnote{201}{Edgar Price, Brooklyn Citizen, March 14, 1945.}
\footnote{202}{Ibid., March 23, 1945.}
\end{footnotes}
The Costume Itself as a Production Factor

Under the larger heading of costume in relation to production factors, critics were interested in costume itself as an element of production. The reviewers looked at the various attributes of costume as each reflected an approach to production. They considered the presence or absence of mood, and whether the costumes had character or not. They were concerned with degrees of realism, by which they meant believability. The consideration of authenticity and its rightness for the play was bound up with an awareness of research and historical period.

Mood as a criterion of costume was most often commented upon in connection with plays whose subject matter most warranted it. Many critics thought that Katharine Cornell's production of *The Three Sisters* had been handsomely dressed, and some in addition commended the designer for capturing that play's special flavor. Among them Wilella Waldorf adjudged that: "The backgrounds and costumes by Motley are perfectly suited to the mood and manner of the play." Mood in *Angel Street* was not so much a dictate of the script but was a technique used to produce the thriller effect. Several critics recognized the part of costume

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in the device, mentioning, "... furniture and costumes made even the most normal shiver..." Howard Barnes noticed special use of period details to further the technical plan: "The mood of the play, both Victorian and sinister, is strikingly captured by Lemuel Ayers' settings and costumes." Critics observed that a sinister quality joined with beauty in the clothes for The Innocents. John Chapman described the play-enhancing effect: "The 1880 costumes by Motley are rich and wonderful—yet they, too, have something indefinably strange about them." Lucy Barton counseled the costume designer "to help establish the mood of the play from the very beginning... with the very rise of the curtain, comes the total impression which sets the mood of the play. Costumes and set should tell the audience whether to expect a farce or a comedy, a tragedy, or a musical spectacle."

Reviewers objected on the score of misleading the audience when costumes missed the mood. Concerning the failure of the modern Greek tragedy Daughters of Atreus, Gilbert Gabriel explained that "... it may be that James Reynolds' costumes, precious to the point of opera bouffe,

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206 Richard Lockridge, The Sun, December 6, 1941.
207 Howard Barnes, Herald Tribune, December 6, 1941.
made them all seem Earl Carrollsme. The same reason was offered by James Mason Brown: "... And with one or two notable exceptions James Reynolds' costumes are such musical comedy exaggerations that [they] are completely out of place." A similar situation occurred in the Anouilh adaptation of Antigone in that mood intrinsic to the play was betrayed by costume. George Jean Nathan pointed out:

I can think of many ridiculous things, but I can think of none more so than a parcel of actors in what is basically classic Greek tragedy dressed in swallow tails, dinner jackets and Valentina evening gowns. Any genuine sense of tragedy must under such circumstances be distilled into bootleg Lonsdale drawing-room comedy, with only the butler missing.

A common critical accreditation of costume was as a help to characterization. Aline Bernstein, the designer whose own costumes were noted for character, has been quoted in Theatre Arts Monthly on the subject: "... Above all she believes, 'the costumes must have character. Characterization is all-important in every prop, in every setting--in every costume.'" In The Skin of Our Teeth John Beaufort found that "Mary Percy Schenck's costumes point up and help

211 John Mason Brown, Post, October 15, 1936.
illuminate character."^214 Brooks Atkinson commended Stewart Chaney, the designer of An Inspector Calls, for his comic use of costume characterization: "As costumer he has shrewdly provided Mr. Cooper with a dress shirt that imper­tinently bulges."^215 The great designer, Robert Edmond Jones, believed that:

Each element [of production] has its own particular relation to the drama and plays its own part in the drama. Each separate costume we create for a play must be exactly suited to the character it helps to express and to the occasion it graces.216

With curiously similar wording Burton Rascoe brought to attention the calculated characterizing in I Remember Mama:

Every costume, designed by Lucinda Ballard, is carefully thought out so that it is exactly suited to the character portrayed and helps us in a subtle, unobtrusive manner, almost as much as do the lines of the play, to elucidate character.217

The artistically ambiguous term realistic was a word of approbation as reviewers used it meaning believability. George Freedley ensured the definition in his review of Therese: "Raymond Sovey has designed a series of realistic and believable costumes."218 The criticism, ", . . . and the

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214John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, November 19, 1942.


216Robert Edmond Jones, "Designing a Stage Costume," Theatre Arts, XXIV (November, 1940), 794.

217Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, October 20, 1944.

218George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, October 9, 1945.
costuming of a group of muddy, bearded, tired soldiers seemed very real,"219 for The Sound of Hunting bore out the sense of belief. For the colloquially oriented Chicken Every Sunday Robert Coleman's "... and Rose Bogdanoff's costumes are so realistic as to incite an Arizonan to a nostalgic spree,"220 continued the idea of believability.

Authentic, as applied to costume by the critics, had a little more mobile meaning. Two reviewers of Feathers in a Gale used it in the sense of "true to." The Brooklyn Citizen approved "Raymond Sovey's single setting [for looking] authentic enough, as do Aline Bernstein's costumes."221 "... Artfully, authentically costumed by Aline Bernstein,"222 was George Freedley's phrase.

In Design For A Stained Glass Window the facet of authenticity criticized was that of truth to historic period. Thomas R. Dash commended Stewart Chaney's designs for having "provided authenticity in the doublet, hose and ruffles of the cast's period costumes."223 Not only reviewers but designers paired design authenticity with a thorough knowledge of the past:

220Robert Coleman, Daily Mirror, April 6, 1944.
221Edgar Price, Brooklyn Citizen, December 22, 1943.
222George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, December 23, 1943.
No matter how stylized your designs may be, a really sound knowledge of historical costume, architecture, ornament and furniture is essential if your work is to have an authentic ring about it. 224

Another aspect of authenticity the critics observed was that of design's being true to atmosphere. George Freedley paid homage to authenticity in the production of *Papa Is All*:

The Theatre Guild has mounted the play in good taste and high spirits and designed it for your entertainment. Emeline Roache's costumes and setting have a quiet charm and convinced at least one "foreigner" to the Pennsylvania Dutch country of their authenticity. 225

But a term like authentic, valid enough in a period or atmospheric setting, if applied to a modern play with a conventional setting hints at misuse. *Variety*’s review of *Goodbye My Fancy*, "... and with the exception noted [that the star was handicapped by unbecoming clothes], Emeline Roche's costumes seem authentic," 226 suggested that authentic held quite another meaning for this reviewer.

That the critic was aware of a need for research preparatory to achieving authenticity in theatrical designing might be as shortly touched on as John Mason Brown’s mention in *The American Way* that: "Mr. Kaufman [the director] has


been aided . . . by Miss Sharaff's admirably documented costumes. . . ."227 The Christian Science Monitor was impressed with mere time spent on research for State of the Union: "Costumes [Emeline Roche] and sets [Raymond Sovey] indicate a great deal of time expended on background accessories of interest."228

One of the outstanding examples of visual design within the period of this study, Robert Edmond Jones' for Lute Song, was notable for the length of time the designer put into research and planning— an entire year, and for his superior use of source material toward theatrical purpose:

The settings for Lute Song . . . maintain skilled balance between stage grandeur and historical accuracy, . . . successful fusion of scholarship with theatre requirements. . . . The rich display of color in the play was also determined as much by fact as lush effectiveness. Red and gold only, the colors of royalty, are used in the palace scenes. . . . Yellow, the color of heaven, is used in religious scenes, while beggars are costumed in blue, the traditional color worn by Chinese coolies. White--the color of mourning, dominates the funeral scene.229

Variety praised the designs for Harriet by recognizing that "Lemuel Ayers' settings show the result of research, same going for the costumes by Aline Bernstein."230 But Ludmila Vachtová, exponent of the Prague school of theatre design,


229Judith Kaye Reid, "Art on Stage," The Art Digest, XX (March 1, 1946), 27.

230Ibee, Variety, March 10, 1943.
warned against too easy recourse to original sources:

Historical costume is for the costume designer the same kind of material as the text of the role. It is his task to interpret it by all his imaginative power. . . . He must use the historical costume as a documentary material which gives him incentives, stimulating him to individual expression as to individual attitude.231

David Ffolkes' designs for the musical Where's Charley? were acclaimed for their good use of recent historical sources. George Freedley said of them: "David Ffolkes has drawn upon his knowledge of England, plus a good deal of research as usual, to come up with some extremely amusing settings and the very best women's costumes of a season which has been rather brilliant in that respect."232

In one instance the commanding image of the play guided the designer to careful use of research for the purpose of conveying a sense of no time nor space. Brooks Atkinson, as did the other critics, wholeheartedly accepted the neutral background of Family Portrait, a story of the family life of Jesus: "Harry Horner has designed a whole series of useful settings and costumes shrewdly designed to represent no clearly defined period in history."233 But two of the critics took exception to the use of one aspect of the research: "Mr. Horner's settings and costumes are

231Tröster, op. cit., p. iii.
232George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, October 13, 1948.
233Brooks Atkinson, Times, March 9, 1939.
admirable, though the use of the Da Vinci design for the scene of the Last Supper seemed clever rather than appropriate."\(^{234}\) John Mason Brown called it "cheap, applause catching."\(^{235}\)

Critics continued to recommend designs that had been well-researched, among them George Freedley who, in his review of *The Leading Lady*, pointed out local sources:

"Mainbocher has created a series of superb costumes. Our playwrights delve into the past so consistently that our designers are spending half their time in the New York Public Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art."\(^{236}\)

Donald Oenslager verified the custom in his own practice:

"I am frequently asked where I obtain source material for the costumes and settings I design for the theatre. This is just like asking how one goes about designing for the theatre. My answer is always first go to the library."\(^{237}\)

An area of research reviewers noticed, and made a basis for costume criticism, was that of historical period. In addition to the beauty and suitability of costumes for *Another Part of the Forest*, Lucinda Ballard was complimented on their historical authenticity. Robert Coleman called them "admirable period costumes";\(^{238}\) Ward Morehouse said


\(^{237}\)Donald Oenslager, "All the Visual Arts," *Library Journal*, LXXVI (November 1, 1951), 1762.

\(^{238}\)Robert Coleman, *Daily Mirror*, November 22, 1946.
"perfect costumes of the period"; and Howard Barnes, "wonderful period costumes." As they praised good use of historical period so too did critics complain of any disparity in period design. The Christian Science Monitor objected to a difference between setting and costumes for R U R:

There is something anachronistic about the contemporary clothing styles and the twenty-first century theme of the backgrounds. Domin wears striped trousers and morning coat for instance.

In other instances the critics recognized costumes which, although not slave to historical period, conveyed the truth of the times. In The Survivors, placed in 1865, Howard Barnes felt "the Rose Bogdanoff costumes set off the period without being in any way authentic." George Freedley in his review of Summer and Smoke wrote: "Rose Bogdanoff has composed a series of costumes which characterize the author's people without ever drawing undue attention to the period of the piece." This critical approach reflected the viewpoint of the set designer of Summer and Smoke, Jo Mielziner:

The good theatre artist is never "actual." He omits the non-essentials, condenses the essentials, accents the details that are the most revealing. He

240Howard Barnes, Herald Tribune, November 21, 1946.
242Howard Barnes, Herald Tribune, January 20, 1948.
243George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, October 8, 1948.
depicts only that part of the truth which he deems necessary to the course of the story.  

Among many fine reviews occasionally one occurred that, in trying to appear knowledgeable, could only be called misinformed. The hit musical By Jupiter was an adaptation of a comedy, The Warrior's Husband, based on the comic premise of reversal of the jobs of the sexes found in the Greek legend of the Amazons. One reviewer offered this negative criticism of the costumes: "The costumes by Irene Sharaff and the settings by Jo Mielziner do not suggest the magnificence of the period in which they were working." This reviewer's misapprehension was that, in a musical, the commanding image, the author's intent, the stage truth sought, was not necessarily "the grandeur that was Greece," but the best use of source material for the theatrical purpose. In the musical By Jupiter, a light bright comic impact was called for. The other critics considered that the designers' purpose had been well achieved.

Occasionally critics commended an apparently non-design factor in costume. Brooks Atkinson's observation that "... Valentina, the costume cutter, ... have all seen Amphitryon 38 well bestowed." This afforded the costumer double praise, for Valentina's designs were executed in her

244 Mielziner, op. cit., p. 19.
246 Brooks Atkinson, Times, November 2, 1937.
own workrooms. Motley has disclosed a little of the rela-
tionship between designing and cutting:

The hard mundane fact is that a competent designer
must be, at least vicariously, a costume cutter. . . .
Good cutters are, of course, artists in themselves. . . .

. . . Authenticity is essential and it is a very
important part of the designer's work to get on with
the cutter, so that there can be a real collaboration
between them. . . .

A designer's job is to supervise the construction of his
designs through final fitting to delivery of the finished
garment to the producer. The American production of Madwoman
of Chaillot was mounted here after the death of the designer
Christian Bérard. In his review George Freedley made a bow
to Madame Karinska who executed the costumes again to criti-
cal acclaim in New York as she had originally in Paris under
Bérard's direction.248 Part of the job of designing costume
is bound up in the fabric. Motley says "--and the choice of
fabrics is a vital part of the costume designer's work."249
Colour design too is affected by the nature of the cloth that
carries it. Mielziner cautioned: "Surface textures of
fabrics and costume materials sometimes are more important
than the actual pigment in which they are dyed or
painted."250 But actual practice in large shows often found

247 Motley, Designing and Making Stage Costumes (New
York, 1965), pp. 16, 80.

248 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, December 29,
1948.

249 Motley, op. cit., p. 12.

250 Jo Mielziner, "Death of a Painter," American
Artist, XII (November, 1949), 36.
the construction shop supplying the cloth for the designer's approval. Rolf Gérard, the English designer, was much praised for his work on Katharine Cornell's production of *That Lady*. The costumer, Edith Lutyens, executed the designs. Among the laudatory critics William Hawkins noticed fabrics: "It's remarkable beauty lies in texture and luminosity." 251

A good costumer must be able to give the public the tactile sense of what it sees, even from a great distance. I never expect much from an artist who elaborates forms and colors without proposing a really thought-out choice of the materials to be used... 252

**The Producer**

Two subjects of the reviewer's pen were the direct concern of the producer—money spent and number of costume changes.

Frequency of costume change was indirectly affected by the budget. Reviewers, then, in appraising the worth of costuming by a numerical standard were evaluating not design but the business of producing. Critics generally liked to see many changes and complained when the number of costumes per actor was skimped. John Chapman praised the musical comedy *Follow the Girls* because "Lou Eisele's costumes are numerous, brilliantly colored and sexy." 253 In *Allah Be* ——


Praised! "The costumes are beautiful, and are different every time the handsome chorus comes on." Kelcey Allen was pleased that Betty Field, the star of Dream Girl, "has many changes of costume and she makes them with lightening rapidity." Although the next two reviews of musical shows with spectacular costume changes appeared to be in accord with the universal opinion a certain wryness of phraseology belies the impression. In his column on White Horse Inn, staged in the vast Center Theatre where "actors advance by regiments," John Anderson exclaimed: "Heaven and the paymaster alone knows how many people tramp across its stage, changing costumes each time." A minority opinion on Miss Liberty was offered by the Daily News: "... And Motley [has] fashioned costumes which range from the spectacular to the just plain ugly. Miss McCarty changes costumes so often that for a while you thought she must be trying to find a dress that looked good." John Anderson's criticism of All That Glitters, a modern comedy upon which was spent "a fortune in finery," complaining about "... long scene

254E. C. Sherburne, Christian Science Monitor, April 21, 1944.
256Richard Lockridge, The Sun, October 2, 1936.
259Walter Winchell, Daily Mirror, January 20, 1938.
waits due, presumably, to costume changes,"260 sounded like
a facetious dig at first-night slowness, using the show's
luxurious dress as cover.

Criticisms involving money spent on costumes, grouped
themselves under such headings as money-no-object, and cost-
a-small-fortune. Further, reviewers regretted costume waste
on two scores: that much money had been spent but the cos-
tumes were poor, and that fine, costly costumes had been
squandered on a poor show. A final money criterion con-
sidered the effects of a limited budget on costumes.

Reviewing the musical comedy Early to Bed, Burton
Rascoe marveled at the costumes by Miles White who was
"... apparently given a blank check and told to expend his
taste and imagination in such a way that Ziegfeld, if he were
alive, would turn green with envy."261 In his production of
the Seven Lively Arts Billy Rose "... spent money like a
Persian prince on Mary Grant costumes. ..."262 In
addition to the settings for the romantic musical Marinka,
Robert Coleman felt that "other assets are ... Mary Grant
costumes. They must have put a sizeable dent in producers
Jules J. Leventhal's and Howard Howard's combined bank-
roll."263

261 Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, June 18, 1943.
Three of the reviewers of Michael Todd's production of the comedy *Catherine Was Great* starring Mae West mentioned extraordinary cost. Edgar Price called them "... gorgeous costumes ... Miss West's gowns alone must have cost a small fortune." Robert Coleman added "and the costumes of Mary Percy Schenck and Ernest Schrapps are costly and a feast for the eye." George Freedley quoted a specific sum, "... a hundred thousand dollars worth of costumes and settings," and offered a facetious comment on audience approval:

Mary Percy Schenck and Ernest Schrapps designed a series of costumes for the cast, and especially the star, which got hand after hand. They were rather florid for my taste but then probably Russia was like that in 1762.

Under the heading of costly but not good were the clothes for the musical romance *Three Waltzes* which John Mason Brown said were "unquestionably expensive yet in the ensemble numbers their colors exhibit a feudist spirit more worthy of mountaineer Kentucky than of Paris and Vienna."

For the next three shows, all reviewed as badly written, the critics deplored a profligation of handsome expensive costumes. Ward Morehouse found "Aline Bernstein's costumes and Oenslager's scenery [for *The Eagle Has Two

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Heads] . . . very fine, but completely wasted."268 The costly musical comedy The Duchess Misbehaves, which closed after five performances, had "hundreds of fancy costumes, a great waste."269 The World-Telegram censured even the much longer-running White Horse Inn for having an inept book so a "... waste of ... delightful set, exquisite costumes. . . ."270

Less than laudatory critical appraisal was sometimes laid at the door of a limited budget. George Freedley hedged his approval of clothes for If the Shoe Fits: "Kathryn Kuhn did rather amusing costumes but her budget must have been hopelessly cut down."271 Burton Rascoe made no bones about the budget cut on Three To Make Ready: "... And the all-over effect, including costumes and scenery, is on the pinch-penny and careless side."272 Variety in calling the costuming in Let Freedom Sing "colorful but also limited" meant limited in the sense of not lavish nor enough changes, economical.273

270Douglas Gilbert, World-Telegram, October 2, 1936.
271George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, December 7, 1946.
272Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, March 8, 1946.
273Ibee, Variety, October 7, 1942.
The Billing and Crediting

In their reviews critics were often concerned with programme crediting. They were aware of incorrect billing and of discrepancies between what they saw on the stage and what the programme said. Critics at times made mistakes themselves in giving credits to designers.

A classic example of critics' championing of what they felt was an injustice in billing was that of the Old Vic production of King Richard II (1937) in its American appearance. The original designer of sets and costumes was David Ffolkes who was hired to redesign it on a more lavish scale for its New York opening on February 5, 1937. But on the St. James Theatre programme, billing for costume only was given to David Ffolkes, not for scenery. Because he was a foreign designer and did not belong to the union he could not at that time by union rules be credited for the setting. Costume had not yet achieved a union status of its own and was not governed by the same strict regulations. The critics in their own way made the situation known. Variety made the basic observation: "There is an exceptionally fine group of sets which, for some strange reason, is uncredited." Robert Coleman pointed out a billing oddity that was obvious by its very absence: "The costumes by David Ffolkes and the setting by Studio Alliance, Inc. [listed only in the technical credits as 'executed by'] are quite the most

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274 Kauf, Variety, February 10, 1937.
opulent and lovely to grace a Shakespearean production in our day."\textsuperscript{275} The New York \textit{Post} called unmistakable attention to design unity:

The costumes, from first to last, are beautiful to behold. Their design is credited in the program to David Ffolkes, while no mention is made of the scenery, which is simple and a perfect background for Mr. Ffolkes invariably stunning creations.\textsuperscript{276}

When the run continued in the new season of September, 1937, the \textit{World-Telegram} review mentioned "David Ffolkes, who designed the sets, and who now receives program credit for his admirable scenes by virtue of membership in the Scenic Designers' Union..."\textsuperscript{277} In October when the production was moved to the Shubert, the programme billed David Ffolkes with his Old Vic title of Art Director.

As the period went along American designers were used as "supervisors" on foreign designed shows to satisfy union requirements as well as strict New York City building code and fire laws. In his review of the English production \textit{Power Without Glory}, "supervised" by a young designer, George Freedley took a quiet dig at the practice: "... Designed superbly by Charles Elson, who is doing better and better work these days. He is beginning to challenge our top masters of decor."\textsuperscript{278}

\textsuperscript{275}Robert Coleman, \textit{Daily Mirror}, February 6, 1937.
\textsuperscript{276}Wilella Waldorf, \textit{Post}, February 6, 1937.
\textsuperscript{277}Sidney Whipple, \textit{World-Telegram}, September 16, 1937.
\textsuperscript{278}George Freedley, \textit{Morning Telegraph}, January 15, 1948.
Another usage the critics disliked enough to gibe at was the parsimonious practice of using second-hand scenery and costumes. Some critical complaints of this habit have been cited earlier in this chapter under the heading of freshness in costume. In the instance of the musical comedy *Louisiana Lady* the critics were concerned with proper billing, both to lay blame and to credit praise. Watson Barrett was named as setting designer but there was no billing in the programme for costumes. The technical credits informed that "costumes were supervised by Frank Thompson" and listed several different construction houses. The reviews were generally bad. George Freedley's analysis defined the confusion:

Watson Barrett didn't help matters by his dreary uninspired settings. The newspapers reported that Mary Grant demanded her name be taken off the Playbill for the costumes. I don't blame her. Occasionally one of them would emerge as something that a really creative designer might have executed. Frank Thompson is credited with supervising them. I am sure he is not to blame for the messy effect currently on view.279

Louis Kronenberger's review in *PM* explained the foregoing excerpt to some extent: "The sets and costumes of *Louisiana Lady* are said to be inherited from a musical that closed out of town last winter."280 A final clue was added from Robert Garland's account:

"*Louisiana Lady,*" the only professional show ever


written around a bargain lot of second-hand scenery and costumes. The scenery, credited to Watson Barratt, and the costumes, not credited to Mary Grant. ... \(^{281}\)

When programmes were remiss in crediting costume design, the critics brought it to attention. John Anderson in reviewing *London Assurance* mentioned that "Only the costumes capture any sort of enchantment and they are distinguished tho the playbill is silent about their creator." \(^{282}\) Among the poor reviews for the musical *Once Over Lightly* John Beaufort singled out clothing for the comment that "... an anonymous designer's costumes are attractive." \(^{283}\)

Critics, too, in the press of meeting deadlines, made crediting gaffes. In its review for Katharine Cornell's *Candida*, entirely designed according to the programme by Woodman Thompson, the *Morning Telegraph* found the production praiseworthy ". . . with Watson Barratt's handsome and atmospheric setting and clad in his beautiful costumes." \(^{284}\) In *Knickerbocker Holiday* Brooks Atkinson praised the set designer for "a comic chorus of obese Dutch councilors amusingly costumed by Jo Mielziner," \(^{285}\) uncognizant that the programme billed Frank Bevan as designer of the costumes.

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\(^{284}\) George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, April 29, 1942.  
When neither amount nor quality of work in costuming warranted it, critics protested against costume crediting. To George Freedley's unfavorable review of Heads or Tails he added tersely: "Alice Gibson took a costume credit for no apparent reason." The comedy Wonderful Journey, according to Freedley, was a poor production and "... Bianca Stroock supervised the 'costumes.' Could the Playbill have been thinking of Donald Murphy's many dressing gowns and boxing shorts?"

A number of subsections were found under the main heading of that group of criticisms relating to production factors. The critics discussed costume in relation to the actor both to his credit and discredit, also as part of a performer's act--his trademark. Involvement of costume with author, considering worth of the play and compatibility of costume, with director, treating of costume as an interpreter's tool, and with producer, including money spent on clothes and number of changes, were all explored by reviewers. The critics saw costume as contributing to the play's success and as holding its own in comparison with other factors of setting and acting. This body of criticism of costume in relation to other production elements tended to be largely favorable to costume.

286 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, May 5, 1947.

287 Ibid., December 27, 1946.
IV. COSTUME APPARENTLY NEGATIVELY CRITICIZED

A small bulk of criticism seemed at first glance to be negative to costume, but on closer scrutiny was found to attack other production factors. Some reviews, apparently disapproving of costume, wittingly or unwittingly assailed actor or director, writer, producer or theme. Other poor costume notices hit out metonymously at the whole show.

By choice of word and calculated phrasing Burton Rascoe's review of This Rock used apparent admiration of clothes to point out author's and producer's and ultimately the actress' failure:

The author (and producer) . . . get the beauteous Jane Sterling on and off the stage every five minutes or thereabouts for a change of costume, until her entrances and her exits seem like those of a model at a style show. Each creation Miss Sterling wears, whether it is an evening gown or a WAAC's uniform, is a stunnerino. Her walk, her manner, her unflexing gracious and superior smile, and her voice, also, must have made some buyers in the audience come awake long enough to mistake the place and inquire the price of this or that number in gross lots.288

George Jean Nathan in seeming to criticize costume and acting in his review of The Eagle Has Two Heads was in reality condemning the practice of writing and producing a vehicle for a star:

There is today something a little ridiculous in seeing an actress costumed to the ears, clinging to the center of the stage, and reciting enough lines to a helpless cast to suffice half a dozen actresses in any more reputable play.289

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288Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, February 19, 1943.
Scene and costume design were used by George Freedley as a springboard to impugn against the writing in *The Fabulous Invalid*: "Relying chiefly upon the kaleidescope of costumes and well-designed scene-episodes, Mr. Hart and Mr. Kaufman have endowed it with nothing but fingertips writing. . . ."290

A complaint against both acting and costuming in *Of Mice and Men* was in fact a tacit criticism of direction: "... Superficial playing of Clare Luce, seemed one permitted to distort the truth ... cheaper finery too forced a contrast, her scarlet gown too obviously a symbol."291 In the instance of *The Importance of Being Earnest* two reviewers, unsure as to costume meaning, connected their confusion with inadequate direction. The *World-Telegram* proposed a possible reason for the use made of costume: "Furthermore in an attempt to add to its gaiety it has been costumed with over-exaggeration, merely, I suppose, to permit people to have a laugh over Clifton Webb in peacock plaid pants and an azure coat."292 But John Mason Brown came right out and mentioned direction: "It was difficult, in the presence of Watson Barratt's charming stylized settings and the exaggerated costumes, to be sure whether in her direction Miss Winwood was subjecting the play to a spoof revival or a straight one."293

Censure of the show's producer was implied in John Mason Brown's review of Night of Love. Brown referred to a well-known theatrical warehouse in his famous denouncement of the costumes and scenery as "... more retrieved than designed. They are more Cain than able." Downgrading of scenery was even used as a means of disapproving of the "triviality" of the theme of No Time For Comedy. Settings by Mielziner and Valentina's costumes, acclaimed by other critics, were considered "adequate, but no more," by the Daily Worker.

In a few instances reviews that seemed positive for costume were really praising another production factor. The Morning Telegraph commended actors by means of costume kudos in reviewing Dance Me A Song: "The young people of the company look energetic and eager, talented and attractive in Irene Sharaff's costumes." Through the agency of costume criticism Robert Coleman applauded the director of As You Like It. "The Bailey settings and costumes must have cost a fortune. They are feasts for the eyes. Benthall's staging uses them ably to achieve fluidity and avoid lulls."

Rather than using costume criticism to attack any one other production element, some reviews hit out at the whole

294Tbid., January 8, 1941.
295J. C., Daily Worker, April 18, 1939.
show by way of costume. By a neutral costume criticism of Jeb, "... while Patricia Montgomery performed the task of costuming it," George Freedley subtly made judgment on the show itself. Of the three main ways of attacking a whole show through costumes two may be considered as factetious: a tongue-in-cheek choice of words, and a poker-faced listing of costume credits. Pejorative use of the word "costume" in describing either clothes or show was the third way.

The use of an exact restatement of programme and credits to condemn the play was both simple and snide. A more sophisticate and just as effective denouncement was a review of Marriage Is For Single People which consisted of a rephrasing of the programme material: "To give credits where credits were claimed," followed by a facetious reiteration of the programme's minutiae. Robert Garland used a similar technique to imply that the musical Lady Comes Across did not live up to its credits, when he said "... they have Stewart Chaney's very beautiful costumes and scenery ... wigs by Lerch, corsets by Kabo, and heaven knows what all."300

Facetious word choice ranged from a simple demeaning usage like "... while Grace Houston ran up a few

298 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, February 23, 1946.
300 Ibid., January 10, 1942.
costumes" for *Violet*, to Brooks Atkinson's comment on costumes for *The Eagle Has Two Heads*: "To dress her properly Aline Bernstein has whipped up regal gowns with glorious bosoms and majestic trains." In his review for *In Bed We Cry* George Freedley's natty diction implied that in spite of the amount of money spent, notably for costumes, the play was not a success: "Miss Chase is revealed by Adrian while the remaining ladies had to content themselves with Hattie Carnegie and Bergdorf Goodman." Brooks Atkinson used a combination of listing and facetious language to poke fun at the acting in the poorly reviewed *My Name Is Aquilon*. He reported that the comedy was "splendidly produced" with:

... Gowns by Valentina and Castillo hemstitching in relays. Arlene Francis, wearing the Castillo gowns and shoes from I. Miller, plays a wayward French mother tactfully. Doe Avedon, whose couturier is anonymous though not bad plays a footloose secretary competently. And Lawrence Fletcher, who probably had to find his own double-breasted suits and gentleman's furnishings, plays a Frenchman of affairs with proper austerity.

Often when a poorly received play happened to be historically set, as was *The Duke In Darkness*, the word costume was used pejoratively, "costume drama" and "costume piece," or was intended as a gibe, "a costume melodrama rife with

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301 George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, October 26, 1944.


303 George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, November 16, 1944.

showy intrigue and bravura histrionics."305 Variety voiced Broadway's general disappointment in Maxwell Anderson's *The Masque of Kings* by relegating it to the place of "still another of the season's costume or period plays."306 Connotations surrounding the word costume as applied to a period play widened from a slight sense of superiority in the review of *The Masque of Kings* to the strong feeling of scorn found in Ward Morehouse's critique of the tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi*: "It's a macabre costume melodrama quite too slow in getting down to the business of the evening which is murder."307 The *World-Telegram* employed the phrase "costume play" in the headline of its unfavorable review of *Boudoir*. In the body of the review William Hawkins punned upon the pejorative meaning of the word costume and the denotative meaning of stage clothes:

> Boudoir is definitely a costume play. The audience sat pop-eyed while Miss Twelvetrees wandered around in her skin and some sheer pleated chiffon. It was 1882 and she was posing for a portrait, Greek style.308

The term costume as a disapprobation was extended even to acting in John Anderson's review of *Madame Capet*, in which he deplored that "... the best of it merely peeps,

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305Rowland Field, Newark *Evening News*, January 25, 1944.


with the sad eye of history, through a clutter of costumes and costume acting."

Among all the uses in a bad sense two whose purpose was to recommend rather than to denounce stood out pleasantly. *Variety* called the popular *Strange Bedfellows* "another costume play" and went on to say that "Morton Haack's costumes are notably helpful." *Vr. Obedient Husband* was called "a costume comedy" by Brooks Atkinson who also commended Jo Mielziner for dressing "the characters up to their wigs in eighteenth century splendor."  

In the smaller category of criticism that was apparently negative to costume, the attack was often found to be, whether consciously intended or not, for another production element, for the acting, the writing, the directing, or even the production as a whole. The critics often used facetious language and a pejorative connotation for the word costume to discredit the production by way of costume.

V. COSTUME RELATED TO THE DESIGNER

The critics also considered costume in direct relation to the man who created it. They noticed the qualities he brought to his work—imagination, originality and good

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taste, or the lack of it. The reviewers, in recognizing costume designing as a special job, also pointed out individual specialists, with idiosyncrasies and talents of their own. Critics grew to expect from each designer a certain calibre of work and judged the costumes in accord. In reviews the designer was awarded many a figurative desert including the ultimately realized one of "prize."

Imagination, Originality and Good Taste

Critics found imagination a worthy quality in the designer. Miles White's greatly praised costumes for The Pirate were commended by Howard Barnes as "imaginative and resplendent."

Of the musical play Brigadoon Richard Watts, Jr. said "The show's fine quality of imagination is to be found in . . . David Ffolkes' handsome costumes." On the other side of the ledger George Freedley censured the designers of the musical revue Call Me Mister for lack of imagination: "Lester Polakov set the show in bright revue fashion but with no imagination to speak of; Grace Houston matched him on the costumes."

Collated with imagination as an attribute of designing was originality. Rowland Field felt that Lemuel Ayers had created "delightfully original costumes" for Kiss Me

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312 Howard Barnes, Herald Tribune, November 26, 1942.
314 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, April 20, 1946.
Kate. And George Freedley attested to originality as desirable in costuming by observing its absence in *Three To Make Ready*: "Audre's costumings are striking and colorful without being marvels of originality."\(^{316}\) The same critic noted the presence of originality in the designs for *The Day Before Spring* by writing: "... Miles White has composed some extremely entertaining costumes which are far from hackneyed."\(^{317}\)

But the classic example of praise for originality was that given to Frank Bevan's costume designs for *The Greatest Show On Earth*. A majority of reviewers singled out the costumes for special comment. Among them Brooks Atkinson commended the "... costumes that Frank Bevan has designed with remarkable originality and taste. ..."\(^{318}\) John Mason Brown wrote:

> ... Frank Bevan dressed it in a manner worthy of the masterpiece it ought to have been. Mr. Root's backgrounds are filled with all the humor which is so sadly missing in the script. So are Mr. Bevan's costumes. They have infinite charm and are splendidly creative. ... They are some of the most original, delicately suggested, and contributive costumes our stage has seen in many years.\(^{319}\)

Critics deplored an absence of originality by calling

\(^{316}\)George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, March 9, 1946.

\(^{317}\)Ibid., November 24, 1945.


Good taste, the critics believed, reflected a quality directly attributable to the designer. Whether this was an artistic good taste or a moral one was not always clear. Of the next three ambiguous reviews, nothing, in either the quotation itself or in the attitude of other reviewers, shed light on what was meant by good taste. John Mason Brown felt that *The Show Is On* was "set and costumed with great effectiveness and rare good taste." John Anderson wrote of the musical play *Virginia* that "Irene Sharaff has cloaked it all in costumes that are as distinguished in design as they are beautiful in color and right in taste..." For the musical play *Allegro* Ward Morehouse found that "... Lucinda Ballard's costumes are in fine taste as they always are." Of *A Lady Says Yes* George Freedley wrote:

The garish scenery and the typically Shubert

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costumes were by Watson Barratt and Lou Eisele, respectively. They should be ashamed of themselves. No worse display of taste has come along in a long time. 326

Although he used the terms "garish" and "typically Shubert" in an artistically fault-finding sense there was little room for doubt that the critic's indictment was against indecency, since earlier in the review Freedley had berated the musical itself for "vulgarity and smuttiness."

Allied to an indictment of artistic poor taste was this criticism of Burlesque, set in the fashion of the late twenties:

...[The first two acts] with all other faults, also have the gals costumed in 1927 styles and the men dressed as though the producer insisted that they wear everything that anybody gave them for Christmas. 327

During the period of this study reviewers gave costumes of shows set in the twenties generally poor reception. The ideal of one man's time may be the bad taste of another's. This apparent affectation of the thirties and forties, born of propinquity, was an honest distaste that slackened as the period neared its close. In 1948 costumes for Sally, set in the twenties, were at least tolerated. P M approached the subject cautiously: "The scenery and the costumes also serve well to recall the general tone of the period, without

326 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, January 12, 1945.

overly burlesquing it." The Post approved of "the costumes of Henry Mulle, which suggest the period in the clothes with none of the horror that was in the styles." Robert Coleman even went so far as to grant that the costumes were "in good taste." But not until the success of The Boy Friend in 1954 could the ideal of the times accept characteristics of dress in the twenties as source elements for creating good theatrical design.

Fun For Designer

With more than usual insight into the creative process critics implied that what the designer had wrought with enjoyment must necessarily be good. George Freedley wrote of the musical adaptation of A Connecticut Yankee: "Nat Karson has amused himself designing settings and costumes which have both glamor and humor." While in Mexican Hayride Mary Grant was commended for letting her "costuming sense enjoy itself."

A continuation of that line of thinking led reviewers to criticize from the designer's viewpoint, seeing a well-done show as having held extra enjoyment for the creator.

328 Hague, P M, May 9, 1948.
329 Vernon Rice, Post, May 7, 1948.
331 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, November 19, 1943.
332 Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, January 29, 1944.
George Freedley remarked that "Raoul Pène du Bois had a field day with the costumes,"\textsuperscript{333} for \textit{Diamond Lil}. The \textit{Post} approved of the production of \textit{St. Louis Woman} because:

Laid in St. Louis in 1898, it did offer Lemuel Ayers a magnificent opportunity to design costumes and sets of bright, garish hues that captured all of the bad taste of that era, yet had the startling color effect so necessary for this kind of musical.\textsuperscript{334}

Two reviewers commented upon the designer's possible scope in costuming \textit{High Button Shoes}. George Freedley pointed out:

Miles White has had a field day in the costumes, running the gamut from evening gowns to male and female bathing suits with a few Keystone cops thrown in. His use of color and line is brilliant and shown almost to best advantage in the dancing numbers when the variety of costumes is displayed.\textsuperscript{335}

\textbf{Women's Wear Daily} also noticed the designer's chance:

This scene [the Mack Sennett ballet] as well as some of the others gave Miles White, who attended to the costumes, a glorious opportunity to revel in the gay but outmoded garb of that period.\textsuperscript{336}

\textbf{Designer's Deserts}

A form of laudatory review critics engaged in during the latter half of the period was delineating the designer's just deserts. The reviewers' projected rewards ran from handshakes and bows through floral tributes to hurrahs and

\textsuperscript{333}George Freedley, \textit{Morning Telegraph}, February 8, 1949.

\textsuperscript{334}Vernon Rice, \textit{Post}, April 1, 1946.

\textsuperscript{335}George Freedley, \textit{Morning Telegraph}, October 11, 1947.

salutes. Certain journalists fell into formulas of routine comment such as "deserves high praise"\(^{337}\) (Lucinda Ballard for I Remember Mama), or "deserves a bouquet"\(^{338}\) (Miles White for Bloomer Girl). Burton Rascoe wished to "bow to Emeline Roche for the costumes"\(^{339}\) of Pick Up Girl and "shake the hand of Mary Percy Schenck for the costumes she has designed"\(^{340}\) for The Next Half Hour. Robert Coleman awarded "a bow from the waist"\(^{341}\) for The Moon Vine to Lucinda Ballard whose costumes for Love Life he felt "merit hurrahs."\(^{342}\) Continuing the form Coleman presented "salutes"\(^{343}\) to Aline Bernstein for The Willow and I, to Motley for A Highland Fling\(^{344}\) and Pygmalion,\(^{345}\) and offered finally "a huge posy"\(^{346}\) to Raoul Pène du Bois" for Lend An Ear. Finally, in 1950, the last year of the study, Coleman suggested: "The settings and costumes by [Stewart] Chaney [for Great To Be Alive] should make him a candidate for one

\(^{337}\)Edgar Price, Brooklyn Citizen, October 20, 1944.
\(^{338}\)Ibid., October 6, 1944.
\(^{339}\)Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, May 4, 1944.
\(^{340}\)Ibid., October 30, 1945.
\(^{341}\)Robert Coleman, Daily Mirror, February 12, 1943.
\(^{342}\)Ibid., October 9, 1948.
\(^{343}\)Ibid., December 11, 1942.
\(^{344}\)Ibid., April 29, 1944.
\(^{345}\)Ibid., December 28, 1945.
\(^{346}\)Ibid., December 17, 1948.
Comparison With Himself

As the individual costume designer's work became known, then, inevitably he was compared with himself, both positively and negatively. A favorite expression in which to couch appreciation of good work was Variety's description of Walter Florell's costumes for the musical Beggar's Holiday as "right out of the top drawer." Lewis Nichols evaluated Mules White's designs for Bloomer Girl as "the contents of the top drawer." The Late George Apley boasted "settings and costumes out of Stewart Chaney's upper drawer."

By negative comparisons critics made clear not only their present disappointment but also something of the standing the designer ordinarily held. In The Stranger George Freedley felt that ". . . Rose Bogdanoff has failed to come up to her usual standards of costuming." The costumes for My Dear Public "by Lucinda Ballard and the settings by Albert Johnson, top-notch artists in their chosen profession,

347 Ibid., March 24, 1950.
349 Lewis Nichols, Times, October 6, 1944.
351 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, January 4, 1945.
are only so-so,"352 according to the Brooklyn Citizen. "And Raoul Pène du Bois, a genuine artist of recognized ability, has designed scenery and costumes that a honky-tonk might not willingly accept,"353 wrote Brooks Atkinson in his review of the musical Heaven On Earth. But Burton Rascoe has paraphrased both Ben Jonson and Lewis Carroll in succeeding sentences to ventilate his disappointment in the designs for Show Boat:

Hitherto I have loved Lucinda Ballard (as a costume designer) this side of idolatry. I think I may be excused if I not only dissemble my love but seem, this morning, to kick her downstairs. For I have never seen such garish preposterous, inappropriate costumes in a musical since "Memphis Bound."354

Recognition of Certain Masters

Upon the occasion of a good piece of work critics singled out certain masters for special praise, or to reaffirm their high standing as designers.

When Maurice Evans revived King Richard II in 1940 with a different cast but using the same production as in 1936 Brooks Atkinson passed on both praise and news of the designer:

David Ffolkes, the young designer, is now Trooper Ffolkes, No. 327,088, of the Royal Scots Greys. While he is faithfully doing martial duty for England, it ought to give him some pleasure to know that his artistic duties for Shakespeare are widely appreciated

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352Edgar Price, Brooklyn Citizen, September 10, 1943.
across the sea. His costumes, particularly for Richard, are brief chronicles of the drama and integral parts of a profoundly engrossing evening in the theatre. 355

Brooks Atkinson again found opportunity for special commendation of a costume specialist in his review of Count Me In:

Irene Sharaff has designed the costumes. For several years she has been imparting gaiety and electricity to musical shows by use of design and color. But what she has done for the musical comedy that arrived at the Ethel Barrymore last evening deserves a prize. It is wonderfully imaginative; it is brilliant and stunning. Miss Sharaff has even discovered how to make Uncle Sam's unobtrusive and eminently practical Army uniform blend into the fantasy of a musical show. 356

Oklahoma! served as the occasion for George Freedley to reaffirm the artistry of Miles White:

Miles White demonstrates that his success with "The Pirate" was no flash in the pan for his costumes are taken from his brightest palette and out of the gaudiest fashion sheets of the turn of the century. They are bright and gay and go far toward setting the mood of the piece. . . . 357

Among the critics George Freedley continued to foster the reputation of the costume specialist. The four following reviews singled out for special attention characteristics and strengths of individual designers. In The Innocent Voyage "Aline Bernstein's costumes have the color and care-

355 Brooks Atkinson, Times, April 2, 1940.

356 Ibid., October 9, 1942.

357 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, April 2, 1943.
fulness which is associated with her name."\textsuperscript{358} For \textit{Happy Birthday} "Lucinda Ballard composed a series of costumes which rates her the first post in the theatre on the distaff side at least."\textsuperscript{359} In \textit{St. Louis Woman} "Lemuel Ayers again covered himself with glory, for his sets and costumes which took the audience's eye over and over again. . . ."\textsuperscript{360} For \textit{Lend An Ear} "Raoul Pène DuBois achieved in his costumes, settings and lighting what all other designers of modern revues and musical comedies on small budgets have been hoping to achieve. His work is a joy."\textsuperscript{361}

Upon rare occasion the critics elevated to first rank a hitherto unnoticed costume designer. John Chapman corroborated the findings of other reviewers of the successful musical \textit{Mexican Hayride}:  

But if I were to pick a star of the show, I would put up in lights the name of Mary Grant. Miss Grant, of whom I'd never heard, designed the Mexican costumes. With money no object she has filled the stage with a succession of dazzling lovely garments which make you feel gay every moment you see them. It is designing at its best, for the costumes make the spirit of the show.\textsuperscript{362}

All the critics recognized one show, \textit{Lute Song} (1946),

\textsuperscript{358}\textit{Ibid.}, November 17, 1943.
\textsuperscript{359}\textit{Ibid.}, November 2, 1946.
\textsuperscript{360}\textit{Ibid.}, April 1, 1946.
\textsuperscript{361}George Freedley, \textit{Morning Telegraph}, December 18, 1948.
as a masterpiece of design by an acknowledged master, Robert Edmond Jones. The divergence in evaluative approaches of even unanimously assenting critics was reminiscent of the blind men feeling the elephant. Of the sixteen reviews of costume ten praised beauty and colour and imagination, marveled at money spent and care in production, and honoured the designer in routine fashion apparently ignorant or uncaring of what the designer had accomplished. The remaining six reviews each exemplified a customary critical viewpoint toward an outstanding design.

George Freedley's review called attention to the unique quality of the design, adding an unusual note on gestative time: "Robert Edmond Jones, after a year's preparation, has wrought such stunning, such magnificent, such provocative costumes, settings, and lighting as have seldom if ever been seen in the modern theatre." 363

Robert Garland's review was written from the Broadway angle—commercially knowledgeable and press agent wise:

For the Robert Edmond Jones who began his illustrious career by dressing up Granville Barker's reproduction of Anatole France's "The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife" has, after three decades, brought that career to a fitting climax by dressing up Michael Myerberg's reproduction of Lao-Tong-Kia's "Pi-Pa-Ki." His scenery, his costumes and his lighting are superb. . . . Pi-Pa-Ki, translated into "Lute Song", is a decorator's show. Robert Edmond Jones's! . . . Michael Myerberg's reproduction . . . is a high, wide and handsome holiday for Robert Edmond Jones. The Great Chance-Taker [the producer]

363 George Freedley, Morning Telegraph, February 8, 1946.
has taken no chance with him. "Lute Song" is $185,000 worth of scenery, lights and costumes. They're wonderful!364

Lewis Nichols prognosticated a possible supremacy for the reputation of the designs, but at the same time pointed out that the visual attributes far outshone the play:

To it has been given a production from which nothing has been spared, with Robert Edmond Jones' designs and costumes setting a mark that will not soon be equaled. . . . In setting in the background, Mr. Jones has done a masterful duty, but the costumes and scenery are alien to the simplicity of the tale. . . . Mr. Jones' settings, costumes and lighting are the heroes of the evening. They are worked out in great detail, each one blending into the other.365

Burton Rascoe indicated points of conflict between story and effects and in so doing emphasized the continuing influence of a star actress even in a masterfully designed production:

. . . And Miss Martin was reduced to begging in a gorgeous white silk gown designed by Valentina. In another number by Valentina she had to sell her hair to give her husband's parents proper burial. Then, in still another Valentina special, she tramped hundreds of miles to the capital, arriving there without a speck of dust, and pretty as a picture.366

George Jean Nathan, after having established the superiority of design in an earlier review, returned to comment, with acid insight into reviewing standards, on objections made by other critics to the leisurely pace and

simple story of Lute Song: "They do not fail to appreciate the vivid coloring of costume so handsomely laid upon it by Robert Edmond Jones, since next to speed they are always most surely fetched by brilliant hues."  

In the important lead sentence, less often devoted to design or designer than to other factors, John Chapman confirmed Robert Edmond Jones' eminent position in stage design:

Visually, "Lute Song" is one of the most exquisite and exciting things I have ever seen upon a stage, and once again Robert Edmond Jones shows he is the first-ranking artist of the contemporary American theatre. ... What life it has throbs in Mr. Jones' magnificent decors and costumes. ... But the great man is Robert Edmond Jones. Whether he is dealing with simple curtains, temple scenes, visions of heaven or earthly pageants, he is a master, and his costumes are no less than superb.  

The body of criticism for Lute Song represented an outstanding tribute to Robert Edmond Jones and the ultimate in journalistic recognition of a costume designer during the period of the study.

VI. COSTUME RELATED TO THE CRITIC HIMSELF

Some of the costume criticism was best understood in the light of the critic himself. Into such a category fell reviews making routine use of descriptive terms, those sporting phrases and devices born of deadline desperation,


the appearance of ambiguities and the presence of self-conscious criticism.

Routine Usage

Discrimination between words and terms wielded validly in a fresh and immediate sense and those whose original meaning had become overused and latterly weakened or misapplied was not always clear. But certain verbal patterns could be recognized as faddishly overworked expressions in evaluating costume. "Sumptuous" and "opulent" stood universally for a description of richness, either of cost or of visual splendor. "Costly" and "splendid" were themselves used widely. The expressions "stunning," "striking," "effective" and "eye-filling" were omnipresent as superlatives. The meaning of "becoming" degenerated even within the period from the idea of enhancing the actor or actress to a routine voicing of general approval; while the frequently heard "handsome," "dazzling," and "magnificent" applied as much to the actor's appearance as to the costumes he wore. The often found approbrium "fetching" sounded impressive but was semantically puzzling in relation to costume. Such routine expressions, some misused and others overworked, could be distinguished from more meaningful criticism by the tests of freshness and clarity.

Desperate Devices

Much of the roughness and apparent carelessness in daily reviews could be explained, if not excused, by the
pressure under which the journalist worked. Critic Ivor Brown shed a bit of light on the reviewer's situation in a magazine article:

Furthermore, if he is working for a daily paper, he has to dash away and write at top speed. That is not an excuse for ignorant or impudent criticism, but it is mentioned as some excuse for slap-dashness. Sometimes speed helps; but sometimes it causes you to write things which you later repent.369

In the rush to meet press deadlines the journalist hit upon various writing devices to expedite his task. One of these was stringing his mentioning of credits along in a series. The conscientious reviewer tried to cover all phases of the production but enumeration ate up writing time and column space. In a really tense writing situation a number of left-over credits might be mentioned in a row in the expendable last paragraph. So the routine reviewer commonly combined set and costume designers in a single mention or praised work of the performer as enhanced by costume. A favorite form of series crediting was linking chorus with clothing. The Brooklyn Citizen described the chorus of Count Me In as "decked out in some of Miss Sharaff's most stunning creations."370 For the chorus of Let Freedom Ring, a musical revue with a limited budget, Burns Mantle noticed that "Paul duPont has made them several sets of attractive

369Ivor Brown, "Dramatic Criticism--Is It Possible?" Theatre Arts, XXIV (November, 1940), 806.

370Edgar Price, Brooklyn Citizen, October 9, 1942.
costumes.  

371 Burns Mantle, Daily News, October 6, 1942.

372 Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, April 1, 1943.

373 Rowland Field, Newark Evening News, October 8, 1948.

374 Alan Branigan, Newark Evening News, November 12, 1945.
expensive and probably out of this world." The hit musical Love Life, with fine costume reviews, evoked from customarily clear-minded Robert Garland only this meaningless grasp at a straw: "... And the costumes of Miss Ballard are a constant comfort." In some instances the desperate measures of a reviewer running out of ideas and of time turned up odd juxtapositions of words and sense, such as that in the following critique of Jackpot: "... But the costumes of Kiviette are not calculated to enhance the pulchritude of the eye-tonic brigade." In a scholarly article on criticism the World-Telegram critic, William Hawkins, called such aberrations "... the erratic or abusive turns of phrase to which exhaustion or boredom may sometimes drive [the] reviewer." Hawkins himself furnished an erratic example in his review of Pygmalion: "Motley's costumes are exclusively pictorial of the period. ..."
Ambiguities

Three kinds of vagaries were found in the group of ambiguous criticism. The first included a simple, probably unwitting, lack of clarity on the writer's part. The meaning of Brooks Atkinson's statement that the costumes for Light Up The Sky "are opulent enough for professional showmanship" was not clear without the added knowledge that the comedy was about theatre people and show business. The same reviewer's comment that the performers in Lysistrata were "attractively costumed in robes, designed to harmonize with Aristophanes' basic idea" telescoped enough separate ideas to defy reception of more than a vague image of the suggested clothing. As frequently happened one critic's puzzling review of As The Girls Go was explicated by another reviewer. Robert Garland's description of the Oleg Cassini costumes as "open faced and stunning" was much more understandable when Richard Watts, Jr., called them "sensational and correctly revealing clothes." A true ambiguity arose when the Christian Science Monitor had this to say about Rebecca:

One opportunity for pictorial contrast was overlooked last evening when Miss Barrymore was posed in a yellow dress sorting yellow flowers near a decoration that was predominantly yellow in tone.

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381 Ibid., October 18, 1946.
The casual reader might accept the comment at face value wondering no more than why "pictorial contrast" should be called for at that spot in the play. The informed reader might consider the criticism valid based on the design principle of contrast, theatrically desirable at that place. Another reader, also knowledgeable, might reject the criticism as ignorant of the design principle of tone on tone and linkage of colour used to achieve harmony, theatrically necessary at that point.

A second vagary represented a widespread confusion of meaning, denotative and connotative, surrounding the words "gaudy" and "garish." The denotative meaning of both gaudy, and garish refers to the idea of attention-getting showiness, usually by lightness and brightness of colour. The connotative quality of garish suggests flash and glare and blatancy, that of gaudy implies ostentation and pretense, rich but without substance. "That is gaudy which is ostentatiously, or tastelessly gay or showy, especially in color; that is garish which is dazzlingly or offensively bright."385 Broadly speaking gaudy presents a positive connotation and garish a pejorative one.

Among the reviews a more regular usage clustered about gaudy. Burton Rascoe approved the costumes for He Who Gets Slapped as "gawdy and circussy."386

385Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1963).
386Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, March 21, 1946.
praised "... some gawdy and gay costumes by Billy Livingston," in the revue *Laffing Room Only*. More cautiously Brooks Atkinson found costumes and scenery for *Seven Lively Arts* "bright, perhaps even gaudy, if there is a distinction." But with obvious reservations Louis Kronenberger reported that the costumes for the musical *A Connecticut Yankee* "are unabashedly gaudy, suggesting that Camelot was more like a circus than a court."389

George Freedley held a definitely negative view of garish. Of the severely criticized musical *The Girl From Nantucket* he wrote: "Lou Eisele's costumes were garish."390 Still using the word in a bad sense Freedley commended Robert Edmond Jones' work on *The Ice Man Cometh*: "... And his costuming just sufficiently garish, though the girls' hair (or wigs) seemed too bright for the tarts they claimed to be."391 That William Hawkins employed the word pejoratively was seen in his critique of the revue *Inside U.S.A.*: "Its scenery and costumes are luxurious and bright without being garish."392

387George Freedley, *Morning Telegraph*, December 26, 1944.


To the contrary Burton Rascoe, who used gaudy in a good sense, did the same with garish in his review of the musical Memphis Bound writing: "... And Lucinda Ballard has costumed it with cute, colorful and garish fabrics."¹³⁹³

But John Chapman confused the issue completely by making a complete reversal of majority usage in praising the costumes by Motley for Carib Song as "properly garish but never gaudy."¹³⁹⁴

A third aspect of ambiguity was intentional and included a deliberate indulgence in the medieval rhetorical device of annominatio—punning. In his review of Bloomer Girl Burton Roscoe was simply enjoying the fun of a good-natured bit of playing with words: "On the credit side, too, there are the costumes by Miles White, who spread himself in the hoopskirt numbers."¹³⁹⁵ Variety's approach to punning in its criticism of Catherine Was Great was, on the other hand, weighed down with innuendo: "As for Miss West's assortment of gowns, they are plentifully ample."¹³⁹⁶ The device was bifurcate, too, in the sense that the single word "ample" served as a fulcrum to balance the double meaning encompassing number of gowns and their dimensions with the allusion to Miss West's figure contained in the clause as a

¹³⁹⁵Burton Rascoe, World-Telegram, October 6, 1944.
¹³⁹⁶Ibee, Variety, August 9, 1944.
whole. Robert Garland's wording in his review of Mr. Barry's Etchings, "Margaret Pemberton . . . knows a fitting costume when she oversees it, . . ." might not have been intended as a play on words. In opposition to the deliberate presence of a double pun was the possibility that an elaborate verbalization on the writer's part turned out to be an unfortunate misjudgment in language.

Self-Conscious Criticism

Finally, there was a kind of criticism that can only be called self-conscious, almost as if the critic for whatever reason was compelled to evaluate by orienting the criteria to himself. A simple example was that of John Chapman's self-involvement in his review of Regina:

". . . And Aline Bernstein's costumes of the year 1900 make me wish I were 49 years younger." The producer and theatre theorist Arthur Hopkins felt strongly about such personal intrusion into reviewing:

And don't use criticism to impress yourself. You haven't any right to it. You, yourself, mean nothing in the matter. You are simply the instrument as we are the instruments. . . .

A different sort of personal involvement in the play's evaluation was seen in a report on The Leading Lady by Ring

Lardner's son, John. After reviewing the set and costumes in general, the critic for the short-lived New York Star continued to say, "... and an expert tells me that the ladies of the play are handsomely gowned by Main." The critic immodestly underrated himself as a judge of women's civil dress, although in this case it was part of the unity of the stage production, while having the temerity to pretend to enough knowledge to criticize other theatrical factors, setting, and costumes not credited to Mainbocher. To classify this criticism as doubtful of its own evaluative faculty was preferred to dubbing it smart-alecky. At any rate the critic's refusal to allow himself the subjective recognition of handsomeness in clothing, whether theatrical or not, established his self-consciousness as a critic.

A less vehemently protested but more obvious confession of critical insecurity was found in the Daily Eagle's review of Anne of the Thousand Days. The reviewer's feeling of inferiority expressed itself in a narrowed scope of experience: "... And the costumes by Motley were superb, in the grand manner known to anybody who ever took English II."  

Whatever the reason for such self-conscious criticism it must differ from critic to individual critic, with the

400 John Lardner, New York Star, October 20, 1948.

play, the varying circumstances, and the reviewer's immediate mood. The deep thought one critic has given to the matter was expressed as follows:

> It is a terrible thing for a reporter to learn that what he writes is reprinted and stashed away in thousands of school libraries all over the country. It makes him self-conscious. The whole lifestream of journalism is the focus of its force on the immediate. It is the best for NOW. . . .

Very seldom did the critic invade the reviews in a personal fashion. When he did the intrusion usually lay at the door of idiosyncrasies of terminology and thought. Infrequently only did a personal remark speak of the critic's sense of insecurity, or of his self-consciousness.

This chapter discussed six large areas of costume criticism, each subdivided into a number of auxiliary sections. The first area consisted of criticism that, assuming the costumes part of a definite production, went on to convey the several attributes of costume for its own sake, its beauty, color, drama, simplicity, and freshness. The second great group of criticism related costumes to other production factors of acting, writing, directing, and producing among others. A small amount of costume criticism pertained to the entertainment of the audience. Another body of criticism encompassed the efforts of the costume designer as a professional. The sixth and last approach to costume evaluation

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was from the personal viewpoint of the reviewer himself, self-conscious criticism.
CHAPTER VI

EVALUATION AND SUMMATION

I seek less to display any theme or thought and more to bring you into the atmosphere of the theme or thought—there to pursue your own flight.

Walt Whitman

At the beginning of the period of this study in 1934, the use of costume which was designed as a theatrical element contributing to the unity of the artistic whole was quite in the minority among methods of procuring costume. Each year a larger percentage of productions on Broadway were credited in the programme as having been costumed by a costume designer. Through the seasons of 1938 to 1942 the productions ran roughly even, as many crediting costume design as those crediting set design only. In the war years of 1942 to 1946, presentations with credits for costume design were double those with costume uncredited. A rapid acceleration took place in postwar years until in the 1949-1950 season all of the productions studied showed a credit for costume design as well as set design in the billing.

The nature of the period itself governed the quiet ascendancy of costume designing. Although a decrease in activity after the depression served to maintain the status quo in the early thirties, Mrs. Paterek's five basic
procedures of costume procurement were tending to merge. Each of them became somewhat modified, all in the direction of the fifth level—costume designed within the setting.

The first level, the use of clothes as costume, was gradually taken out of the unskilled anonymous hand and increasingly entrusted to the costume supervisor, who in the previous period had been an expert buyer but who now was becoming more and more a skilled theatre coordinator. This kind of costuming became known as working on a "found show."

Costume designer Virginia Volland explained:

> The expression refers to the method of obtaining the clothes with which to dress the show. Sometimes, usually for monetary reasons, you must shop for the clothes and buy what you can locate in the stores, rather than have the costumes made to your order.¹

Often the responsibility of procuring modern clothes to carry out the image of the production's total design fell to the designer's technical assistant or to his costume assistant. Sometimes, later in the period, a costume specialist was charged with the designing of a found show. "Ingenuity is one of the prerequisites of the designer of the found show," wrote Mrs. Volland.²

The second procedure, the use of gowns in the sense of contemporary garments constructed specially for a show as costumes, almost disappeared after the first two years of the 1934-1950 period. Thi. did not mean that couturières no

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²Ibid., p. 37.
longer designed for specific stars, but that the gown design became, by consultation with the theatrical designer, part and parcel of the visual whole. The old crediting of "gowns by:" was supplanted by crediting to a set designer plus fashion designer, or set designer plus costume designer plus fashion designer, or set-and-costume designer plus fashion designer.

With the demise of the road and the disappearance of stock companies, the third level, that of representative period-place costumes, was almost entirely enveloped into the fifth procedure.

As musical shows developed into an artistically integrated form, the fourth level of costumes specially constructed for musicals became synonymous with the fifth.

By both dogma and artistic inclination the designer of the new stagecraft was bound to total designing—lights and setting and costumes. At first in the little theatres where the actual physical job was smaller he managed to stick to his belief and his desire. But as the impetus of the new stagecraft grew, the actual task of supervising all three became ever more difficult and the job was split up. Two new theatre artists evolved, the lighting expert and the costume design specialist.

In the first two years of the period of this study, timorous production held to old methods, but as the Federal Theatre boosted theatre activity, actually and spiritually, opportunities for the merging of the costume procedures
appeared. For the very reason of putting more people to work the costume designer was sought out and used separately from the set designer. The workshop system of constructing costume, evolved for the sake of material economy and to make more jobs available, fostered the designer-executor relationship and developed costume technicians. The Federal Theatre's artistic approach of striving for the unified effect, was a framework within which the costume designer's skill was important. The production methods of the several New York units gave the place and prestige of costume designing a boost within the whole. Elsewhere than the Federal Theatre, the cultural boom of the late thirties on Broadway provided conspicuous costume designing opportunities for the growth and development of both the costume designers and their reputations. The beginnings of musical theatre and continuing classic revivals of the early forties augmented the training and the name of the costume designer. The costume designer, then, as an established artist, the costume design specialist, took his place as a member of the producing team on the big musicals of the late forties.

To management's active awareness of costume designing as an elemental factor in the success or failure of a play was added the increasingly knowledgeable recognition of costume designers by the daily dramatic reviewers, and also added was the critical honour of annual awards in costume design.

Throughout the first third of the period studied, as
it had been in the previous one, journalistic criticism of
costume was inconsistent and unperceptive. After 1940, with
the accession of George Freedley to the dramatic desk of the
New York Morning Telegraph, the inclusion of costume criti-
cism in reviews became at first increasingly more frequent,
then a matter of routine, and also, with certain reviewers,
perceptibly better informed.

From 1915 the Pulitzer Committee had honoured the best
American play of the year with a prize. The Drama Critic's
Circle, starting in 1935, offered an annual award for the
best new play written by an American playwright and produced
in New York. In 1944 the Donaldson Awards were established
in memory of W. H. Donaldson (1864-1925), the founder of The
Billboard magazine. Among other areas of theatre both
scenery and costume were honoured. The American Theatre Wing,
in memory of Antoinette Perry, the director-producer, began
presenting the "Tony" in 1947 for costume design among other
theatre arts. Variety publishes each year the results of a
poll taken of drama critics' preferences. Starting in 1939,
the Variety poll judged best actor and actress, and in 1942
added best director and best set designer. Then in 1956
costume design excellence was recognized. The Village Voice,
an off-Broadway newspaper, started the Obie awards in 1955
for specific jobs, including costume design, in off-Broadway
theatre. As early as 1943 and on until 1956, costume design
began to be recognized for its worth as one of the contrib-
uting factors in successful play production, and the
designers honoured by prizes.

A summary of findings fell naturally into two parts. The first conclusion was that a specific job of costume design evolved in the period from 1934-1935 to 1949-1950, and that an artist, the costume design specialist, arose to fill the bill. The second summation embraced the reasons and causes for the occurrence of such a phenomenon in New York at that time.

The situation at the end of the previous period had made no public distinction between setting and costume as aspects of scenic design. The critics so rarely mentioned costume design as to be discounted. Costume design credit was seldom billed on the first programme page; even scene design was often credited after the cast. The practice was for the producer or director to decide on stage clothes, procured from retail establishments, costume houses, or couturiers. Even when Mrs. Paterek's fifth level, that of total designing--creating setting and costume as an artistic unit to fulfill the idea of the production, was operative both billing and review-mention usually recognized the designer only as a setting artist. Early in the period this oversight began to be remedied. Gradually more and more frequently was credit given for costume design, and increasingly often the artist recognized was a different one from the setting designer. The union required billing before the cast as part of contractual agreement, and set up a separate division for the costume design specialist. Although, at
the beginning of the period, few programmes mentioned costume design, before the quarter mark the number of billings for setting alone were equal to those naming both setting and costume credits. By mid era costume billings were rapidly increasing until in the final season of 1949-1950 the programmes of all the plays credited both setting and costume design.

With the acceleration in costume production credits came also a growth in reviewers' recognition of costume design. At the beginning of the period few critics but Brooks Atkinson mention costume and that only rarely under some unusual circumstances. George Freedley's entry into journalistic criticism in the early forties started a new recognition among reviewers of costume design as a production factor and began an awareness of the identity of the artist. The placement in the review rose from the traditional last expendable paragraph for setting and costume, to the prestigious lead sentence, to a secure and accepted main-body position.

Analysis of the quality of costume criticism, wherever it might occur in the hierarchy of the review column, brought to light six major points of departure for evaluating costume design. By far the greater part of all the criticism considered costume as existing for its own sake, and among that criticism colour was the most frequently remarked attribute with beauty a remote second. The next largest amount of criticism was concerned with the relation of
costume to the production itself. In opposition to this group was one apparently negative to costume but in reality projecting dissatisfaction with other production factors. Two far smaller blocks of criticism related the design to its creator, and, much in the minority, involved the reviewer himself in his criticism.

Appreciation of the creative individual was manifest also in the growing number of awards and prizes offered for costume design. Starting with the Donaldson Award in 1943-1944, and adding in 1947-1948 the Tony, costume honours continued to wax in amount beyond the end of the period.

The renascence in visual theatre which sparked the New York stage in the early twenties had fostered and cultivated the idea of wholeness in production. The watchword of the new stagecraft was unity. The designers of the new movement were all by theory and practice total designers, believing that one hand and eye had to design the entire scenic environment in any production. During the days of the little art theatres there was time enough and energy for a single designer to supervise all the visual production, setting and costume and lighting. But as both theory and practitioner became part of the commercial theatre the designers found they could no longer devote the time needed to oversee the final construction details of both set and costume. At first they delegated costume finishing to an assistant but later one designer began to do the whole thing for another until two commensurate artists would be designing,
one setting, and the other costume. Little by little some designers stuck to setting and others opted for costume, and a new job, that of costume design specialist, emerged.

A number of other factors helped to encourage the breakaway of costume design from setting. The practice of the Federal Theatre by which production jobs were split up and more closely defined to make more work for more people increased the trend toward splitting scenic design into setting and costume. And in the latter thirties a wave of classic and costume plays intrigued the New York stage making necessary a designer who could devote full time to costume design and supervision. Then as the new form of the American musical evolved with its strong emphasis on the unifying element of costume, skillful costume design specialists were even more in demand.

Thus, some ten to fifteen years later, costume design finally felt the whiplash impetus the new stagecraft had given the New York theatre, in the appearance and development of the costume design specialist.
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Dissertations


UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL


VITA

Eelin Stewart Harrison was born in New Canaan, Connecticut, on August 28, 1915. She was educated at the Port Bannatyne School, Bute, Scotland, and Public School 16, Staten Island, New York. On the secondary level, she attended Rothesay Academy, Scotland, and Curtis High School, Staten Island, New York. In 1945 Mrs. Stewart Harrison received a bachelor of arts degree from Brooklyn College, and from Louisiana State University in 1946 a master of arts degree. She qualified as a candidate for the doctoral degree at Louisiana State University, spent two years in the drama school at Yale University, and returned to Louisiana State University to complete requirements for the doctorate. Mrs. Stewart Harrison has taught at Brooklyn College, Louisiana State University, Southern Connecticut State College, and the University of Chattanooga. She is now a member of the theatre faculty at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Eelin Stewart Harrison

Major Field: Speech


Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signature]

[Signature]

[Signature]

[Signature]

Date of Examination:

March 19, 1968