

**THEATRICAL DESIGNS BY ROBERT EDMOND JONES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS
OF SELECT RENDERINGS FROM THE TOBIN
COLLECTION OF THEATRE ARTS**

THESIS

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by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband and soul mate, Dr. Donald K. Shaw. His unwavering love and support have made this degree possible. I am forever thankful for his compassion, friendship, and respect.

Further dedication of this thesis is placed at the feet of my hope and joy in life, Jesus Christ.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Philippians 4:13

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“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. [. . .] Robert Edmond Jones always combined these three roles with triple felicity.”

Donald Oenslager (Theatre 131)

Housed in the Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum, the Robert L. B. Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts is comprised of over fourteen thousand artifacts encompassing six centuries of artistic creativity. Included in this collection are nearly one hundred original set and costume designs by Robert Edmond Jones, one of the most renowned and influential designers in American theatre history. Jones infused a European ambiance into existing domestic set and costume design techniques, thus leading the way for the “new stagecraft” and its subsequent incorporation into American theatrical design. Several of his theatre, opera, and ballet drawings reside at the McNay Art Museum located in San Antonio, Texas. Although many of Jones’s artifacts have been carefully studied, others have remained cryptic treasures awaiting examination in the context of their contribution to contemporary theatre history.

Purpose of Collection Documentation

Given the ephemeral nature of theatre, a live performance is lost unless there is an effort to archive the production. If not electronically recorded, scripts, narrative

accounts, reviews, production books, and designs are the only substantial way to chronicle a performance. Narrative accounts and reviews often manifest cultural or historic biases well outside a context matching the reader's own experience and surroundings. This observation appears significant when related to script and production staging with a proper marriage of the two being pivotal to the accuracy and quality of the final product. Study of scene and costume design can magnify a play's intent by enhancing features unique to the era depicted.

Historically, theatrical scene designs have often been neither preserved nor revered for their intrinsic value. Although this is an unfortunate reality, the door remains open for focused investigation in the area of design. One example of further study might be a document presenting the comprehensive records of a collection. As such, it would offer invaluable insight for subsequent in-depth examination of a specific designer's work. The purpose of this thesis is to introduce, emphasize, and provide critical analysis of select Robert Edmond Jones renderings found in the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts at the McNay Art Museum in San Antonio, Texas. Each design has been assigned a catalogue number by the Tobin Collection for identification purposes (TL 0000.00.0). TL denotes the Tobin Library, with the first sequence of numbers (0000) representing the acquisition year, followed by numbers (00) designated by the library. The last series of numbers (0) indicates the order in which a work was originally acquired.

Chapter II presents a brief historical overview of the Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum. Provided in this chapter are select details of Marion Koogler McNay's life, from her early appreciation of fine arts to the founding of the McNay Museum. Chapter III introduces Robert L. B. Tobin and the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts. Highlights of

both his life and his collection are featured. Chapter IV unfolds as an examination of Jones within the context of his works archived at the Tobin. Prominent circumstances affecting the direction of Jones's life and his artistic contributions are featured.

Illustrations of select designs by Jones are presented. Chapter V is a description of all Robert Edmond Jones designs at the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts. Chapter VI concludes the thesis by offering a final, yet focused look at the philosophies, artistry, and goals of Robert Edmond Jones and Robert L.B. Tobin.

CHAPTER II

MARION KOOGLER McNAY ART MUSEUM

“It was [Robert Edmond] Jones who used to say to his classes, ‘Some of you are doomed to be artists.’”

Agnes De Mille (115)

Founded as the first museum of modern art in Texas, the Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum in San Antonio was established to promote “[. . .] the advancement and enjoyment of modern art” (McNay Museum entrance plaque). The Spanish colonial revival style structure is situated on twenty-three acres of lawns and wooded trails surrounded by fountains, streams, and Japanese-style gardens. With an emphasis on American and European art from the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries, the collection also contains medieval and Renaissance works. In addition to the McNay galleries, the museum houses one of the largest theatre arts compilations in the United States, the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts.

Born in 1883, in DeGraff, Ohio, Jessie Marion Koogler was the only child of a local physician and his wife, Dr. and Mrs. Marion Koogler. After a move to El Dorado, Kansas, Dr. Koogler invested in several thousand acres of grazing land; subsequently oil was discovered on the property and the Koogler family fortune was secured. Marion studied art at the University of Kansas and later enrolled in the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1912, she followed her family to Marion, Ohio where her lifelong role as art patron

began in earnest following her appointment as art supervisor for the Marion City School District (Diehl 25).

After her marriage to railroad manager Don Denton McNay in 1917, the couple traveled through San Antonio, Texas before reaching their destination in Laredo, Texas. With the United States' entry into World War I, McNay had recently enlisted in the army. After reporting to his post in Laredo, he was commissioned to Florida before deployment overseas. While in Florida and after only ten months of marriage, McNay died from the influenza epidemic of 1917. Following her husband's death, Marion would marry and divorce four times; she would later retain the name of her first husband, a name by which the museum is known today (Diehl 25).

In 1926, Marion and her third husband, ophthalmologist Dr. Donald Taylor Atkinson, began construction of a home in San Antonio at the intersection of Austin Highway and New Braunfels Avenue. Naming the property "Sunset Hills," Marion commissioned local architects Atlee and Robert Ayres to construct a mansion reflecting the Spanish colonial revival design. In keeping with this architectural style, the home incorporated wrought iron grilles, gates, and lamps, elaborately paneled doors, ceramic tile, and other embellished accoutrements signifying the Atkinson wealth (Burkhalter 19-20). The residence was completed three years later.

The newly built home was the perfect location to showcase Marion's expanding accumulation of art objects, American watercolors, and French impressionist paintings. As a watercolor artist herself, she gravitated toward unstructured art with bold color and form. During her travels to Taos and Santa Fe, New Mexico, she became an ardent Taos Society of Artists supporter. This interest led to a large acquisition of primitive folk art

and crafts from Pueblo Indian artists, including several dozen paintings and sculptures. She later added Rio Grande blankets, ceramics, jewelry, and furniture to her collection.

Given Marion's affection for vibrant hues and abstract design, it follows that her attraction would shift from Native American folk art to artists of the French school of color and composition. Over the next several years her accumulation of neo-impressionist works by Camille Pissarro, Henri Matisse, and the post-impressionist style of Paul Cézanne enhanced her ongoing collection, now reaching museum status. She often augmented her art with the unusual rather than the typical, acquiring works by symbolist Odilon Redon, expressionist Amedeo Modigliani, and cubist Pablo Picasso (Burkhalter 48). The latter, a significant work entitled Guitar and Wine Glass, represents one of the first paper collages and demonstrates Picasso's transition from analytical cubism to synthetic cubism (Rubin 28).

When Marion died at the age of 67, her collected works comprised approximately seven hundred pieces of modern art. By her standards, she regarded this collection as essentially complete when she succumbed in 1950. Following her wishes and with the assistance of the home's original architects, the McNay mansion was converted into a public museum, opening in 1954.

For the next several years, the McNay, like most American art museums of the day, acquired items primarily through gifts. For example, during the remainder of the 1950s, philanthropists Dr. and Mrs. Frederic Oppenheimer bequeathed items of medieval and early Renaissance art which they had amassed over a thirty year period. Known as the Oppenheimer Collection, the works include paintings, which are predominately fragments of altarpieces, and portraits by such artists as Albrecht Bouts, Jan Gossaert

(called Mabuse), the Master of Frankfurt, Taddeo di Bartolo, and Alvise Vivarini (Chiego, Modern 11).

In 1959, community outreach was fostered and expanded by the first membership organization, the Friends of the McNay. The group, whose main function was to raise funds for the purchase of art, began by procuring modern master prints which added to the paintings bequeathed by Marion. By the early 1960s, the museum's operating budget allowed for the addition of two works by modern artists from the Alfred Stieglitz group, Marsden Hartley's Portrait Arrangement and Max Weber's Conversation. Many of the museum's most rare and important print acquisitions continued during the 1960s and 1970's thanks to the efforts of the Friends of the McNay. These include: an etching of Winslow Homer's Eight Bells; Maurice Prendergast's monotype Roma – Flower Stall; Erich Heckel's woodcut Portrait of a Man; Picasso's Etchings Illustrating the Texts of Buffon; and Jasper Johns's Figures '0' – '9'. Private bequests continued into the 1970s with gifts of American paintings from Mary and Sylvan Lang, European works on paper, and modern sculpture. Examples of paintings donated during this period include Edward Hopper's Corn Hill, Georgia O'Keeffe's Leaf Motif #2, and various expressionistic designs of Ben Shahn, Karl Zerbe, and Jackson Pollock. Modern European sculpture given by the Langs consisted of Edgar Degas's Femme se Coiffant (Woman Arranging Her Hair), and Alberto Giacometti's Bust of Annette IV, along with sculptured works by Henri Matisse, Käthe Kollwitz, and Henry Moore (Chiego, Modern 11-13).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the McNay collection grew with such contributions as Jerry Lawson's donation of over one hundred prints from primarily American, Spanish, and French artists. Her donated works contained nineteen pieces

from Jasper Johns, including Decoy II and Ventriloquist; twenty-one Picasso prints; four early and rare impressions by Francisco Goya such as Que Sacrificio! (What a Sacrifice!); four Tahitian color woodcuts by Paul Gauguin; and Henri Ibels's and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's eleven lithographs of Le Café Concert. The museum acquired four Robert Motherwell collages in 1996 which showcased his wide ranging techniques, such as African Collage #1 and Suchard on Orange #5 (Chiego, Modern 16-17). As of 2006, the museum's collection has grown from approximately seven hundred objects in 1954, to over fourteen thousand works of art.

A collection of modern outdoor sculptures surround the grounds, including Cantate Domino by Barbara Hepworth, and Asteriskos, a large scale geometric work by Tony Smith. Two important contemporary sculptures were added in the 1990s with support from the Russell Hill Rogers Fund for the Arts: an untitled, minimalist work by Joel Shapiro which projects from the exterior wall of the Brown Gallery, and a stainless steel kinetic design entitled Horizontal Column of Five Squares Excentric II by George Rickey (Chiego, Modern 17, 126, 201).

As the McNay art collection increased over the years, so too did the physical plant of the museum expand in size and scope. The Brown, Lang, and Frost galleries linked the original mansion into a more cohesive structure, a donation from the Koehler family provided a fountain, and an adjacent esplanade presented an improved entrance into the museum. A gift from Jane and Arthur Stieren offered a new warehouse addition constructed for the permanent collection and for the storage and preparation of traveling exhibitions. The multi-purpose Leeper Auditorium allowed for lectures, concerts, film series, and social functions (Chiego, Modern 14-15). Margaret Batts Tobin supplied

funding for the opening of the Tobin Wing with a two-fold purpose: to house the McNay Art Museum Library and to accommodate the theatre arts collection of her son, Robert L.B. Tobin.

Robert L.B. Tobin had a longstanding relationship with the McNay Museum. Since the museum's inception, his donations not only consisted of theatrical works (which will be discussed in Chapter III), but also contained non-theatrical items as well. In 1999, Tobin made one of the most sizeable gifts in McNay history with a contribution of American paintings. Both modern and contemporary divisions of the museum were bolstered by his offering of over twenty-four works of art. Modernist paintings included Milking Time (Echo Farm, New Hampshire) by William Zorach, Untitled/Moses, a double-sided oil on canvas by James Daugherty, and What I Believe by Paul Cadmus. Paintings by John Storrs, George L.K. Morris, Louis Eilshemius, and Arthur B. Davies were also among the pieces given. Donated contemporary art included four Robert Indiana paintings representing the early days of the Pop Art movement, and landscape works by San Antonio artist César A. Martínez (Chiego, Modern 18). Yet even with these and other gifts by Robert Tobin, the most substantial museum growth came with the opening of the Tobin Wing and with his donation of rare books, as well as scene and costume designs.

CHAPTER III

TOBIN COLLECTION OF THEATRE ARTS

“We live in a world of microfilm and microfiche, but neither of these, nor a reprint, nor a facsimile, can provide the thrill or sensation of using the real thing, of touching the original ...I just want the materials to be available to people. I don't want the collection to be a shrine to myself. I want it to be a living, useful, workable tool - something alive...exciting.”

Robert L.B. Tobin (Newlin 25)

The genesis of businessman and philanthropist Robert Lynn Batts Tobin's passion for theatrics began with a Dallas production of Donizetti's opera La Fille du Régiment. Tobin was six, perhaps seven, when he attended the production with his parents. So enamored was Tobin with what he had seen that he began staging his own operas using an FAO Schwarz toy theatre. By his early teens, he was constructing actual model opera sets. While most boys petitioned for bikes or sports cars, the adolescent Tobin supposedly requested original theatre designs and artists' drawings for his birthdays and graduation (Blake 78-79). From these very meager beginnings, the seeds of what would one day be the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts at the McNay Art Museum were sown.

Born on March 12, 1934 in San Antonio, Texas, Robert Tobin was named in honor of his grandfather, Robert Lynn Batts, who was the Chief Judge of the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, Louisiana. The son of Edgar G. and Margaret Lynn Batts Tobin, he was formally educated at Alamo Heights High School and the University of Texas at Austin. Although he attended the University only one year, Tobin

was active in Kappa Alpha Fraternity (San Antonio Express News 6B). It was during this time he became the object of a frequently related story. While working on a theatre history paper, Tobin asked to see Monumenta Scenica, a rare twelve-volume compendium of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European theatre design. When told undergraduates were not allowed access to the library's rare books, he simply went out and bought a set of his own (Wengrow 64).

Following his father's 1954 airplane-related death, and at the young age of nineteen, Tobin set before himself nineteen specific corporate goals as heir to his father's survey business. It was this goal-driven behavior that built Tobin Surveys Incorporated into the nation's premiere mapmaker for the oil industry (San Antonio Express News 6B).

As Tobin's interest in the fine and performing arts grew, he served as production coordinator for the annual San Antonio Opera. It was here his interest in music and stage performance matured. Tobin himself reflected, "I've been involved in a number of civic affairs – mostly hospital charity and child welfare – and I belong to various clubs, but opera is my first love" (Lingg 13). His affection for opera placed him in frequent contact with many performing luminaries. These contacts, combined with his personal wealth, soon launched him into the world of philanthropy, both nationally and internationally.

Tobin's accolades are numerous and exceed the scope of this thesis. However, a brief list of his activities and honors related to the arts includes: Chairman, Board of Trustees, Marion Koogler McNay Art Museum; President, The Festival Foundation (II Festivale dei Due Monde, Spoleto); Vice President and Member of the Board, American National Opera Company; Trustee, Museum of Modern Art; Member, Executive

Committee Metropolitan Opera; Member, National Business Committee for the Arts; Member, Opera Panel, National Endowment for the Arts; Honorary National Chairman, the Central Opera Service of the Metropolitan Opera National Council; and Cavaliere Ufficiale, Ordine Merito della Repubblica Italiana (Tobin resume).

Tobin was involved with the McNay Museum from its inception. His mother served on the original board of trustees and Tobin himself had become a serious art collector by the age of twenty. By the second year of Museum operation, he was already lending several of his works for public display. During these early years, Tobin became close friends with the Museum's first director, John Palmer Leeper. It was the deep admiration the Tobin family held for the McNay, its leadership and its mission, that prompted Margaret Tobin to give funds for the design and construction of a library wing addition (Chiego, An Eye 87). The purpose of this addition was to house the expansive theatre arts collection amassed over many years by her son.

When the new wing opened in 1984, Tobin gave rare books of scene and costume designs which he had collected since the early 1950's. Contained in the opening's donation was Monumenta Scenica, the twelve-volume compendium Tobin acquired while writing his theatre history paper in college. Among the collection's other holdings are festival books, which describe fifteenth- through nineteenth-century European court coronations, weddings, and political events. Specifics of these court festivals and theatrical performances have been retained via the preservation of costumes and precise descriptive recordings (Blake 15). With a library consisting of floor-to-ceiling shelves, these festival publications, along with illustrated volumes of architectural treatises and costume analyses, comprise the backbone of the Tobin Collection.

Artifacts of Ballet Russes encompass a large section of the collection with nearly six hundred works from this early twentieth-century art form. Established in 1909 by Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev, Ballets Russes was a ballet company whose new and exciting scenic designs became celebrated throughout the world. The company's style was strikingly different from traditional nineteenth-century stock sets and costumes because it incorporated the use of color, line, and ornamental motifs to reveal emotion and theme instead of typical time period and locale. This new and exotic type of decorative design ushered in a sense of fantasy and originality. The influence of Ballet Russes's designers, including such notables as Léon Bakst, Alexandre Benois, Mstislav Dobuzhinsky, and Natalie Gontcharova, was profound, influencing European design immeasurably (Brockett, History 455). The Tobin Collection includes works from all four of these designers, plus additional pieces by Eugène Berman, Pavel Tchelitchev, and Ivan Bilibin.

Tobin had a sincere appreciation for the history of fairs, festivals, and other types of public theatre. Demonstrating the insight he displayed in the acquisition of his Russian ballet designs, he made a further rare 1972 auction purchase of four paintings created for the 1940 World's Fair by Albert Gleizes titled Les Quatres Personnages Lègendaires du Ciel (The Four Legendary Figures of the Sky). Tobin understood their intrinsic value and significance to theatre history and within one year he donated the paintings to the McNay (Chiego, An Eye 84).

Several of the most recognized and distinctive set creations from American musical theatre are represented in the form of scene designs and maquettes¹. The

¹Maquettes are three dimensional scale models of a set as envisioned by the designer.

collection contains Jo Mielziner's opening street scene for A Tree Grows in Brooklyn and a transformation drop for Bali Ha'i in South Pacific; Oliver Smith's designs for West Side Story and Camelot; and William and Jean Eckart's work for Damn Yankees and Mame. Broadway musical maquettes include the Texas Flag Scrim for The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas by Marjorie Kellogg; Boys Bathing Unit for Sunday in the Park with George by Tony Straiges; and a scene from You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown by David Gallo.

A personal friend of pop artist Robert Indiana, Tobin donated Indiana's designs of Virgil Thomson's opera The Mother of Us All, with libretto by Gertrude Stein. Tobin sponsored the opera's updated revival in 1976 by the Santa Fe Opera, which featured a bicentennial procession during the overture. The opera, based on the life of Susan B. Anthony, incorporates elaborate Indiana design pieces. Each work is a strikingly colored paper cutout which presents the stencil-method typography of Indiana's signature style (Blake 68).

Tobin not only had an appreciation for theatre history, but he also had an unwavering respect and understanding for it as well. This is demonstrated in part by his accumulation of works by designer Edward Gordon Craig. Perceiving theatre in visual terms, Craig argued that an audience goes to *see* a play rather than to *hear* a play. His designs favored tall, right angles often incorporating movable fabric screens such as the Tobin owned scene design for a production of Craig's Macbeth. In Craig's handwritten notes, he describes instructions for set construction as, "unbuilt – instead based (sic) on the hair net principle and every line added (in cloth or paper) like a line in pencil - oftentimes one tone – sometimes another" (TL2002.58.2).

One of Craig's most controversial views came by suggesting the actor become as an "ubermarionette," or type of "super puppet" whose movement was symbolic, without ego, allowing for an abstract performance of moving shapes and shifting light. Nowhere is this more evident than the linen-hinged paper on board model he created for a production of Hamlet in which he includes a small figure in profile – further illustrating his concept of the ubermarionette (TL1984.1.1066.1,4). This scale model, along with an exceptional gathering of Craig's books, renderings, manuscripts, notes, prints, and maquettes, are part of the Tobin Collection.

In 1999, one year before his death from cancer, Tobin bequeathed to the McNay his entire collection of American scene and costume designs. This donation included important works by Robert Edmond Jones. With renderings ranging from ballet, opera, and theatre designs, to portraits and shadow puppets, the collection contains nearly one hundred of Jones's compositions.

The Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts is significant as it illustrates, both figuratively and metaphorically, the evolution of the art of scene design. The artifacts encapsulate over six centuries of theatrical design, with the collection expanding each year. One of Robert L.B. Tobin's objectives was that the works be utilized by students, teachers, researchers, and the general public. It was his desire that these pieces should be accessible for study, research, and exhibition. Toward this end, realization of this dream materializes daily thanks to continued public access to the many items of his collection at the McNay Art Museum.

CHAPTER IV

ROBERT EDMOND JONES

“Out of the manifold contacts of my experience the image of a new theatre has gradually formed itself – a theatre not yet made with hands. I look forward to this ideal theatre and work toward it.”

Robert Edmond Jones (Dramatic Preface)

The phrase “set and costumes designed by...,” is often interpreted by the average audience member as referring to someone who merely paints scenery or sketches the actor’s clothing. Many assume that this is the designer’s sole function in a given production. In reality, the role of the designer is layered, multifaceted, and demands involvement in every visual phase of stage presentation. The responsibility of the scene designer is primarily to define and characterize the performance area, with the objectives of scene design being to advance the action, to promote understanding, and to convey particular artistic characteristics of the production (Brockett, Introduction 553). In order to achieve these goals, the script must be read analytically, many times over, searching for any nuances which will direct the scene designer toward the visual requirements of the text. Copious notations are made regarding the type of research required, encompassing such concerns as time period, architectural style, furniture, interior and/or exterior décor, and geographical location.

While the scene designer is concerned with the stage setting in which the actors perform, the costume designer concentrates on the physical appearance of the actors.

Much like the role of scene designer, the costume designer's task involves the challenge of providing additional depth by advancing one's comprehension and interpretation of the production. Through dress, the character's socioeconomic status, occupation, age, and relationship to other characters can often be established (Brockett, Introduction 597-598). Furthermore, both the scene and the costume designer search for indications of the psychological nature of each character; this will help determine selection of clothing, environment, mood, and color. The theatre lighting designer's duty, like those of the scene and costume artists, is to facilitate understanding and to convey the creative values of a production. Lighting may enhance awareness by establishing the time of day and year, weather, and period (i.e., electric versus kerosene lamps, candles). Special effects can be achieved through lighting, along with the establishment of mood, atmosphere, style, and themes (Brockett, Introduction 623). Rare is the individual who possesses the talents to function in all three capacities, as scene, costume, and lighting designer, however, such was the case with Robert Edmond Jones.

Recognized for incorporating a "new stagecraft"² into American theatre, Robert Edmond Jones's design style reflected a clean-lined set and costume construction accompanied by dramatic, yet simple, lighting. Frequently referred to as a simplified realism, this new and innovative method mimicked the European design approach, which was in direct opposition to the heavy, ornate American sets popular during the early

²Toward the close of the nineteenth century, two designers, Adolph Appia (1862-1928) and Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966), rebelled against the elaborate scenic practices of traditional European theatrical companies. Realistic scenery and costumes had led to excessive clutter on stage. Instead of intricate superficial dressing, Appia and Craig moved toward simplicity which conveyed the play's essence. Emotionally rich lighting served to evoke mood and suggestion, placing an emphasis on the language of a production. This unique and innovative European trend became known in America as the "new stagecraft."

1900's. For his first Broadway production, The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife, Jones created a minimal set and costume design that complimented the action of the play. Many historians consider this play to be the defining moment in American theatrical design, moving set staging from ornamental craft to serious art, thus assuring Jones's reputation and title as the "father of American scene design" (Smith 514).

Although much has been written of Robert Edmond Jones as artist and theatrical icon, a search of available resources has revealed a dearth of writing regarding Jones's childhood and early years. The definitive reference devoted to the topic of his youth appears to be the few pages written by Mary Hall Furber in the book, The Theatre of Robert Edmond Jones. He was born to Fred and Emma Jane Jones in an 1810 home built by his great-grandfather in Plumer's Ridge Township, Milton, New Hampshire. In this dwelling, which was formerly a tavern, Emma gave birth to her second child, around noon on December 12, 1887. Jones would always declare with great pride that he was born at the twelfth hour of the twelfth day in the twelfth month (Furber 7-8).

Fred, Jones's father, aspired to attend Harvard like his older brother, though his affection for the 600 acres of land left by his parents was deeply rooted. This fondness for the land inspired Fred to become a farmer. Yet despite the long hours of farming, Fred found time to pursue his passion for reading. A quiet man, now living with a wife and six children (three boys and three girls), he would often search to find a place of silence wherein to peruse the pages of his favorite text. Like Fred, his wife Emma came from a cultured background and was well-educated. A distant relative of Ralph Waldo Emerson, she was an accomplished pianist, having studied at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. Through her work and talent she was provided with an

invitation to further train in Europe. Her mother, however, intervened and forbade her travel to a foreign land. Emma returned from Boston to Plumer's Ridge and subsequently met, fell in love, and married Fred Jones, resulting in a loving union which would last for over sixty years (Furber 9-10).

Surrounded by his father's books, Robert acquired his love of reading by following the role model of the elder Jones. His parents further fostered Robert's artistic endeavors by purchasing for him a violin and by providing him with weekly lessons. His two athletic brothers played baseball or fished after schoolwork and farm chores were completed. In contrast, Robert retired to read, to draw, or to practice playing his violin (Furber 11-12). He was given art supplies very early in life; by the age of nine Robert announced that he would become an artist. Although trained in drawing, he demonstrated an independence in style by rejecting the constraints of patterns and forms. Instead, according to Furber, "He drew airplanes, quantities of wonderful airplanes, when no one in Milton Township had ever seen an airplane. He thought deeply about the pictures he found in his books and he formed his own idea of what an artist did" (Furber 12).

Robert graduated in 1905 from Nute High School. While Fred Jones's dream of enrolling in Harvard University never came to fruition, he saw to it that his son would not miss such an opportunity to attend. In the fall of 1906, Robert, now called Bobby by his friends, left for Harvard on an academic scholarship and became a member of the class of 1910. Surprisingly, he entered university life with the goal of studying mathematics; however, within a couple of years he changed his degree plan to fine arts (McDermott 197).

A movement referred to as the “Harvard Renaissance” coincided with Jones’s undergraduate years. The movement was comprised of a coalition of liberal thinkers who openly opposed the conservative privileged majority. This resulted in a clash between the “Yard” of poorer students housed in Harvard Yard dormitories, and the “Street,” which consisted of wealthy students living in the private clubs on Mt. Auburn Street (Stansell 57-58). After low income students were banned from select social activities and clubs, they established their own organizations and publications, fostering a free and liberal exchange of thought. Given Jones’s socioeconomic background, he gravitated toward up and coming liberal thinkers such as Walter Lippman, John Reed, Kenneth Macgowan, and Hiram K. Moderwell (Yannacci 73).

Jones’s collegiate discovery of theatrical art came not only through his classes, but also through his extracurricular activities as well. Soon after arriving in Cambridge, he began to frequent area theatres and vaudevillian houses, often returning to his dormitory, “to drape sheets over his classmates and to direct them through the lines of *Salomé*” (Furber 13). As a member of Professor Baker’s³ drama class, Jones vied to be one of the “Baker Dozen,” students who the professor handpicked to meet in his home for group discussion. Jones was not “one of the chosen,” however, and would pace outside the Baker home, hoping for inclusion which never came. Baker’s English 47 workshop class instructed students in practice-based theatre education which included

³George Pierce Baker (1866-1935) was an American educator and graduate of Harvard University. While a professor at Radcliffe College, he began teaching the first playwriting class in the United States (which was later offered to Harvard students). Baker began his English 47 workshop class in 1906. He moved to Yale University, where he was instrumental in founding the Yale School of Drama. Among his students were Robert Edmond Jones, Maurine Dallas Watkins, Eugene O’Neill, George Abbott, Sidney Howard, Edward Sheldon, and Stanley McCandless.

playwrighting, and the production basics of scene, costume, and lighting design. The professor also served as sponsor of the Harvard Dramatic Club, where Jones played his violin in the orchestra for their production of The Scarecrow (Yannacci 73-74). His friend Kenneth Macgowan, who served as stage manager, remembers Jones's exhilaration in absorbing all areas of production, stating, "The next thing we knew, he was making up the faces of the actors" (Macgowan, Th Arts 723).

After graduating cum laude in 1910, Jones remained at Harvard for two years, first, as a fine arts graduate student and assistant until 1911, then as a fine arts instructor for an additional year (Larson 53). It was during these important two years that his early exposure to a new type of design manifested in such works as Joseph Urban's⁴ Boston Opera House designs and Livingston Platt's⁵ productions at the independent Toy Theatre of Boston. Jones gained further insight into the principles of stage simplification when he attended a William Butler Yeats lecture on the modern designs of Edward Gordon Craig, and later when he read Craig's book, On the Art of the Theatre (Macgowan,

⁴Joseph Urban (1872-1933) was an Austrian born architect, known for his theatrical designs. He immigrated to the United States in 1912, bringing with him the new school of European design with simplistic sets. Urban was one of the first designers to coordinate colors by using subtle lighting to enhance color schemes. After becoming art director of the Boston Opera House, he moved to New York where he designed productions for Florenz Ziegfeld and the Metropolitan Opera. The color gel "Urban Blue" (Roscolux #81) is named for him.

⁵Livingston Platt (1874-1933?) was an American scene designer. Born in New York, he studied art abroad before returning to America in 1911 to accept a position as set and costume designer for Mrs. Lyman Gale's Toy Theatre in Boston. He shunned current trends of pseudo-realistic settings for more realistic designs. Also a lighting designer, Platt believed that too much detail had the potential of ruining a performance because it distracted attention from the action of the play. Platt disappeared after being detained on morals charges; whether he committed suicide or lived in obscurity has never been determined.

Ed Theatre Journal 136). Additionally, he was an audience to the first American tour of the Abbey Theatre group. In his book The Dramatic Imagination: Reflections and Speculations on the Art of the Theatre, Jones recalls his reaction to the simplified realism of the Irish set:

This setting was very simple [. . .]. Neutral-tinted walls, a fireplace, a door, a window, a table, a few chairs, the red homespun skirts and bare feet of the peasant girls. A fisher's net, perhaps. Nothing more. But through the little window at the back one saw a sky of enchantment. All the poetry of Ireland shone in that little square of light, moody, haunting, full of dreams, calling us to follow on, follow on. . . . By this one gesture of excelling simplicity the setting was enlarged into the region of great theatre art. (75)

These early encounters, along with his educational experiences, helped inspire Jones's interest in, and wonderment of, modern design.

During this time Jones saw two separate noteworthy productions, the ballet Cleopatra starring Gertrude Hoffman in the title role (Erdman 113), and Lillian Russell performing at Keith's Theatre in Boston. Jones sketched a portrait of each of the actresses – renderings that are now part of the Tobin Collection (Hoffman, TL1999.132; Russell, TL1999.133). Interestingly, both drawings are distinctly diverse in style. Russell is drawn in light watercolors emphasizing her zaftig physique. Hoffman is depicted in what can best be described as an “Al Hirschfeld” caricature, so similar in style that this author unconsciously found herself looking for a “Nina” contained within.

After leaving Harvard for New York in 1912, Jones held a succession of small

theatre jobs, such as costume designer for producers Comstock and Gest. Yearning to break free from the restrictions of realistic design, Jones wanted to experience the fresh and exciting production designs firsthand. For Jones to train in this “new stagecraft,” as the European trends were called in America, meant traveling to Europe for study with Craig. Without finances for a trip of this magnitude, he developed “The Robert Edmond Jones Transportation and Development Company,” for which John Reed, Kenneth Macgowan, and other friends took up a collection and contributed to the fund. In the summer of 1913, Jones was in Florence, Italy at the studio door of Gordon Craig (Pendleton 146). Accompanied by a friend who promised to introduce the two, Jones was disappointed when Craig refused to meet with him. Consequently, Jones traveled to Berlin to examine the theatrical experiments of Max Reinhardt, who was manager of the Deutsches Theater and one of Craig’s collaborators. Serving as a type of apprentice under Reinhardt and his designers Ernst Stern and Emil Orlik, Jones beheld evocative and simplistic stage designs and was mesmerized by them. In a scene from Ernst Stern’s Sumurun, the set depicted a shallow “relief” in front of a white background. For Reinhardt’s production of Faust, a single tall church pillar towered about the stage; his version of Hamlet was equally stark (Feinsod, TDR 103). Between his study of Craig’s manuscripts, and his exposure to Reinhardt’s staging techniques, Jones now understood the power of suggestive lighting and how set shapes could produce bold and commanding stage effects. Mysterious lighting to affect moods and plasticity would become a hallmark of Jones’s design. His comprehension of the new stagecraft had taken hold.

While Jones was working on costume and scene designs for The Merchant of Venice, World War I erupted forcing Jones’s return to the United State in 1914.

Returning to New York, he found the appearance of theatre sets in complete opposition to what he had left in Germany. Production designs for the stage were either “three-dimensional box-set realism or the trompe l’oeil illusion of painted flat scenery” (Black 13). Jones argued that throughout stage history, the Greek, the Medieval, and the Elizabethan theatres were practically void of scenery. He maintained that only in dull and lifeless theatrical periods does the focus lie on grand sets. To awaken a set burdened by “things,” he claimed, it must be stripped bare:

It is a truism of theatrical history that stage pictures become important only in periods of low dramatic vitality. Great dramas do not need to be illustrated or explained or embroidered. They need only to be brought to life on the stage. The reason we have had realistic stage “sets” for so long is that few of the dramas of our time have been vital enough to be able to dispense with them. That is the plain truth. Actually the best thing that could happen to our theatre at this moment would be for playwrights and actors and directors to be handed a bare stage on which no scenery could be placed, and then told that they must write and act and direct for this stage. In no time we should have the most exciting theatre in the world.

(Jones, Dramatic 134-135)

In an exhibition formed to showcase theatre art, Jones was hired by the Stage Society of New York to conduct a demonstration of lighting and stage techniques on model sets. This presentation was supplemented by maquettes, photographs of avant-garde European productions, plans, and original renderings, including some of Jones’s The Merchant of Venice drawings intended for Max Reinhardt. Several of these,

including fourteen costume (TL1999.108.1-14) (see fig.1) and eleven scene (TL1999.108.15-25) designs, are part of the Tobin Collection.

The exhibition of Jones's work led the Stage Society of New York to commission him to design sets and costumes for an upcoming Society production of Anatole France's one act play, The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife. Directed by English dramatist Harley Granville-Barker, the show was performed in repertory as a curtain-raiser for George Bernard Shaw's Androcles and the Lion and was the American première of both productions (Pendleton 147).



Fig. 1. Costume design for Antonio from The Merchant of Venice. (TL1999.108.1)*

The 1908 comedy, The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife (hereafter referred to as "Dumb Wife"), portrays a medieval Parisian judge, Leonard Botal, who marries his mute wife Catherine for her beauty and for her sizable dowry. Soon after the wedding, Botal believes Catherine's inability to speak is detrimental to his business and he sets out to find a cure. Following the restoration of her voice, the wife's constant talking enrages her spouse. Botal's answer is to have a doctor make him deaf. Unfortunately, this resolution to the problem is temporary as Catherine is infuriated that he can no longer hear her speak. The play concludes with the madness extending from wife, to husband, then eventually to all the characters, who close the comedic adventure with a silly song and dance.

*Reprinted by permission from the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts at the McNay Art Museum.

Set in the Middle Ages, typical design of the day would have incorporated Gothic architecture, complete with stained glass windows, gargoyles, and heavily ornate tapestries. Director Granville-Barker was clearly not interested in presenting an authentic medieval stage given his instructions to Jones to create a set with only one room, two windows, and a door (Feinsod, TDR 110). Although Jones took on the challenge with exuberance, he did think “outside the box” by drastically departing from playwright France’s original set design. Whereas France’s action is located inside a large room, Jones’s milieu consisted of a street in front of a house façade. Turning the set inside out, he only *suggested* a portion of the main room be seen through a twelve-foot window. Countless properties were required in France’s stage directions; Jones, however, carefully selected only those that would compliment both the play’s action and the abstract design elements. Of the set pieces incorporated (i.e., desk, bookcase, stepladder), most were visible only through the window, giving a further distancing effect from the audience. Completing the stage was a twelve-foot bench beneath the window, a balcony on the left with a door below, and a small window between the large window and door. The stage was shallow, painted primarily in tones of white and shades of gray. Jones framed the windows, balcony, and door in black, which stood in sharp contrast against the stippled grey house wall; the framed asymmetrical outlines of squares and rectangles further contributed to the abstract look of the set. Red was the only striking color used, accentuating the stepladder placed in front of the stark white bookcase in the window. In keeping with the austere feel, the lighting design was purposely flat, utilizing floodlights from the balcony front (Bogusch 417), which only served to emphasize the simplicity of the stage design.

Jones's position on the topic of set design is best described by Jones himself in his book The Dramatic Imagination:

A good scene design should be, not a picture, but an image. Scene-designing is not what most people imagine it is – a branch of interior decorating. There is no more reason for a room on a stage to be a reproduction of an actual room than for an actor who plays the part of Napoleon to be Napoleon [. . .]. Everything that is actual must undergo a strange metamorphosis, a kind of sea-change, before it can become truth in the theatre. [. . .] A setting is not just a beautiful thing, a collection of beautiful things. It is a presence, a mood, a warm wind fanning the drama to flame. It echoes, it enhances, it animates. It is an expectancy, a foreboding, a tension. It says nothing, but it gives everything. (25-26)

In contrast to the near-monochromatic set, costumes were brilliantly colored in bright hues of yellow, orange, red, and purple, skillfully calling attention to the actors and to the action of the play. The designs recognized the medieval time period, however, not through precise details, but rather through simplified form. One of Jones's costume designs for this landmark production, the Footman to Madame de la Bruine (see fig. 2), is part of the Tobin Collection (TL1999.105).

The play opened January 17, 1915, at Wallack's Theatre on Broadway and 30th Street. The producers, the Stage Society of New York, consisted of young, progressive artists (two of whom were Jones's former Harvard classmates) who wished to provoke complacent audiences into viewing theatre in a fresh and more visually evocative way. They clearly succeeded.



Fig. 2. Costume design for the Footman to Madame de la Bruine from The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife. (TL1999.105)*

Reactions to Jones's designs were positive from both critics and audiences alike. Accustomed to extravagantly decorated and cumbersome sets, spectators appeared impressed with the geometric clean-lined simplicity and economical use of space. Jones was able to connect the literal with the abstract, such as the identifiable door and windows with visually pleasing shapes, which viewers understood (Feinsod, TDR 111). Immediately after the play's première and until this day, historians fail to remember France's plot or Granville-Barker's direction, but they readily recall the visual effects of Jones's artistry.

The "new stagecraft," incorporating the design ideas of Appia and Craig, had been presented in America by touring companies such as the 1911 visit by the Abbey Theatre, Reinhardt's 1912 production of Sumurun, and notable Joseph Urban works by the Boston Opera Company (Brockett, History 496). The Dumb Wife, however, became

the first Broadway design to unveil these European trends. While the play marked the historic entry of the new stagecraft by an American, Jones's creations also represented a turning point for theatre in the United States, spurring the outright rejection of realism and naturalism in set, costume, and lighting design, in favor of symbolism, abstraction, and suggestion.

The significance of Jones's work was in its ability to establish a visual milestone for the rejection of realism and naturalism. Yet it was his collaboration with Granville-Barker that laid the foundation for designers to be included and considered as an essential part of a production from the moment of inception. While such acceptance was common in European state-subsidized theatres, the concept was new to America (Henderson 21). Fellow designer and friend Lee Simonson said of Jones, "He was the first to win recognition in this country for the scenic designer as an indispensable collaborator in the interpretation of a script" (Simonson 18). Jones's joint efforts with the director elevated the role of designers to an equal partnership, and thus for the first time ushered in the concept of a "team" approach, winning wide endorsement in the American stage production process.

Attending the first matinee performance of Dumb Wife was a mother and her two teenaged sons. Sitting in the balcony, the family was amazed at the spectacle of the set (Henderson 21). The younger brother would grow up to work as an assistant and as an apprentice to Jones. The fourteen year old boy, named Joseph, would later be known to the world as Jo Mielziner.

The influence of Jones and fellow designers Simonson, Sam Hume, Norman Bel Geddes, and their colleagues, would spawn the next generation of designers, including

Mielziner, Boris Aronson, Oliver Smith, Donald Oenslayer, and Howard Bay (Aronson 4). Although these men possessed their own unique styles, each adhered to the importance of stage simplification, and like Jones and his contemporaries, they wanted to depict the essence of the text through design (Brockett, History 498).

In the summer of 1915, Jones designed sets for the Provincetown Players⁶. The first productions were two one act plays, Suppressed Desires by George Cram “Jig” Cook and Susan Glaspell, and Constancy by Neith Boyce. Lest one should mistakenly assume this group began with grand pecuniary fanfare, it should be noted the productions were presented at Hutchins Hapgood’s home. Jones set the stage, which consisted of using a veranda with the Atlantic Ocean as a backdrop for the first play, then asked audience members to rotate their chairs to face a doorway for the final play (Deutsch, Hanau 7-8). With limited funds, Jones was able to turn “nothing into something,” thereby further reinforcing European examples of simplified realism.

Later in 1915, Jones began a partnership with director Arthur Hopkins, which would become, both economically and artistically, one of the most productive relationships in theatre history (Feinsod, TDR 111). The two men collaborated on The Devil’s Garden by Edith Ellis. Much like Jones’s work for Dumb Wife, the play’s three sets incorporated minimal design, with unadorned walls, limited furniture, and monochromatic color. While Jones could have littered the set with mailbags and envelopes to indicate a post office, he chose to leave the room bare, further illustrating a

⁶The Provincetown Players was an amateur independent theatre company founded in Provincetown, Massachusetts (later moving to New York City). Like many of the “little theatres” of the day, it was a noncommercial entity that was more concerned with promoting artistic achievement than with acquiring financial success. This group, which embraced the innovative European staging techniques, championed experimental theatre and supported young and progressive playwrights such as Eugene O’Neill.

“less is more” concept. As with Dumb Wife, critics and audiences responded enthusiastically and favorably.

Jones and Hopkins believed in the concept of “unconscious projection.” This is in direct contrast to Bertolt Brecht’s alienation effect, which supports a conscious (or critically detached) connection to a play⁷. The designer and director instead sought to eliminate any stage action, accoutrements, scenery, etc., which would divert the conscious or unconscious mind that consistently desires to connect with the performance. Complicated elements (i.e., embellished sets, costumes, or superfluous movement by an actor) only served to distract and hinder a viewer’s understanding of the production (Feinsod, Simple 138). Both Jones and Hopkins aspired to stage simplification through minimalist design.

Jones departed from this model, however, for his first ballet designed in collaboration with Serge Diaghileff and choreographer and dancer Nijinsky in association with the Metropolitan Opera House of New York. Set to the music of Richard Strauss and his tone poem⁸ Till Eulenspiegel, Jones created a single set that could be used interchangeably throughout the ballet (Oenslager, Drawings 13). The Tobin Collection includes one costume (TL1999.118) (see fig. 3) and two scene

⁷The term “alienation effect” or “Verfremdungseffekt,” was coined by German playwright Bertolt Brecht to illustrate the aesthetics of epic theatre. Brecht’s theory had audiences take an active role by forcing them to watch a play critically rather than passively. This was achieved through the technique of “making strange,” or having the stage and events so surprisingly out of the ordinary that it would remove the viewer from the production, prompting critical thinking and questioning. Brecht accomplished this concept in such ways as actors addressing spectators directly; lighting, scene, and costume changes taking place in front of the audience; musical numbers between episodes; and lighting and other stage devices in full audience view.

⁸A tone poem is instrumental music which incorporates a narrative or illustrative element.

(TL1999.119.1-2) designs from this production. (Note: Figure 3 is a chalk and graphite on paper drawing, producing the blurred appearance seen in the reprint.)



Fig. 3. Costume design for Till from Till Eulenspiegel. (TL1999.118)*

Diversion from Jones's typical style makes these pieces especially noteworthy additions to Tobin's collection. The stage was an expressionistic backdrop of Gothic towers and jagged rocks, yet was effectively used in several scenes, such as the interior cathedral setting, and the outdoor hanging sequence. Though not used in the final production, the collection also contains a sketch from Till Eulenspiegel showing a less stark version of the later set background. Costume design seems to be Jones's main focus, with exaggerated ballooned attire for the dancers (see fig. 4).

For the New York City Shakespeare Tercentenary Celebration's presentation of Caliban by the Yellow Sands by Percy Mackaye, Jones was asked to design ten scenes along with interlude costumes (Pendleton 148). The play combined three theatrical



Fig. 4. Scene design from Till Eulenspiegel.
(TL1999.119.1)*

styles: pageantry, contemporary Shakespearean performance, and masque. With attention given to the three-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death, 1,300 amateur or community actors, and 1,200 singers and musicians participated in the performance (Gordon 95-96). When the primary costumer fell ill, Jones stepped in to design and supervise the completion of 1,500 costumes in four weeks (Larson 57). One of his Caliban renderings, a courtier costume design, is found in the Tobin Collection (TL1999.96).

Jones served as designer for an adaptation of Tolstoy's Redemption (The Living Corpse) following his tercentenary activities and productions of The Wild Duck and Hedda Gabler. Another collaborative effort with director Hopkins and starring John Barrymore, Redemption received acclaim for its "utmost simplicity in line and color" (Hansen 139). Three scenes designs from this 1918 play (see fig. 5) are part of the Tobin

Collection (TL1999.110.1-3).



Fig. 5. Scene design from Redemption. (TL1999.110.1)*

While Jones is most recognized for his work as a designer, it should be noted that he was an accomplished director as well. Jones directed and designed several plays after



Fig. 6. Scene design from The Emperor Jones. (TL1999.37)*

he and old friends Eugene O'Neill and Kenneth Macgowan formed The Experimental Theatre, Inc. in 1923. Included in his directorial efforts were O'Neill premieres of Desire Under the Elms, The Fountain, and The Great God Brown. Although Jones did not function as director in his later collaborative efforts with O'Neill, he did create costumes, lighting, and scenery for ten O'Neill

productions during his career (Pendleton 146-185). One scene design (see fig. 6) from the 1924 revival of The Emperor Jones starring Paul Robeson, is housed at the Tobin

(TL1999.37).

The Birthday of the Infanta, a ballet in two scenes by John Alden Carpenter, adapted from the story by Oscar Wilde, was a significant production by Jones. Three costume designs (TL1999.94.1-3) and a scene design (TL1999.95) from this ballet are part of the Tobin Collection. The latter illustrates the palace setting for scene II, the “Hall of the Mirrors” (see fig. 7) where the birthday celebration takes place.

Representing an interior corridor in the mansion, a tall iron gate is placed center stage,



Fig. 7. Scene design for the “Hall of the Mirrors” from The Birthday of the Infanta. (TL1999.35)*

and becomes the set’s central focal piece. Adding to a sense of grandeur are two large mirrors which anchor the gate, joined by enormous candles placed symmetrically on each side of the portal. It is in this scene that the hunchbacked dwarf Pedro sees his reflection and realizes he will never be loved by the Infanta. Jones dressed Pedro in drab green, with the princess and her court in bright red, yellow, rose, and white. Once the Infanta discovers Pedro has died, she lays a red rose on his cheek (Young 4-5).

For Jones, stage simplicity translated not only to sets, costumes, and lighting, but

also to properties. This is elucidated in a 1928 journal article he wrote for Theatre Arts entitled, “The Artist’s Approach to the Theatre,” wherein he provides an example of the effectiveness of this minimalistic idea. Jones recounts how Italian actress Eleanora Duse portrayed Juliet with only one prop, a bouquet of white roses, throughout a production of Romeo and Juliet.

I mingled them with my words, with my gestures, with each attitude of mine. I let one fall at the feet of Romeo when we first met; I strewed the leaves of another on his head from the balcony; and I covered his body with the whole of them in the tomb. (633-34)

Jones enthusiastically applauds Duse’s method of “excelling simplicity” which combined and exalted Juliet’s tragedy of tender passion.

For their first Shakespearean collaboration, Jones and Hopkins opened The Tragedy of Richard III starring John Barrymore in 1920. Jones visualized a set featuring the Tower of London filling the stage, creating a shadowed, looming background. To replicate this look, Jones traveled to England to examine the structure and to study how natural light produced mood changing effects (Feinsod, TDR 112). Overall, his design captured the significant characteristics of the fortress without morphing into an actual reproduction.

In a design approach similar to that provided for Carpenter’s The Birthday of the Infanta, Jones incorporated a centered iron gated entryway built into massive walls which curved into the wings. The tower was visible throughout the play, except for the few moments when his lighting blocked the audience’s view (i.e., a single light fell on Richmond resulting in the tower not being seen). When scene changes were required,

Jones added screens, furniture, and lighting to transform locale and to convey various moods. For example, in the final scene, he backlit a gibbet against a red sky indicating the closing conflict of the play (Oenslager, Drawings 13).

With the tower serving as a permanent background, Jones demonstrated his innovative abilities in creating stage abstraction. In scenes where the tower represented itself, action took place in front of the fortress as if it were a London street. In contrast, when the location was altered by scenic pieces, the vast structure served as both a symbolic reminder of Richard's demonic control and as a foreboding reminder of the play's dark plot (Feinsod, TDR 116). Once again Jones achieved design simplicity with a permanent set and successfully incorporated multi-scene settings for the entire play. His creativity provided the necessary mood which served to unify all subsequent settings. The Tobin Collection contains only one costume design from this production (TL1999.112). It should be noted, however, that of Jones's six Emil Pirchan's Richard III impressions published in Continental Stagecraft, the Tobin owns four (TL1999.113.1-4).

The Tobin Collection contains two scene designs from one of the most recognized sets of Jones's career, that of the 1921 production of Macbeth (TL1999.104.1-2). Produced and directed by Hopkins and starring Lionel Barrymore and Julia Arthur, the play represented Hopkins's and Jones's most daring attempt at absolute abstraction. So daring was this attempt, that Hopkins wrote a New York Times article before the première explaining the designer's expressionistic concept for the production.

“In our interpretation of Macbeth we are seeking to release the radium of Shakespeare from its vessel of tradition. To us it is not a play of Scotland

or warring kings [...] We care nothing about how Inverness may have looked [...] We believe the witches are the evil forces of life, forces that have hovered about for all time. (Hopkins X1)

This trepidation and forewarning was warranted given Jones's unique scene, costumes, and lighting designs. Instead of creating a literal landscape, both men chose to illustrate the uncontrollable evil forces of the human psyche (Feinsod, TDR 118). The stage was presented as a deep, dark, and empty space, complete with black walls and



Fig. 8. Scene design from Macbeth. (TL1999.104.2)*

black flooring. Set and costume color choices used were reminiscent of Jones's limited color palette for Dumb Wife (see fig. 8). The set consisted of suspended gray conical shapes and arches against a black background; costumes were constructed of flowing material, fitting loosely on the actor's bodies in bright primary colors (Macgowan, Macbeth 204).

Three inverted giant silver tragic masks, visible during most of the play, towered

above the stage. Often Jones's lighting kept the masks in shadow, while other times they were prominently illuminated. Yet another technique incorporating the masks is observed in the beginning scene with the three witches. Penetrating lights spilled through the eyes which spotlighted the three, dressed in blood red costumes and wearing the same masks as found featured overhead (Young 5).

The characters' declining mental states were developed visually through the use of strategically positioned arches. These objects were presented as strong and erect at the play's opening, only to become tilted and twisted as the play progressed. Jones further built on this theme by aligning these same arches in military precision at the peak of Macbeth's career, with only a single, grotesquely angled arch remaining for the final scene (Gorelik 200).

Not only were sets and costumes abstract in concept, but so too were the direction choices implemented by Hopkins. In the sleepwalking scene audience members see Lady Macbeth at the far left, long before she glides between the arches for her "true" entrance (Young 5-6). These types of abstractions were new to American audiences, as they had not heretofore been exposed to such a mixture of conceptual elements in professional theatre (Feinsod, Simple 158). Critic and audience reactions were harsh; obviously neither appreciated nor comprehended the extremist revolutionary approach. Although the play failed on Broadway, positive historical interest continues because the designs remain as representative of the new stagecraft (Henderson 54-55). Seen as a production ahead of its time, Donald Oenslager wrote in 1969, "I suspect [if produced] today it might have the success it deserved forty-eight years ago" (Drawings 17).

Jones teamed with Hopkins for a 1922 production of Hamlet, with John

Barrymore starring in the title role. The stage was reminiscent of Richard III's design, with a return to the semi-permanent set which featured a dominant, centered image. The focal point of Hamlet was a series of stairs leading to a twenty-five foot high arch. As seen with the tower in Richard III, the single arch was in view during most of the production, with Jones incorporating various lighting techniques to conceal the arch during different scenes. In keeping with his style, Jones applied his minimalist approach to *suggest* location, using a single grave to establish the cemetery, and a throne to indicate the palace (Feinsod, TDR 116). No scene changes were used, with alterations in lighting utilized to create mood and drawn proscenium curtains to provide background. A further illustration is found in one of this author's favorite Jones designs at the Tobin. Of the two Hamlet scene designs (TL1999.102.1-2) in the collection, one watercolor presents Hamlet, sword behind his back, standing near the shadowed kneeling figure of Claudius with the scene's action materializing in front of the curtain (see fig. 9).



Fig. 9. Scene design from Hamlet. (TL1999.102.2)*

The arch (like the tower in Richard III) was used by Jones in both a literal and abstract sense. While most audiences were receptive, some were perplexed by the permanent set concept. Indeed, after Ophelia's funeral was held in front of the same arch as the court scenes, one critic believed that Ophelia had been "buried in the parlor" (Oenslager, Drawings 14).

In designing Skyscrapers, a second John Alden Carpenter ballet, Jones revealed an ambitious continuation of his expressionistic style. With music composed by Carpenter and choreography undertaken by Samuel Lee, the ballet was produced by the Metropolitan Opera Association in 1926 (Pendleton 164). Of the ballet's five scenes, the Tobin Collection is home to four of Jones's set designs and frequently showcases these drawings in exhibits and printed materials (TL1999.116.1-4). Skyscrapers has little plot, presenting instead the rhythmic movements and sounds of American life during the mechanical era (Borowski 464). Jones incorporated stark vertical and diagonal lines

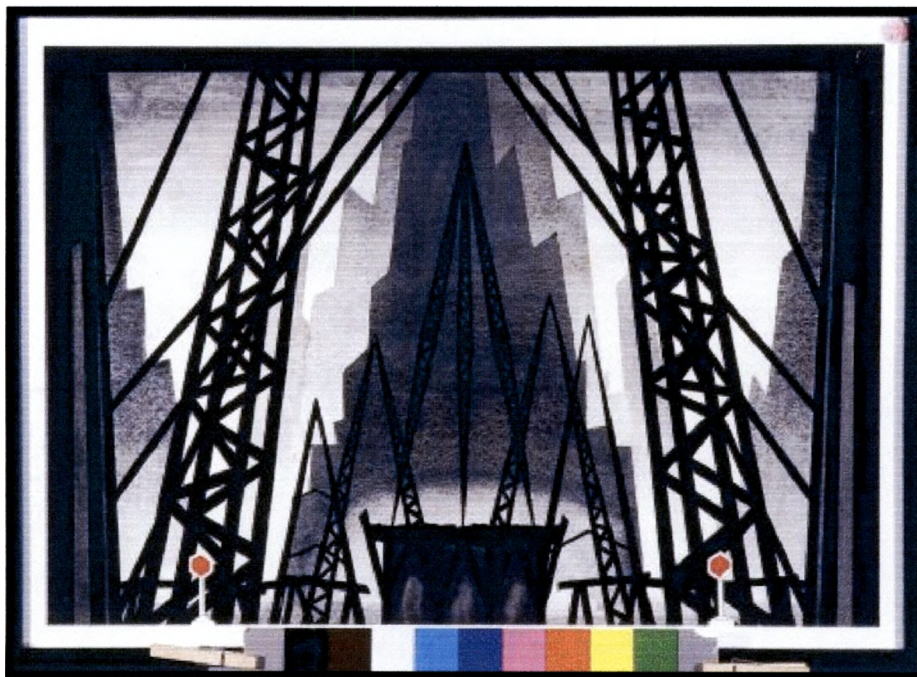


Fig. 10. Scene design for "Steel Girders" from Skyscrapers. (TL1999.116.1)*

flanked by two stop signs to help establish a modern and bustling industrialized city. A distorted skyscraper (see fig. 10) looms as a symbol of the brutal toil of a futuristic style society, depicting the dynamics of Americans at work and at play. His stark “Construction Site” (see fig. 11) stands as an ominous black, white and red skeleton. The



Fig. 11. Scene design for “Construction Site” from Skyscrapers. (TL1999.116.3)*



Fig. 12. Scene design for “Subway” from Skyscrapers. (TL1999.116.4)*

transition from work to play is shown in a stylized Metropolis-like fashion (see fig. 12), while the “Coney Island” set (see fig. 13) is an exaggerated and garish amusement park. With a return-to-work mentality, Skyscrapers concludes as it began, with an equal portrayal of the American trappings of intense work and intense play.

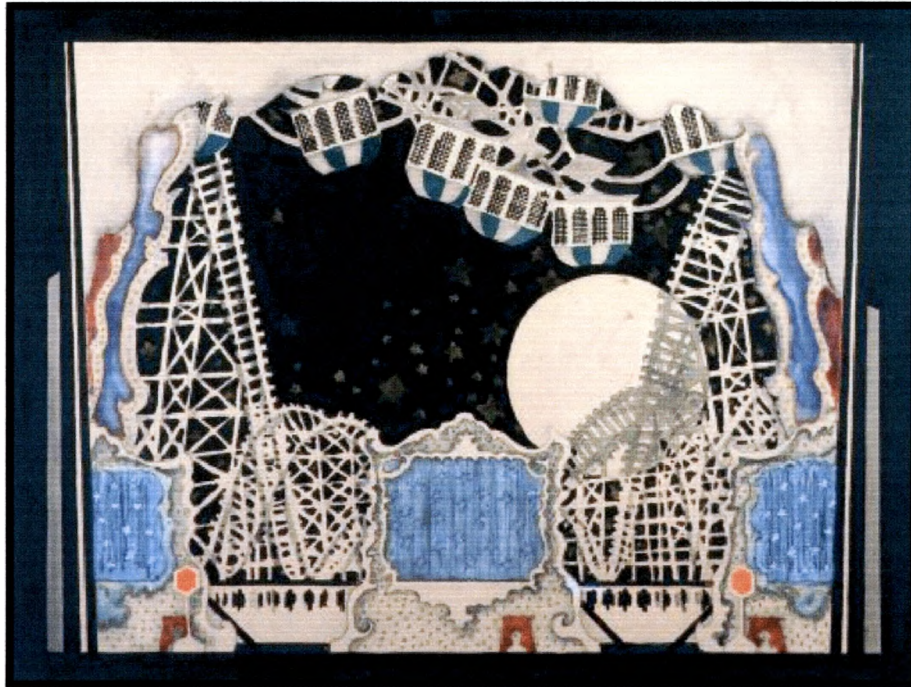


Fig. 13. Scene design for “Coney Island” from Skyscrapers. (TL1999.116.2)*

Jones worked tirelessly on many landmark American theatre, opera, and ballet productions until his death in 1954. With a few exceptions, however, his early years were his most artistically creative. The designs from these years comprise the bulk of Jones’s collection at the Tobin. It is a testament to the insight and tenacity of Robert L.B. Tobin that his collected works of Jones encompass the designer’s most accomplished period of his career.

Among the most noteworthy work in his final years were Jones’s designs for the 1946 production of Lute Song. The large scale musical, directed by John Houseman and

which he always sought to advance and showcase the actors in their portrayals. For scenes depicting inner turmoil in Lute Song, a harsh spotlight was utilized to further intensify the emotion. At other times a gentle luminescent wash was integrated to build on the layering action of the scenes (Oenslager, Theatre 137-138).

With the exception of Jones's work, reviews of Lute Song were lackluster. One critic wrote, "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" (Nichols, NYT 7 Feb. 35). Ten days later this same critic added:

Highest among the play's virtues are the offerings by Mr. Jones, for he has outdone himself. What has come from the easel and the soaring imagination of an artist is easily the most beautiful background given any play in recent years. His colors flow across the stage in an ever-changing pageant which seems to stretch out beyond the confines of the theatre. They swirl with the dancers and add majesty and dignity to the lives they touch. (Nichols, NYT 17 Feb. 47)

In the late 1940s, Jones's health began to fail and he often retreated for recovery to his Milton, New Hampshire childhood home, now owned by his two sisters ("Jones...Dead" NYT 13; Oenslager, Drawings 20). Months after Lute Song premiered, Jones would design the sets for two more O'Neill plays, The Iceman Cometh and A Moon for the Misbegotten. During a 1954 period of recuperation, and while continuing to write and design, he articulated his plans to return to work in New York within one week. On November 26, 1954, however, after spending Thanksgiving Day with family, Jones died in the same house in which he was born (Furber 8).

On what would have been Jones's sixty-seventh birthday (December 12, 1954), a simple memorial service was conducted at the Plymouth Theatre in New York, the site of many of his most successful productions. After introductions provided by Jo Mielziner, various leaders in the world of theatre reminiscenced about their friend and colleague. At the conclusion of the tribute, which featured music from Gluck's opera Orpheus and Eurydice, the Plymouth Theatre curtain was lowered "very, very slowly" (Pendleton 183).

Robert Edmond Jones's life might best be encapsulated in a 1915 letter to his mother. As a result of his groundbreaking designs for Dumb Wife, Jones was excited to be accepted as a member of Arthur Hopkins's production staff. With his career just beginning, theatre represented a pure joy and delight, indefinable as a job or occupation. On the eve of his life in theatre, Jones wrote,

Life has become so wonderful, beyond words. I have so much work to do, I can't possibly do it, all wonderful work, just what I want to do. I wonder how many people have the luxury of living by the work that makes them the happiest and the most content. I want you to be glad because you are going to see me become a real influence on the American theatre. (Furber 13)

CHAPTER V

ROBERT EDMOND JONES DESIGNS AT THE TOBIN COLLECTION OF THEATRE ARTS

"He was the founder of the whole present day tradition of scene design in the United States."

Mordecai Gorelik regarding Robert Edmond Jones (Gorelik, NYT X7)

In presenting Robert Edmond Jones's collected works at the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts, designs are arranged in performance sequence beginning with production title. Available information is elucidated in the format below.

Production Title

Scene or Costume Design

Play, Opera, or Ballet

Date of the Design

Medium Used

Dimensions of the Piece in Inches

Catalogue Number

It should be noted that no date is given on most of Jones's designs. Therefore, in cases where Jones created designs for both the original and revival shows, it is unclear for which production the designs were developed. In these instances, specifically Othello, The Green Pastures, and Caliban by the Yellow Sands, the original and revival dates are provided.

The Merchant of Venice

Costume designs (14)

Play

1914

Graphite, ink, watercolor, and/or
gouache on paper, some with collage

Each approximately 13 ½ x 9 in.

TL1999.108.1-14

The Merchant of Venice

Scene designs (11)

Play

1914

Watercolor and ink on paper

Sizes vary

TL1999.108.15-25

The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife

Costume design

Play

1915

Ink and graphite on paper

11 x 8 ½ in.

TL1999.105

Til Eulenspiegel

Costume design

Ballet

1916

Chalk and graphite on paper

12 ⅝ x 10 in.

TL1999.118

Til Eulenspiegel

Scene designs (2)

Ballet

1916

Ink and watercolor on paper

7 ⅛ x 7 ¼ in.

3 ⅛ x 4 in.

TL1999.119.1-2

Caliban by the Yellow Sands

Costume design

Masque

1916 or 1917

Ink and wash on paper

12 x 9 ⅜ in.

TL1999.96

Redemption (The Living Corpse)

Scene designs (3)

Play

1918

Ink, wash, and gouache on board

Approximately 8 x 20 in. each

TL1999.110.1-3

The Birthday of the Infanta

Costume designs (3)

Ballet

1919

Ink, graphite, and metallic paint on paper
or board

Sizes vary

TL1999.94.1-3

The Birthday of the Infanta

Scene Design

Ballet

1919

Watercolor and ink on paper

10 ⅝ x 15 ¾ in.

TL1999.95

The Tragedy of King Richard III

Costume design

Play

1920

Graphite, watercolor, and metallic paint on
paper

10 ¾ x 8 ½ in.

TL1999.112

Macbeth

Scene designs (2)

Play

1921

Ink and watercolor on paper

6 1/8 x 12 in.

11 x 20 in.

TL1999.104.1-2

Hamlet

Scene designs (2)

Play

1922

Gouache and graphite on board

11 x 14 in. each

1999.102.1-2

The Emperor Jones

Scene design

Play

1924

Watercolor and ink on paper

17 1/2 x 17 1/2 in.

TL1999.37

The Saint

Scene design

Play

1924

Ink and wash with graphite on paper

8 x 10 1/2 in.

TL1999.114

The Last Night of Don Juan

Costume design

Play

1926

Watercolor, ink, and collage on paper

14 1/4 x 11 1/4 in.

TL1999.103

The Fountain

Costume designs (3)

Play

1925

Watercolor, graphite, and collage on paper

Sizes vary

TL1999.99.1-3

Skyscrapers

Scene designs (5)

Ballet

1926

Watercolor, ink, and collage on paper

19 1/4 x 26 1/2 in. each

TL1999.116.1-4

TL2004.1

The Green Pastures

Drop

Play

1930 or 1953

Watercolor, ink, and graphite on board

18 1/2 x 25 1/2 in.

TL1999.101.1

The Green Pastures

Scene design

Play

1930 or 1954

Watercolor, ink, and graphite on board

20 x 15 in.

TL1999.101.2

Othello

Scene designs (2)

Play

1934, 1937, or 1943

Watercolor, ink, and metallic paint on board

11 1/2 x 15 3/4 in.

9 3/4 x 14 1/2 in.

TL1999.103.3-4

Death of Cleopatra

Costume design

Opera

1935

Watercolor, metallic paint, and fabric

20 x 13 in.

TL1999.98

Portrait of Lillian Russell performing at
Keith's Theatre, Boston

1911

Ink, watercolor, and graphite on paper

24 ¼ x 18 ¼ in.

TL1999.133

Lute Song

Scene design

Musical

1946

Ink, watercolor, and graphite on board

20 x 15 in.

TL1999.117

Bach's Mass in B Minor

Scene design

Year unknown

Ink and wash on board

14 x 17 in.

TL1999.93

The Flying Dutchman

Scene designs (2)

Opera

1950

Watercolor and ink on paper

16 x 26 in. each

TL1999.100.1-2

Various productions, possibly including

The Enchanted, Lute Song, and TheMerchant of Venice

Costume designs (9)

Ink, watercolor, and graphite on paper,
some with collage

Various sizes

TL1999.121-128

TL2005.154

Portrait of Gertrude Hoffman as

Cleopatra

Approximately 1911

Ink on paper

14 x 10 in.

TL1999.132

Unknown productions

Scene designs (3)

Ink and watercolor on paper

Various sizes

TL1999.129-131

Shadow Puppet Designs (3)

TL2005.153.1-3

The works noted with two asterisks (**) were designs sketched by Jones during a ten-week, 1922 trip to Europe with friend and colleague Kenneth Macgowan. Attending nearly sixty theatrical performances, the purpose of their travel was to study and to document set design trends of the European stage (Macgowan, CS vii). These

illustrations and impressions of productions were included as plates for the 1922 book Continental Stagecraft, co-authored by Jones and Macgowan. Therefore, these renderings are not the product of Jones's original designs, but are his sketched reproductions of other's work. The original designer and the location of productions are listed below.

****Masse-Mensch**

Scene impressions (2)
Hans Strohbach (Designer)
Berlin, Germany
Play
1922
Crayon, ink and wash with graphite on paper
7 ¼ x 9 ¼ in.
TL1999.107.1-2

****Othello**

Scene impressions (4)
Emil Pirchan (Designer)
Berlin, Germany
Play
1922
Watercolor and ink on paper
6 x 8 in. each
TL1999.109.1-2

****Maria Stuart**

Scene impression
Ludwig Sievert (Designer)
Frankfort, Germany
Play
1922
Gouache and ink on paper
7 ½ x 19 ½ in.
TL1999.106

****Das Rheingold**

Scene impression
August Linnebach, Leo Pasetti
(Designers)
Berlin, Germany
1922
Gouache and ink on paper
7 x 10 in.
TL1999.111

****The Tragedy of King Richard III**

Scene impressions (4)
Emil Pirchan (Designer)
Berlin, Germany
Play
1922
Ink and wash on paper
Approximately 7 x 10 in. each
TL1999.113.1-4

****Samson and Delilah**

Scene impression
Opera
Isaac Grünewald (Designer)
Stockholm, Sweden
Presented by Royal Opera in Stockholm
1922
Gouache, watercolor, and ink on paper
7 ¼ x 8 ½ in.
TL1999.115

****Cirque Medrano**

Impression

No designer/production (see note below)

1922

Ink and wash on paper

5 ¾ x 7 in.

TL1999.97

Note: Continental Stagecraft concludes with the description of the author's project for transforming the Cirque Medrano in Montmartre, France into a theatre in the round, possibly the first stage completely encircled by an audience in modern times.

****Uncle Vanya**

Scene impressions (2)

Play

1922

Ink and wash on paper

Approximately 5 x 6 in. each

TL1999.120.1-2

Note: Although not archived in the Tobin Collection as an impression for Continental Stagecraft, it is this author's opinion through comparison of these two renderings and the renderings on page opp. 124 of CS, that these are indeed impressions made by Jones during his 1922 European theatre trip.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

“The thing that is absent from these records is the thing that never can be recorded, the emotion that these artists aroused in our hearts [...] that in their impersonations they could show us man’s creating spirit, in action, before our eyes. And in the end they put aside the make-up and the vesture and went away into the darkness, leaving us only a few fading photographs and old playbills, and their imperishable memories.”

Robert Edmond Jones (Dramatic 157)

The Robert Edmond Jones compilation at the Tobin Collection of Theatre Arts is a rich and an indispensable resource for stage design study. These pieces represent a pictorial account of Jones’s career, particularly his early years, which in turn chronicle the beginnings of American theatrical design and the new stagecraft movement.

The Tobin Collection contains examples of ninety-five Jones drawings including scene and costume designs, portraits, and shadow puppet renderings in two separate categories. The first category is comprised of impressions made for Continental Stagecraft. This compendium became one of the most influential design books of its day. A second grouping of Jones’s work represents a broad time span beginning with his days at Harvard and ending with the production of one of his last designs, The Flying Dutchman in 1949. Of the numerous Jones items, many preliminary renderings have specific directions inscribed by the designer which are obvious given his distinctive handwriting. Most of Jones’s work is stored in archival boxes, while other designs are matted, framed, and hung on storage walls in the McNay Museum. These pieces are

often awaiting museum display or shipment to exhibitions where the designer's work is featured.

Several costume designs reveal carefully cut material adhered to board or paper, lined-up in precision. Other drawings are devoid of cloth when Jones's preference was to hand paint the fabric instead. In addition, Jones frequently jotted down notes on the working renderings for the wardrobe department, the cutters, the sewers, the finishers, the drapers, and others. Thus, these became more than just simple sketches, since they provided focused instructions useful in final product development. Jones's directions to craftspersons transform these artifacts into more than mere sketches; they represent a record of the symbiotic process of artistic collaboration required for theatrical production success. From this author's perspective, all of Jones's designs emerge as an individual work of art. Several of these appear to be in mint condition and are expertly illustrated, almost as if they had come from the brush of an accomplished painter. Others are brittle, stained, torn and yellowed, which only serves to remind the viewer that they represent real, *working* drawings, not merely artistic vignettes to be looked upon. They are more than sketched images; they are focused instructions, renderings designed to come alive on stage.

A further important feature of these creations is their availability. Found in San Antonio, Texas, the Tobin collection is centrally located in the nation, thereby facilitating accessibility from all geographic regions of the country. Additionally, the McNay makes access to the collection a reasonable undertaking; those desiring to view items not on display may make an appointment for private viewing. Such appointments are encouraged since pieces are often loaned to universities or other museums. This

availability is in keeping with Tobin's wish that the collection be accessible to all sincerely interested individuals and groups.

An unexpected commonality surfaced between Robert Lynn Batts Tobin and Robert Edmond Jones during the course of the present thesis research. For example, not only did both men share a passion for theatre, but they shared a desire to promote further understanding of the designer's role and his/her overall importance to the production. Jones published many articles on theatre design throughout his career and wrote three books: Drawings for the Theatre (1925), The Dramatic Imagination: Reflections and Speculations on the Art of the Theatre (1941), and Continental Stagecraft (1922) with Kenneth Macgowan. In the foreword of the first edition of Drawings for the Theatre (the second edition was published in 1970), Jones poetically enumerates the functions of the designer in working with the dramatist and actor. To this day, Jones's heartfelt The Dramatic Imagination is required reading in many theatre programs, and the book serves to inspire and instruct students and professionals alike.

In the early 1940's, Jones made himself available for public lecture tours including frequent engagements at colleges and universities. These lectures were later chronicled in a text, Towards a New Theatre: The Lectures of Robert Edmond Jones. Contained in this book are two addresses given at Harvard in 1952. However, one of the most memorable and touching moments of Jones's engagements was recorded in an Educational Theatre Journal wherein Jones conducted a question and answer session with a group of high school students from Columbus, Ohio in 1947. Most poignant regarding this event was the earnestness of Jones's answers to questions from children, who were not always the most astute at asking questions of the "father of American scene design."

Jones's responses are a reflection of his love for the profession and his wish to share this passion.

When the Tobin Wing was built to house his collection, Robert Tobin hired librarian Linda Hardberger as the museum's first theatre arts curator. Together they labored over the next several years in organizing exhibits of collection items. Through these exhibitions, Tobin was able to convey his dream to develop museum status for theatre "art." He learned the value of the theatrical designer and sought to elevate them as artists – artists worthy of having their designs next to the works of Picasso, Renoir, and Matisse. In an interview appearing in a San Antonio newspaper weeks before his death, Tobin said, "I have an intense desire to see theatre designers recognized on the same level as visual artists. Theatre designers are artists, not just craftsmen" (Wengrow 60).

Tobin, like Jones, shared a desire to encourage young people in the selection of scene designing as a career. He manifested this desire in one of his last acquisitions obtained before death, seven maquettes from director Tim Burton's film The Nightmare Before Christmas (Blake 89). Tobin wanted children to not only view these models, but he also wanted to inspire them toward a career in scene design.

A final important function of this thesis is its contribution to the organization and cataloging of Jones's designs at the Tobin. Until all of the private and public collections are documented in similar manner, resources will not be available for complete and thorough study of his works. The various Jones collections in museums and archives throughout the world are akin to a mammoth library waiting proper indexing. It is this author's hope that the present thesis addresses, in part, this unfortunate reality and will further facilitate an understanding of Jones's contributions to theatrical design.

Perhaps in summary it is best for Robert L.B. Tobin to provide the thesis's conclusion. In referring to the Tobin Collection he stated,

“Our world is limited only by our imagination, which being quite a lively phenomenon, is a living thing. The collection is not full of ‘books and designs’ but of ‘creations’ which fairly cry out to be seen, used, understood, and above all loved.” (San Antonio Express News 6B)

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