



# Harvard Designers for the Theatre: An Exhibition by the Harvard Theatre Collection, April 16 – August 31, 2002

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# **The Harvard Theatre Collection**

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## **Harvard Designers for the Theatre**

**April 16 through August 31, 2002**

**The Edward Sheldon Exhibition Rooms**

**Nathan Marsh Pusey Library  
Harvard Yard**

# Harvard Designers for the Theatre

Robert Edmond Jones, '10

Lee Simonson, '09

Donald M. Oenslager, '23

David Hays, '52

Edward Gorey, '50

Horace Armistead

Franco Colavecchia

## An Exhibition by The Harvard Theatre Collection

Fredric Woodbridge Wilson, Curator

With the help of

Thomas Garrett

Elizabeth Carroll-Horrocks

Annette Fern

Julia Collins

# Robert Edmond Jones

1887–1954

Harvard Class of 1910

Robert Edmond Jones was born at Milton, New Hampshire, in 1887, and attended Harvard from 1906 to 1910, during which time he took part in George Pierce Baker's influential "47 Workshop," the performance laboratory connected with the English 47 playwriting course. After graduation, Jones sought to work in Florence with Edward Gordon Craig, to whose work and theories he felt much attraction; but he was not accepted by Craig, and instead seized upon an opportunity to work in Berlin with the renowned director Max Reinhardt.

In 1916, Jones designed the décor and costumes for *Til Eulenspiegel*, Nijinsky's last produced ballet; and in 1920, he designed an important production of *Richard III*, starring John Barrymore. Thereafter he embarked upon a long association with Eugene O'Neill and the Provincetown Playhouse, creating the décor for nine of O'Neill's plays. In 1930 he designed Marc Connelly's ground-breaking play, *The Green Pastures*, and in 1943 he designed the famous Margaret Webster production of *Othello*, starring Paul Robeson.

Jones was a lifelong advocate, and the leading representative, of what is known as the New Stagecraft. Fundamental to Jones's approach was a scorn of realism, a strong sense of visual proportion, the reduction of a scene to its essence to heighten dramatic intensity, and the use of light as a dramatic element. He constantly asserted the primacy of the setting — "a stage setting is not a background; it is an environment" — even to the point of the subordination of the play's text to theatrical imagination and experience. His designs, even in their somber, dark hues, and cavernous black expanses, are intensely dramatic and involving.

1

*Camille, The Fate of a Coquette*, adapted from the novel *La Dame aux Camelias* by Alexandre Dumas.



Produced by Delos Chappell at the Morosco Theatre, New York, 1932, adapted for the stage by Robert Edmond Jones and Edna and Delos Chappell.

Original scene design, 1932. Act 4, "The Ballroom at Olympe's."

Black ink and wash touched with opaque white on illustration board.

The Gift of Edna Chappell, 1970.

2

*The Cenci*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Two original scene drawings, ca. 1916. Act 5, Scene 4, "The Hall of the Prison," and Act 4, Scene 2, "Before the Castle of Petrella."

Drawings for the projected publication, *The Cenci*; A Tragedy in Five Acts by Percy Bysshe Shelley. Hillacre Bookhouse, Riverside, Connecticut, 1916.

Black ink and watercolor on paper.

Not titled, signed, or inscribed.

The Gift of Florence H. Wescott, in memory of Ernest Waters Wescott, Class of 1911.

3

*The Green Pastures*, by Marc Connelly.

Produced at the Mansfield Theatre, New York, 1930.

Original scene drawing, 1930. Part 2, Scene 4, "The Prayer of Moses."

Preliminary drawing for the published book displayed below.

Black ink and wash on paper.

Not titled, signed, or inscribed.

The Gift of Elizabeth Jones, 1968. HTC 13,800.

4

*The Green Pastures*, by Marc Connelly.

Printed edition with illustrations by Robert Edmond Jones. Farrar & Rinehart, New

York, 1930.

Large paper edition, copy no. 154 of 550 copies, signed by the author and designer. Copy signed by the cast of the original 1930 production for presentation by the cast to the producer Ethel Gordon, and later signed by the cast of the 1935 revival. Opened to show the finished illustration corresponding to the original preliminary drawing displayed above, Part 2, Scene 4, Moses and Aaron, pp. 110–111. Purchased on the Russel Crouse Fund, 2001.

5

*The Cenci*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley.

Original scene design, ca. 1916. Act 5, Scene 4.

Preliminary dummy for *The Cenci, A Tragedy in Five Acts by Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Hillacre Bookhouse, Riverside, Connecticut, 1916. Introduction and eight drawings by Robert Edmond Jones.

Apparently the edition was never published. The copy shown includes a printed title page, three original drawings by Jones, and two pages of letterpress text. The other pages are blank.

Ink, watercolor, and white gouache on paper.

Purchased on the Robert Gould Shaw Fund, 1969.

6

*The Birthday of the Infanta*, ballet based on a story by Oscar Wilde.

Produced by the Chicago Opera Co., with music by John Alden Carpenter and choreography by Adolph Bolm, starring Ruth Page as the Infanta.

Original scene design, 1920. Scene 2, "The Hall of Mirrors."

Black ink and gray wash touched with red gouache.

The Gift of Lee Simonson, Bequest, 1967.

7

*Richard III*, by Shakespeare.

Produced at the Plymouth Theatre, New York, 1920, starring John Barrymore as Gloucester.

Original scene drawing, 1946. "The Vision of the Crown."

Preliminary sketch for the finished version shown to the right.

Black ink and wash over pencil on illustration board.

Signed "Jones 46."

The Gift of Elizabeth Jones, 1968.

8

*Richard III*, by Shakespeare.

Produced at the Plymouth Theatre, New York, 1920, starring John Barrymore as Gloucester.

Original scene drawing, 1946. "The Vision of the Crown."

Finished version of the sketch shown to the left.

Black ink and pencil on illustration board.

Titled "Richard III. The Vision of the Crown."

Signed "Jones 46."

The Gift of Elizabeth Jones, 1974.

9

*Richard III*, by Shakespeare.

Produced at the Plymouth Theatre, New York, 1920.

Original costume design, 1920. John Barrymore as Gloucester.

Black ink and red gouche over pencil on paper.

Titled "Richard III."

Signed "R. E. J. 1920."

Purchased From the Sale of Duplicates, 1971.  
HTC 3,238.

10

*The Merchant of Venice*, by Shakespeare.

Two original costume designs, ca. 1912. "Bassanio, Gratiano, Solarino, Salanio, and Lorenzo," and "Launcelot Gobbo and Old Gobbo."

Black ink and wash on paper.

The Percy MacKaye Papers, Bequest, 1956.

11

*Til Eulenspiegel*, ballet by Vaslav Nijinsky.

Produced by Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes.

Original scene drawing. "Before the Cathedral."

Executed for the book *Drawings for the Theatre*, 1925.

Black crayon scratched in grattage, ink, gray wash, and white gouache on illustration board.

Not signed. Not inscribed.

The Howard D. Rothschild Collection, Bequest, 1989.

HTC 4,247.

12

*Til Eulenspiegel*, ballet by Vaslav Nijinsky, set to the tone poem by Richard Strauss.

Produced by Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes at the Manhattan Opera House, 1916.

Original costume design, 1916. Bourgeoise.

Pastel over pencil on colored paper.

The Howard D. Rothschild Collection, Bequest, 1989.

HTC 4,245.



13

*Til Eulenspiegel*, ballet by Vaslav Nijinsky, set to the tone poem by Richard Strauss.  
Produced by Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes at the Manhattan Opera House, 1916.

Original costume design, 1916. Vaslav Nijinsky as Til.

Watercolor over pencil, ink background, on paper.

Signed "Jones."

The Howard D. Rothschild Collection, Bequest, 1989.

HTC 4,255.

*Nijinsky was a thing of flame and fantasy, a dizzy personality, blazing and audacious — a whimsy creature, half human, half devil, touched at moments with the humor of Olympian gods ... A wonder world of medieval color and costumes ... An evocation of all that was fantastic and gorgeous about this extraordinary period ... Nijinsky is its center and spirit, giving life to the whole. ... It seems strange to think that I am the only living person who can tell about this ballet which so nearly came into being.*

Robert Edmond Jones, notes for an essay on *Til Eulenspiegel*.

14

*Much Ado About Nothing*, by Shakespeare.

For a projected but unrealized production.

Original costume design, 1925. Beatrice.

Watercolor and gouache over pencil on paper.

Titled "Beatrice (1st Costume)."

The Gift of Elizabeth Jones, 1968.

# Lee Simonson

1888–1967

Harvard Class of 1909

Lee Simonson, like his classmate Robert Edmond Jones, was strongly influenced by George Pierce Baker, and took an active part in the productions of the "47 Workshop." Born in New York City, Simonson settled there again after a period of art study in Paris following graduation from Harvard.

Simonson was one of the founders of the Theatre Guild, in 1919, and for many years he was its principal designer. Among the many Guild productions he designed were Shaw's *Heartbreak House* and *Back to Methuselah*, Molnar's *Liliom*, Rice's *The Adding Machine*, Werfel's *The Goat Song*, O'Neill's *Marco Millions*, *Dynamo*, and *Days Without End*, Anderson's *Elizabeth the Queen*, and Giraudoux's *Amphitryon 38*.

Simonson also designed a number of ballet productions, including notably Prokofiev's Soviet-themed work, *Pas d'Acier*, for Edwin Strawbridge and Leopold Stokowski, and a Ballet Theatre production of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*.

Simonson was at once a visionary innovator and a practical craftsman, and he approached design as an exercise in problem-solving — "My first step in designing almost any production is to find a solution to its technical problems." As a pragmatist, not a theorist like Jones, Simonson's solutions were varied, and, it might be said, tailored to the situation. "A setting is a plan of action" — in one production his plan might tend toward almost photographic realism, in another absolute expressionism, and in yet another to stylistic pastiche.

Although he was trained as a painter, he conceived of stage design in terms of architecture. Like an architect, Simonson constructs a ground plan and then raises the elevation upon that foundation. As a consequence, his archive includes (as have exhibitions of his work) photographs of completed designs, but relatively few renderings.



15

*Le Pas d'Acier (The Steel Step)*, ballet by Serge Prokofiev (Op. 41).

Produced by the Philadelphia Orchestra, choreography by Edwin Strawbridge,  
conducted by Leopold Stokowski.

Original costume design, 1931. Flappers, from the Parade of the Bourgeoisie.

Ink and watercolor over pencil.

Titled "Flappers. Society Buds. Somewhat touched with frost."

Signed "Lee Simonson 1931."

The Gift of Lee Simonson.

16

*Dynamo*, by Eugene O'Neill.

Produced by the Theatre Guild at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York, 1929, directed  
by Philip Moeller.

Original technical drawing, 1929. Set piece, practical dynamo.

Black ink on drafting cloth.

Signed "Lee Simonson."

The Lee Simonson Papers, Bequest, 1967.

*When the curtain rises at the Martin Beck Theatre you see the open faced houses of the Lights and the Fifes. The Lights, quaint creatures, believe in the manly God of their fathers. The Fifes, supposedly atheistic, believe in a female god known as Electricity. ... Perhaps you get the impression that Mr. O'Neill's "Dynamo" irks me. It does. It seems so self-consciously profound, so Provincetownian, so phony ... But for the production which the Theatre Guild has given it I have nothing short of praise. Mr. Simonson's settings are both imaginative and helpful. Even a great American playwright should be thankful for them.*

Robert Garland, New York Telegram.

17

*Dynamo*, by Eugene O'Neill.

Produced by the Theatre Guild at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York, 1929, directed by Philip Moeller.

Production photograph, 1929. Act 3, "The Powerhouse."

Photograph by Vandamm, New York.

Sepia print, 11 by 14 inches.

The Lee Simonson Papers, Bequest, 1967.

18

*Volpone*, by Ben Jonson.

Adaptation by Stefan Zweig produced by the Theatre Guild, 1928, directed by Philip Moeller.

Original costume design, 1928. Mosca.

Ink and watercolor over pencil on paper.

Not titled, signed, or inscribed.

The Gift of Lee Simonson, 1964, through Orville K. Larson, in memory of William B. Van Lennep.

19

*The Road to Rome*, by Robert E. Sherwood.

Produced at the Playhouse Theatre, New York, 1928.

Original costume designs, 1928. "The Carthaginian Generals. Carthalo. Maherbal. Hasdrubal."

Ink and watercolor over pencil on paper.

Signed "Simonson."

The Gift of Lee Simonson.

# Donald M. Oenslager

1898–1975

Harvard Class of 1923

Donald Oenslager was born in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and like Robert Edmond Jones and Lee Simonson a dozen years earlier, he became a disciple of George Pierce Baker at Harvard. When Baker moved to Yale in 1925 to establish the School of Drama, Oenslager joined him to head the design department as Professor of Scenic Design. He remained at Yale for his entire career, all the while designing a seemingly constant series of productions of plays, ballets, musicals, and operas. Over a long and remarkably prolific career, Oenslager designed more than 150 productions, including about 115 in New York City between 1929 and 1974, and many others at Yale University. In fact, some of Oenslager's most imaginative work exists only as projects, no doubt created in the classroom studio, and never realized on the stage.

Well aware of his illustrious predecessors at Harvard, Oenslager followed their path: immediately after graduation, he studied design in Europe; afterward, he worked under Jones and O'Neill at the Provincetown Playhouse. His early productions embraced the New Stagecraft, and introduced angular, stylized designs, the unit set, and the dramatic use of light, including projected scenery. But that Oenslager proved to be a synthesist — influenced by Robert Edmond Jones, and yet unlike Jones in that he attempted to let the design derive from, not drive, the dramatic situation — “to sublimate himself so that the setting may appear to be the expression of the characters in the play.” His working method was more like that of Simonson, thinking architecturally, working from ground plan to elevation to rendering.

And like both Jones and Simonson, Oenslager published important treatises on his art, some of them illustrated with designs from his own extensive collection.

20

*Egmont*, by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

Projected but unrealized production.

Original scene design, 1949. "Egmont's Execution."

Gouache, mounted in the artist's frame.

Not titled, signed, or inscribed.

The Gift of Donald M. Oenslager.

21

*Dido and Æneas*, opera by Henry Purcell.

Produced at the Yale University Theatre, 1953.

Original scene design, 1953. "Dido's Throne."

Collage with watercolor and ink, layered with raised proscenium.

Not titled, signed, or inscribed.

The Gift of Donald M. Oenslager, 1959.

22

*The Soldier's Tale (L'Histoire du Soldat)*, musical drama composed by Igor Stravinsky.

Produced by the New York League of Composers, directed by Michio Ito,  
choreographed by Jacques Cartier. The American première, 1928.

Original costume design, 1928. The Devil.

Watercolor on paper, outlined in yellow, highlighted in silver appliqué.

Not titled, signed, or inscribed.

The Gift of Donald Oenslager, in memory of William B. Van Lennep, 1963. HTC  
13,800.

23

*Prometheus Bound*, by Æschylus.

Translation by Edith Hamilton produced by the Yale University Department of Drama  
at the Yale University Theatre, New Haven, 1939, directed by Constance Welch.



Original scene design, 1939. "Choral Lamentation."

Watercolor and ink on paper.

The Gift of Donald M. Oenslager, 1959.

24

*Antigone*, by Jean Anouilh.

Produced by the American Shakespeare Festival, Stratford, Connecticut, 1967, directed by Jerome Kilty.

Original scene design, 1967. "The Palace."

Watercolor and brown ink over pencil, mounted in the artist's frame.

Not titled, signed, or inscribed.

The Gift of Donald M. Oenslager, 1969.

25

*Brand*, by Henrik Ibsen.

Produced by the Department of Drama, Yale University, New Haven, 1928, directed by George Pierce Baker.

Original scene design, 1923. "The New Church."

Black crayon scratched in grattage, ink, gray wash, and white gouache on illustration board.

Signed "DMO '23."

The John Mason Brown Papers, Bequest, 1969.

*Since the signature indicates distinctly the date 1923, it is likely that this design was executed as a project, several years earlier than the Yale production. It seems clear, however, that it was employed in the 1928 production.*

*The grattage technique used by Oenslager in this design is similar to that employed by Jones in many of his published designs.*

26

*The Lady From the Sea*, by Henrik Ibsen.

Produced at the Little Theatre, New York, 1934.

Original scene design, 1934.

Ink and watercolor on paper.

Not titled, signed, or inscribed.

The Gift of Donald M. Oenslager, 1938.



## Other Designers

27

Franco Colavecchia (b. 1937).

*Treemonisha*, ragtime opera by Scott Joplin.

Produced by the Houston Grand Opera, 1974, orchestrated and conducted by Gunther Schuller.

Original scene design, 1974. Act 2, "Bears' Frolic."

Colored inks and watercolor on paper.

Titled "Sketch for Treemonisha Joplin Bears Frolick Act II."

Signed "Colavecchia '74."

The Gift of Franco Colavecchia, 2001.

*Franco Colavecchia was a consulting designer for the Loeb Drama Center from 1970 to 1972. The Theatre Collection has an extensive archive of his work consisting of more than 200 designs and models.*

28

Edward Gorey (1925–2000, Class of 1950).

*Dracula*, by Bram Stoker, adapted by John Balderston and Hamilton Deane.

Produced and designed by Edward Gorey, directed by Dennis Rosa, at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York, 1977.

Printed poster, signed copy, 1977.

Gorey received a Tony Award for costumes for this production.

Copy signed (in ink, lower right) "Edward Gorey."

Purchased on the William Morris Hunt Fund, 2001.

29

Horace Armistead (1898–1980).

*Love's Labour's Lost*, by Shakespeare, directed by George Hamlin.

Produced by Daniel Seltzer for the Harvard Summer School Players, Loeb Drama Center, 1964, as part of the tercentenary Shakespeare Festival.

Original scene design, 1964.

Watercolor and colored inks on illustration board.

Titled "Love's Labour's Lost. Directed by George Hamlin."

Signed "HA."

The Gift of Horace Armistead.

*Horace Armistead was a consulting designer for the Loeb Drama Center. The Theatre Collection has an archive of his work consisting of some 275 designs.*

30

David Hays (b. 1930, Class of 1952).

*All the Way Home*, by Tad Mosel, based on the novel *A Death in the Family*, by James Agee.

Produced at the Belasco Theatre, New York, 1960. Directed by Arthur Penn. Scenic design and lighting by David Hays.

Original scene design, 1960.

Watercolor, gouache, and ink over pencil on illustration board.

Titled "All the Way Home — Rough."

Signed "David Hays. 1960."

The Gift of David Hays, 1972.

## Theatre Collection Holdings

In a pioneering exhibition organized by the Harvard Theatre Collection and held at the Fogg Art Museum in 1950, more than 200 designs by Robert Edmond Jones, Lee Simonson, and Donald M. Oenslager were shown — all of them borrowed, since at that time the Theatre Collection owned no original works by any of these artists.

Since that time, the Theatre Collection has received a collection of Jones's designs given by his classmate Lee Simonson, as well an archive of Jones's papers, pencil sketches, and renderings given by his sister, Elizabeth Jones. Several other acquisitions — including the papers of the critic and writer John Mason Brown and the collection on the Ballets Russes formed by Howard D. Rothschild — have also included designs by Jones. The Theatre Collection has also purchased a number of Jones's works, most recently (in 2001) a costume design for Nijinsky's ballet *Til Eulenspiegel*.

Donald M. Oenslager has donated more than a dozen fine designs, and other examples have been given by other donors or purchased by the Theatre Collection. In particular, he donated three large panels (not included in this exhibition) upon which the production designs of Henry James's *Washington Square*, from sketches to renderings, are mounted.

Lee Simonson gave the Theatre Collection his large collection of designs by Robert Edmond Jones, and, late in life, as he retired, his friend Orville Larson realized the artist's intention of donating his own archive of designs and papers to the Theatre Collection. The remainder of his archive was left to the Theatre Collection by bequest.

Lee Simonson donated a set of portfolios containing several hundred original designs and large production photographs, as well as an extensive archive of technical drawings and working papers.

In addition, the Theatre Collection has collateral material — including photographs, programs, and clippings — for nearly all of their productions.

## Theater In and Around Harvard University

Through the entire twentieth century, and since even before, Harvard has been renowned as the home of an active student-produced, student-directed, student-performed theater community, whose productions range from the classics to original plays written by undergraduates. Through this period the Hasty Pudding Club (the sole survivor among Harvard's several nineteenth-century theatrical clubs) has also produced its annual extravaganzas, written and performed by undergraduates. Each year more than one hundred student productions take place in the undergraduate houses, theaters, outdoor spaces, and many other locations throughout the college.

Around Harvard at various times, other producing organizations flourished in Cambridge, always having Harvard alumni or faculty at their core, but organized outside of the University's official purview. Among these were the Poets' Theatre, an influential association formed to promote verse drama; the Brattle Theatre, an adventurous company in the mold of the Provincetown Playhouse; and the Cambridge Drama Festival, which sponsored original productions of classics as well as touring productions. Among the early designers for the Poets' Theatre was Edward Gorey; designers for the Brattle Theatre included Horace Armistead and Robert O'Hearn.

In 1960, the new Loeb Drama Center opened on Brattle Street as a long-anticipated locus of student theater, with two innovative houses (the versatile Mainstage and the black-box Experimental Theatre) and ample workshop and administrative space. For student-run, student-performed productions there, a permanent staff of supporting professional designers, technicians, and administrators was engaged. Among these designers were Horace Armistead, Donald Soulé, and Franco Colavecchia. In 1980, management of the Loeb was turned over to the American Repertory Theatre, a professional theater company resident at Harvard, whose staff has continued to work with and advise undergraduates, especially for productions taking place on the Loeb Drama Center stages.



*Revised May 5, 2002*