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Faking it: Costume Design for the Theatre
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List of Illustrations

Introduction

The fantasy world of theatre has played a major part in the history and culture of every race. Men, women and children have an inherent desire to dress up and play fantasy roles, whether it is to glorify kings, to re-live battle scenes or to indulge the meandering mind of a playwright. Theatre satisfies a need. Theatre provides an escape from a mundane existence, even if it is only temporarily. It can entertain and relax. It can make us weep or laugh. Theatre can bring us inside the life of another or back in time to events long past.

And it all seems so real. One forgets that a theatre production is crafted and controlled. It is used as a tool to stir up our emotions. According to Rosemary Ingham:

> Plays are both more than life and less than life.
> Even when a play seems most realistic...
> it is not like life but life-like.
> (Ingham, 1992,p.51)

In keeping with this idea I will attempt to get inside the world of theatre costuming and find out what is really going on. Is a theatre production a slice of life or is there a lot more going on behind the scenes?

My first task was to approach the various theatres around Dublin. The most welcoming response I received was from the superb wardrobe staff at the Gate Theatre, Parnell Square. The Gate Theatre was founded in 1928 by Hilton Edwards and Michael MacLiammóir and is internationally renowned as one of the most adventurous and far-sighted playhouses in Europe. Even today, the Gate continues to receive invitations to tour from leading theatres and festivals throughout the world. Most recently, the Beckett Festival met

Ill. 1   Joy Gleeson, Wardrobe Supervisor (left) and Jacqueline
Kobler, Wardrobe Assistant (right), at the Gate Theatre.

with international acclaim when it was presented in August at the Lincoln Centre Festival '96, New York.

So, with thanks to wardrobe supervisor Joy Gleeson, and her assistant, Jacqueline Kobler [Ill.1] I was able to study costumes and designs drawings of the recent production of Charles Dickens' "A Tale of Two Cities". The play was adapted for the stage by Hugh Leonard and directed by Alan Stanford and ran from the fifth of December 1996 to the eight of February 1997 inclusive. The play is set in the years just prior to and during the French Revolution and the action takes place in England and France. The Cast of seventeen included several well known Irish actors such as Stephen Brennan and Britta Smith.

The costumes and set were designed by Austrian Bruno Schwengl, best known for his designs for opera and ballet such as Teatro La Fenice, Venice; Teatro Dell'Opera, Rome; Santa Fé Opera Festival and Los Angeles Music Centre Opera. His previous work for the Gate includes set and costume design for "Present Laughter", "Pride and Prejudice", "The Picture of Dorian Gray" and "Great Expectations".

Chapter 1
The Role of Costume in Theatre

Ill. 2 Actor Bill Golding as the banker "Jarvis Lorry" in "A Tale of Two Cities.

It could be argued that costume is an unnecessary indulgence by the actor, serving only to flatter his own ego. Would not the script, together with the action, be enough to execute the plot? Perhaps, if the plot was the chief concern of the spectacle. Theatre is, however, a celebration of both verbal and visual elements. As such, costume is an essential factor in a successful production. Costume is used as a means to enhance the particular characteristics of the play and the personalities within it.

"A character is often seen before he is heard"
(Prisk, 1966, p.1)

As soon as an actor appears on stage at least an element of his character is established. Costume is the necessary key which establishes among other things; age, personality, social status, period and location. A theatrical costume becomes a visual extension of the actor and the character being portrayed. Costume establishes an atmosphere, a definite mood. The single most important factor, especially in the opening scenes of the play, is the overall silhouette of the costume. This serves to set a specific time and place and the audience, hopefully, will immediately identify with it and the character involved.

When the curtain rises on "A Tale of Two Cities" the first character we see is that of the banker, "Jarvis Lorry" [Ill. 2]. He is dressed in a three-piece suit consisting of a high-buttoned waistcoat, knee-length breeches and a knee-length frock coat. The trousers are buttoned at the knees and the coat, although it has buttons all down the front, is left open. He wears black stockings and buckled shoes with a one inch heel. His shirt has ruffles on the cuffs and is tied, scarf-like, at the neck. The final addition is a wig. The

Ill. 3   A servant girl .

Ill. 4   Actress Gwynne McElveen as "Lucie Manette".

Ill. 5   "Madame Sériziat und einer ihrer Sö", 1975, Jacques-Louis David, Paris, Musée National du Louvre; used as period reference for the costume of "Lucie Manette".

period of the play is, therefore, clearly identifiable as being eighteenth century.

The costumes worn by the extras in a production also play an important part in establishing period and place. As their role is purely visual their costumes are their only form of communication and as such speaks volumes about their circumstances. We can see an example of this in [Ill. 3]. A servant girl in clothes typical of the period, especially with the addition of a mob cap. It is also obvious that she is of servant status by the wearing of a apron and also by the untidy and unpressed look of her attire.

Detailing is a very important feature in period costuming. It is usually accepted by the audience as being historically correct. However, close examination generally reveals that this is not always the case. Even the most accurately recreated period costume will be subject to contemporary considerations and current taste. For example, an actual Greek tunic from the seventh century B.C. would not be the same as a nineteen-nineties' recreation of the same style of tunic. The untrained eye, however, could very well perceive it as being accurate. Looking at the costume for the character "Lucie Manette" in "A Tale of Two Cities" [Ill. 4] and designer Bruno Schwengl's period reference [Ill. 5] we can see how he has kept the overall silhouette but changed some of the details according to contemporary ideas of taste. The fissue around the neck is simpler and the skirt is not as full as the original. The waistline has been lowered and flattened and the large bow has been discarded.

This is done in order to appeal to our modern view of what is considered beautiful. Also, the costume designer must give careful consideration to

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Ill. 6   Actor Stephen Brennan as
lawyer "Sydney Carton".

Ill. 7   Actor Stephen Brennan as "Syd".

what has been successful down through many years of theatre costuming. Sometimes, this may be in direct opposition to a designer's desire for historical accuracy. There are, however, certain signals to which an audience will instinctively respond. Even a frill, a ruffle or a certain trimming can evoke a reaction from an audience.

Costume is also used to disguise the appearance of the actor. Masks are used to obliterate all personal identity. Make-up and wigs are also used to disguise. Stage make-up can be very effective when suggesting age or harsh social conditions. Even the simple act of changing an actor's hair colour can change his appearance considerably. False moustaches, beards and even glasses are simple ways to change a face. Take, for example, the two characters from "A Tale of Two Cities" - "Sydney Carton" and "Syd". "Sydney Carton" seen here in [Ill. 6] is a respectable lawyer and is finely dressed in suitable attire; three-piece suit, lawyer's robe and wig and shiny black shoes. Compare this to "Syd" the grave robber in [Ill. 7]. Both characters are played by one Stephen Brennan. They look completely different, however, due to effective use of costume. "Syd's" costume comprises of a grey dishevelled three-piece suit, grey stockings and dirty brown shoes. He wears a long black cloak thrown over one shoulder and a long grey wig. His chest is bare. To complete his crazy appearance his teeth have been blackened and his left hand has been hidden up his sleeve so that it looks as though it has been chopped off. This shows just how effective a good disguise can be. It is possible to use the same actor for two parts in the one production, without the audience realising it.

Costume can also disguise body shape by adding padding or by corseting areas. Good costume can even disguise the sex of the actor: In Shakespearean times it was usual for young boys to play the necessary female roles. This form of role reversal can be found in today's theatre in comic plays or in pantomime. It has been the tradition in pantomime that the male characters are played by female actors and the female characters or "ugly dames" are played by men. This is made quite obvious to the audience to induce laughter.

We must not overlook the effect that the costume has on the actor himself. Indeed, an actor dressed as a pantomime dame would feel quite differently if he were dressed as a period gentleman. The costume must evoke feelings within an actor as soon as he puts it on. The costume must do more than simply represent the character, it must embody the very essence of the part. In the words of American actress, Anne Baxter:

> An actor's costume does far more than clothe the actor.
> It becomes the peculiar carapace, or even second skin,
> into which one climbs and, as one does so, feels a character quicken.
> (Lewis, 1990, p.3).

Indeed, the wearing of costume clothing will affect every movement of the actor. His whole posture will be affected. The style of shoe importantly determines the very way in which he walks across the stage. All the male actors in "A Tale of Two Cities" wear shoes with a one inch heel. This not only gives them the look of the period, but also gives them the characteristic walk. Also, uneven shoes can be used to give an actor a crooked walk. An actor wearing a hooped underskirt will move quite differently to one who is wearing a modern day dress. An actor often has to practice moving in these

sort of understructures. When women wore corsets their bodies were held rigidly and they sat in stiff, upright positions. An actor will notice the limitations of body movements as soon as he puts on a costume of this sort. The weight of the costume is also important. Sometimes, to accentuate a character who is weighed down by life's burdens the costume is also weighed down. Thus the actor is unable to feel anything but burdened as he drags himself across the stage. This only happens, however, where required. For the most part, an actor should be comfortable in his costume if he is to be comfortable in the role. It is also essential that there is enough freedom in the costume to allow for any necessary physical action.

The unity of a production is very important and costume plays a major part in establishing this. It is essential that the costume designer considers all of the costumes as a unit and not just as separate designs. It is important that the costumes relate both to each other and to the stage sets. It is therefore necessary that the costume designer and set designer work closely together, especially during the initial stages of a production. To create mood and period, the set and costume must have common elements which tell the same story.

In "A Tale of Two Cities" both costumes and set were designed by Bruno Schwengl and as such they work very well as a unit. Both costume and set designs are quite simple, but yet very effective. Only elements necessary for the production have been included. Unfortunately, due to the fact that no photography is allowed during performances, I was unable to get photographs of the set. In brief, the set consists of two long tables and some chairs. The tables are moved around the stage and draped with different

Ill. 8 Actor Michael Devaney as "Charles Darnay".

Ill. 9 Actor John Kavanagh as "Barsad".

cloths during the different scenes. Therefore, the tables perform many 'roles' during the production. The tables form the banker's office, the French wine tavern, the lawyer's office, the judge's bench and even the bed on which the "Marquis de St. Evremond" is slain. Only two backdrops are used throughout the entire play; a plain blue cloth for the first act and a plain red cloth for the duration of the second act. The switch from blue to red cloth at the beginning of the second act prepares us for the oncoming bloodshed with the onset of the French Revolution. The use of colour is a very simple, yet very effective, device often employed by costume designers.

Just as costume can unite a cast it can also be used to separate certain characters from each other. By changing a character's costume slightly, it is possible to make that character stand out more than the rest of the cast. A character's costume could be more exaggerated than that of the others; a large skirt being that bit larger, a top hat being slightly taller or perhaps more brightly coloured. The audience will respond subconsciously to even small differences and as such will be able to distinguish the characters from each other. In "A Tale of Two Cities" we can see how this has been used to separate "Mr. Darnay" [Ill. 8] and the spy "Barsad" [Ill. 9]. "Mr. Darnay's" bright, noble personality has been reflected in his costume which is a blue-grey colour. He wears a clean white shirt and is often seen with his jacket off, which displays more of his beautiful, bright white sleeves. His hair is tied back neatly. "Barsad", on the other hand, is always seen with his knee-length black coat. He is a dark figure. Although, he too wears a white shirt, only collar and cuffs are visible to the audience, and they do not appear to be very clean. His hair is untidy and his beard unshaven. His clothes are

twisted and wrinkled and, along with his crooked walk, reflect his evil and twisted character.

Direct references are often made to clothing in the text of a play. It is essential that these are strictly adhered to. If the costuming does not match the text it can result in ludicrous confusion. When the actor is not given appropriate costuming he is put in conflict with the text, the time, the attitude and the very essence of the play. Without traditional costuming some plays would completely lose both their meaning and their message. For example, take this excerpt from "Hamlet":

> Lord Hamlet, with his doublet all unbraced,
> No hat upon his head; his stockings fouled
> Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankle
> Pale as his shirt.

In this instance it is important that the correct costume is provided as the text refers specifically to certain garments. In "A Tale of Two Cities" we see how Miss Pross, refusing to remember Mr. Jarvis Lorry's name, continually refers to him as:

> "you in brown"
> (Leonard, 1996, "A Tale of Two Cities".)

It is, therefore, obvious that if the play is to make any sense he must be dressed "in brown" [Ill. 2] and there cannot be too many other characters in brown. In this play, he is the only one wearing brown at all. The costume must always be in tune with the script and fulfil the playwright's dramatic statements.

Costume must also serve to enrich the actor's performance and not distract from it. It cannot be so obvious that the acting goes unnoticed. Costume must be invisible, as it were, because as soon as the audience see

costume *as* costume the play becomes a farce. Therefore, ridiculous or outlandish costuming should be avoided unless called for by the script.

Nudity is another "costume" which should be avoided. Often used on the stage for its shock value, complete nudity does, however, totally distract the audience and the plot becomes insignificant. The suggestion of nudity is often used to better advantage. Mere unlacing of a woman's stays can often be more erotic than a completely naked body, and is much less of a distraction.

Costume performs many functions. Costume alone can denote age, social status, race and religion. Even modern clothes tell a story when seen on stage. According to Anne Hollander:

> "Ordinary clothes automatically become extraordinary on stage or screen". (Hollander, 1978, p.239).

Costume is, therefore, a key component in all theatre productions. It performs many roles and each of these roles unite to deliver the core message of the play. The character's garments do not serve just to mask the actors, but reflect the lifestyle of the character, his habits, background and culture.

Chapter 2
Simulating Fabrics

The choice of fabric for a costume is an important consideration for a costume designer. Most people have a preconceived idea of the meaning of certain fabrics. Many fabrics have established a status down through the ages and this cannot be ignored by the designer. The mere inclusion of velvet or silk will suggest royalty or affluence. Rough cotton suggests a poor lifestyle or harsh social conditions. Brocades are associated with period costuming while stretch fabrics and bright colours give a modern look to a performance. Often certain fabrics are called for by the script. However, as most costume designers are given only a small budget, it is often not possible to purchase expensive fabrics. In such cases, in order to achieve the desired feeling in a costume, it is necessary to simulate the fabrics. Many cheaper fabrics can be just as effective as their more expensive lookalikes when under stage lighting conditions. Sometimes fabrics must be simulated if the fabric no longer exists.

Some designers actually prefer to work entirely with simulated fabrics and, in recent times, there has been an increasing tendency by costumiers to move away from conventional fabrics. This can be particularly effective when costuming a well-known play and can add much to the attraction of the particular production. A play can have a completely different feel when different costumes are used, even if the script remains exactly the same.

Sometimes the obvious choice for a substitute fabric may not be the best choice. Modern manmade fabrics are best avoided if the costumes are to appear realistic. Modern satins, velvets and taffetas lack depth when viewed under stage lighting and serve only to give a feeling of pantomime as apposed to authenticity of period.

To realistically recreate or simulate a desired fabric the actual properties of the fabric in question must be taken into account. Costume leather, for example, will not work convincingly if it looks exactly like leather on the surface, but it drapes like chiffon. To simulate fabric successfully it is necessary to categorise fabric qualities under two heading; drape quality and surface quality.

The first category, namely drape quality, considers the hang or fall of a fabric. Some fabrics, such as muslin, chiffon or silk crepe, fall and hang in soft folds. Others, such as buckram, crinoline and taffeta are less fluid by far, and have a tendency to hang in sharp, angular folds.

The other factor in determining the choice of fabric for a garment is surface quality. This can be categorised as being dull, shiny, textured or glittery. The dull fabrics are those with little or no reflective quality, such as wool or cotton. Shiny fabrics such as satin have a smooth surface and reflect light. Textured fabric refers to any fabric with an uneven surface quality and glittery fabric has a metallic thread content. Thus, as the costumier begins to think of substitute fabrics the above factors will determine the choice and will have to be adhered to if the costume is to be successful.

Leather is one fabric which is almost always simulated, as it is quite expensive to buy. A good way to represent heavy leather garments is to use thick floor felt and treat the surface by rubbing it hard all over with moist soap and then painting or spraying it to give age and texture. Another option is to spray the felt with shellac which has been thinned with alcohol. This is the more permanent of the two, but the shellac does have a tendency to stiffen the felt considerably.
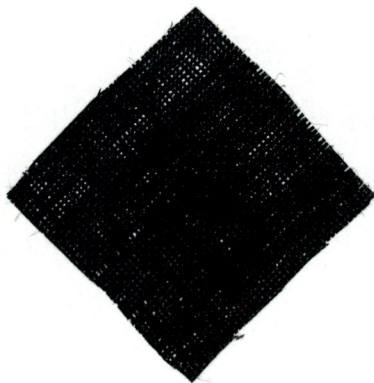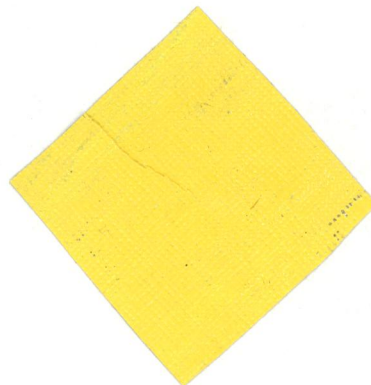
Ill. 10 Actor David O'Brien as the "Prosecutor"

Ill. 12 Actress Claudia Boyle as the "Seamstress"

Ill. 11 Leather substitute; black Holland linen painted with acrylic paint.

Ill. 13 Glazed cotton substitute; natural Holland linen painted with acrylic paint.

In costuming "A Tale of Two Cities" Bruno Schwegl has used black Holland linen to great effect as a leather substitute [Ill. 10 & 11]. Here, the linen has been painted with acrylic paint and as such has a sheen very similar to that of actual leather. It is also very similar in weight to a clothing leather and as such drapes in a very similar fashion. As the designer was uncontactible, I am unsure as to why he chose leather as his main fabric for the production as it is not a typical eighteenth century fabric. It was increasingly popular, towards the end of the century, for its workmanlike qualities and perhaps this is why it was chosen.

To simulate **glazed cotton**, the fashionable fabric for women's dresses at the end of the eighteenth century, he has again used Holland linen. This time, it is used in its natural colour and is painted in bright colours [Ill. 12 & 13]. Therefore, I will assume that he simply chose to use one fabric for all the costumes and that the leather look was purely an end result and not an actual decision. This a good example of how the colour of the base fabric will affect the end results of a costume even if it is treated in a similar fashion.

To simulate **patent leather**, oil-cloth is an excellent substitute in both surface quality and drape.

The usual substitute for **fine brocades** is upholstery fabrics of the sort sold in most average fabric shops. These are excellent as they are wide in relation to dress fabrics and come in a huge variety of colours and patterns. The designer must be careful, however, that the pattern on the fabric works in harmony with the costume and period of the play. Sometimes, upholstery fabrics carry very modern designs. Another way to simulate brocade is to

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stencil the design onto your chosen fabric. English/American costume design partnership "Motley" used this idea to simulate brocade for a production of "Hamlet". The fabric they used was one of the cheapest of all fabrics, scenery canvass. (Motley, 1964, p.75)

For chain-mail effect, the garments can be effectively knitted or crocheted into the required shape and then either dip-dyed or sprayed with metallic car paint. This has two advantages in that it is convincing to look at but it is light and comfortable to wear.

Velvet is another expensive fabric which is often required for stage costume. This is because through the ages velvet has become synonymous with the royal court. Due to its high cost, however, a cheaper substitute is often required, the most common choice being velveteen. Under the right circumstances, velveteen can give a fairly convincing imitation, although, being made of cotton, it does lack the "body" of genuine velvet. Interlining usually solves the problem. One advantage of velveteen is that it is sold in a wide variety of colours and will dye very well if needs be. Also, it reacts splendidly under stage lighting.

Another surprising substitute for velvet is corduroy. It is surprising because corduroy fabric has a pile which is woven into ridges and therefore has its own unique surface quality. These ridges, however, are only visible up close and give a very convincing imitation velvet from an audience's point of view. Also, the drape of corduroy is more like period velvet than any of the modern velvets readily available and as such gives a more realistic feel to period garments such as coats, waistcoats and floor-length capes. It must be noted, however, that most stage lighting will turn anything but

Ill. 14 Taffeta substitute; dressing-gown of dyed curtain fabric.

Ill. 15 Wool substitute; military-style jacket of painted calico.

genuine black velvet to a murky grey. If a pure black is required, the genuine article must be used.

The aristocrat of fabrics, namely **silk**, is another difficult one to imitate but also often called for in period costuming. The best substitute is rayon taffeta which has a moderate sheen and is available in several different weightings. It is very important, however, to chose carefully as the wrong weight or shine could induce a look of "fancy dress".

Taffeta itself, however, is still an expensive fabric and as such it is often simulated. In "A Tale of Two Cities" , curtain fabric has been used as a substitute for taffeta in the dressing gown for the character "Sydney Carton" [Ill. 14]. Here, it has been dyed blue and with the addition of expensive-looking tassels on the belt, it looks quite convincing from the audience's position.

Often, genuine fabrics look completely different from an audience's point of view. Colours tend to change under stage lighting. For this reason, it is suggested that off-white fabrics make a more convincing "white" on stage. Unbleached muslin or calico is often used. This can be seen in the dress of the "seamstress" [Ill. 12]. The natural colour of the Holland linen comes through in certain areas to give the fabric more depth.

To simulate wool, any different type of cotton may be used. Cotton flannel and Terry cloth are two types commonly used. It is important, however, to back such fabrics with some sort of stiffening or heavy lining to give the garment the right weight. Calico is used as substitute wool in the military-style jacket worn by "Vengeance". It has been painted roughly with dry acrylic paint [Ill. 15]. This also helps to add weight to the fabric as much
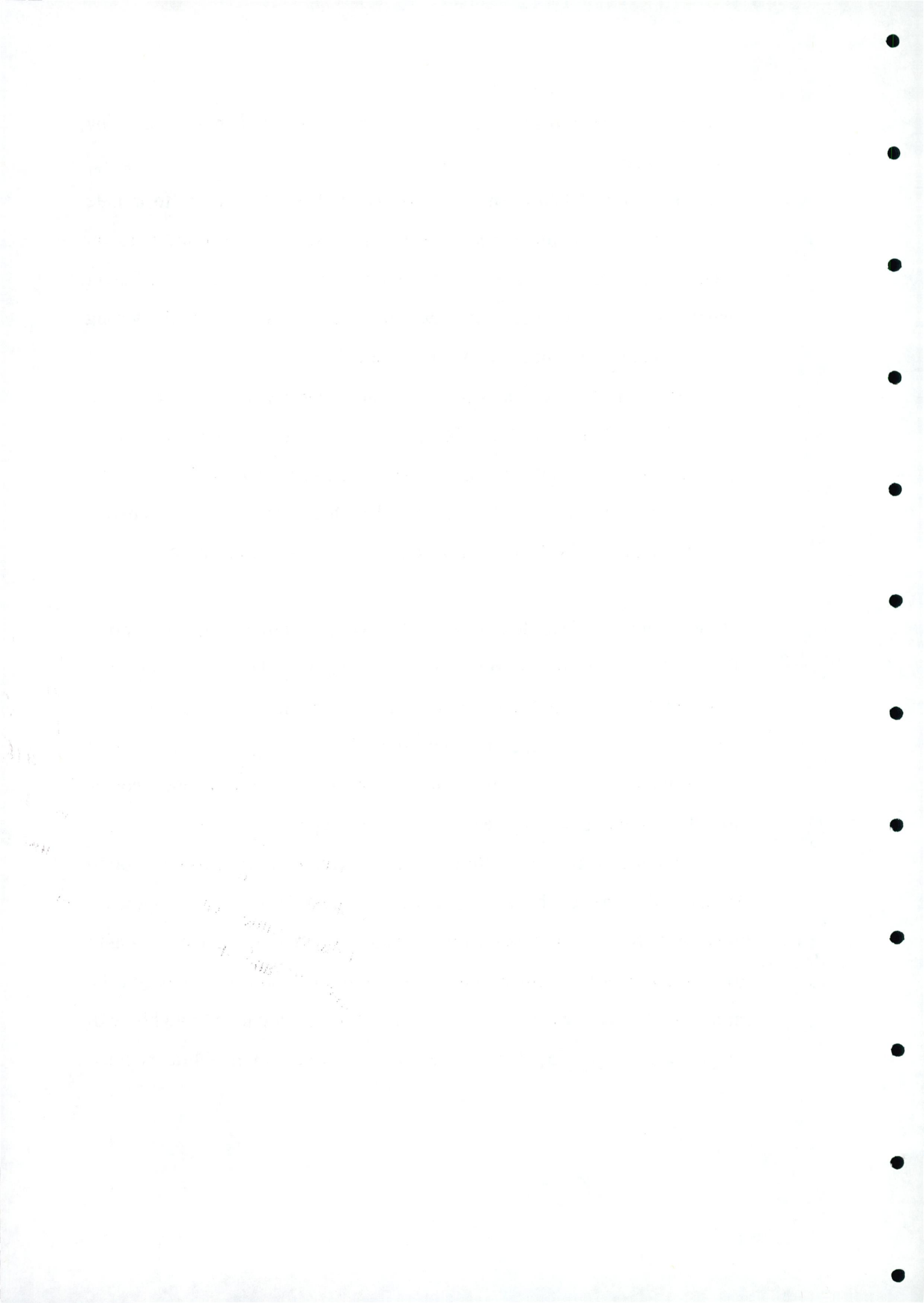
of the paint remains on the surface and does not soak in. Also, by using dry paint the look is softer and works very convincingly as fine quality wool.

When simulating fabrics for a production, it is important to experiment with many different fabrics. Often, cheaper or poorer quality fabrics can provide very exciting results when dyed, sprayed or painted with different types of medium. It is important to keep an open mind as often fabrics will take on a new life when it is put under stage lighting. Also, it must be remembered that none of the costumes will be viewed at a close range and as such it is the effect from a distance that it truly important.

Chapter 3
Ageing and Distressing Fabric

A large percentage of modern productions, particularly period plays, require aged or worn looking costumes. This is the job of the costumier, who must achieve this look, often starting from scratch with brand new fabrics. This is called "distressing" or "breaking down" fabrics. There are standard techniques which have been developed over the years, many of which have been borrowed from the techniques employed by scene painters. It is, however, up to the costumier to use his or her imagination when it comes to ageing garments. Anything can be used if it helps to create the right look for a production.

There are varying degrees of the ageing process. It must be remembered that when distressing fabric sometimes less is more (Ageing does not reverse easily!). It is a job that must be done slowly if the costume is to be successful. In reality, garments age over a period of several years and this must be appreciated when ageing a costume for a production. A garment can be slightly aged and given a "lived-in" appearance or you can go to the other extreme (which is often required) and completely destroy the shape and fabric of the garment. It is essential that the desired result is discussed in advance with the designer.

Everyday wear and tear of a garment can be suggested by washing it several times or perhaps by getting it dry cleaned and not well pressed. This will get rid of all the sharp creases, giving a lived-in feeling.

To age it a little more, the critical areas of wear and shine - namely the elbows and knees, buttonholes and buttons, pockets, collars, hems and cuffs - must be looked at. To "create" shine, the area can be rubbed with

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Ill. 16 Close-up view of distressed Holland linen.

Ill. 17 Actress Britta Smith
as "Mme. Defarge".

Ill. 18 Actress Marion O'Dwyer
as "Miss Pross".

candlewax or with a bar of soap which has been dampened with water. This gives a worn look for elbows and knees.

A cheesegrater or sandpaper is used to wear away clean hems and cuffs and around buttonholes. For more advanced fraying a wire brush can be useful. After fraying, the area can be sponged with show polish or paint to simulate ingrained soil.

"Mme. Defarge's" dress in "A Tale of Two Cities" [Ill. 16] has been crumpled and rubbed hard all over to give it a worn look. This intense rubbing causes the paint to wear away in certain places and in other areas gives a cracked, creased effect. Darker paint was then applied and rubbed off to give the dress that overall worn look [Ill. 17]. To complete the look, she wears an untidy wig and a mob cap. The result is very effective and does a lot to establish "Mme. Defarge's" character.

The character, "Miss Pross" [Ill. 18], also wears a similar red dress but, to distinguish between the two, hers is well pressed and spotlessly clean. Thus, their opposite lifestyles are apparent from their clothes, even before they utter a word.

To give an aged garment a completely lived-in feel it is necessary to simulate sagging, as the whole silhouette of a garment will change through wear and tear. This is achieved by putting rocks or other heavy objects into the pockets and elbows, knees and trouser bums. The fabric is then steamed to loosen the weave and left to dry naturally.

Buttons and shoe buckles, as in those of "Mr. Jarvis Lorry" in "A Tale of Two Cities [Ill. 2] have to be dulled. This is done by sanding them down and then painting with a matt emulsion.

Ill. 19 Distressed trousers; note the uneven hems.

If even more distressing is required, the fabric can be completely attacked with whatever is available. It can be scrubbed with a wire brush and scraped with a file. Holes can be created with a file or alternatively can be punctured with a scissors. Slashes can be made with a blade or a knife. These will look natural and will be more convincing than those cut with a scissors. Straight cuts have a tendency to look contrived. Slashed areas can also look very convincing when singed with a naked flame. The ruffian in "A Tale of Two Cities" [Ill. 19] has had the ends of his trousers frayed in this way and then filed vigorously. The rough threads are then left hanging around his bare legs to complete the affect. To achieve the faded look of his trousers, they have been painted with acrylics on the <u>inside</u>. The paint then soaked through to the outside and created the worn look. This actually happened as an accident but the effect worked so well that it was used for the actual costumes. This, again, reiterates the fact that a costume designer must be prepared to try out new and different ideas each time he is designing for a new production. It is only by experimentation that new ideas will emerge.

Faded areas can also be created by sponging the fabric with bleach and water. This works best on natural fabric. It is important, however, that only diluted bleach is applied as undiluted bleach can completely destroy the fabric to the point where it will actually create holes where they are not wanted.

If the budget for a production is low, or if it is known where to find the exact costume for the production it may be necessary to "borrow" or rent garments. To keep up good relations between theatres it is vitally important to return costumes in the same condition as when they first arrived.

Ill. 20 Simulated blood; dress dyed with fabric dye.

Therefore, you cannot age a borrowed costume as you would your own. You can, however, create a reversible dirty look by powdering the garment with coloured make-up powders which come in a range of colours, and can be washed out or simply brushed away. Coloured hairspray is another device which may be used as it will dry clean out.

It is often necessary to simulate dirt and food stains. This can be done by applying leather dyes or acrylic paint directly to the fabric. They can also be sponged on with a mixture of poster paint, water and P.V.A. white glue. For greasy looking stains you can achieve excellent results by using shoe polish. If the dirt is to be more "caked in" you can mix sawdust and P.V.A. glue with any of the other applications. The bloodstains on the dress worn by "Vengeance" in "A Tale of Two Cities", were created by using regular fabric dyes. The dress was first dyed a pinkish colour and then the bloodstained part only was dyed a deeper red. This is useful for creating stains, which naturally have an irregular pattern [Ill. 20].

When ageing or distressing fabric it is essential that you are familiar with the content of the fabric. This is useful when trying to decide on the most effective method for breaking it down. Most synthetic fabrics are extremely difficult to age. These are easily recognisable by their appearance and their textures. However, it is important to be careful of mixed fabrics i.e. cotton/polyester or wool/rayon mixes which may be mistaken as being natural. These will not age or give the same look as 100% cotton or 100% wool will give.

When ageing or distressing garments or fabrics it is essential that you have a clear idea of the degree of ageing that is required. It is quite easy to

get carried away with the idea and overdo the ageing process. It is also crucial to remember that they must be worn by an actor and therefore must be strong enough to withstand the demands of two or more hours on stage, night after night. They must remain comfortable and clean on the inside. If the garment will have to be cleaned during the run of the production, this must be taken in account and therefore the special effects must be permanent and allow for washing or dry cleaning.

Distressing is a lengthy process which will always involve some experimentation. No two garments will require the same amount of ageing. It is imperative that plenty of time is allowed to age garments if they are to be successful.

Chapter 4
Understructures
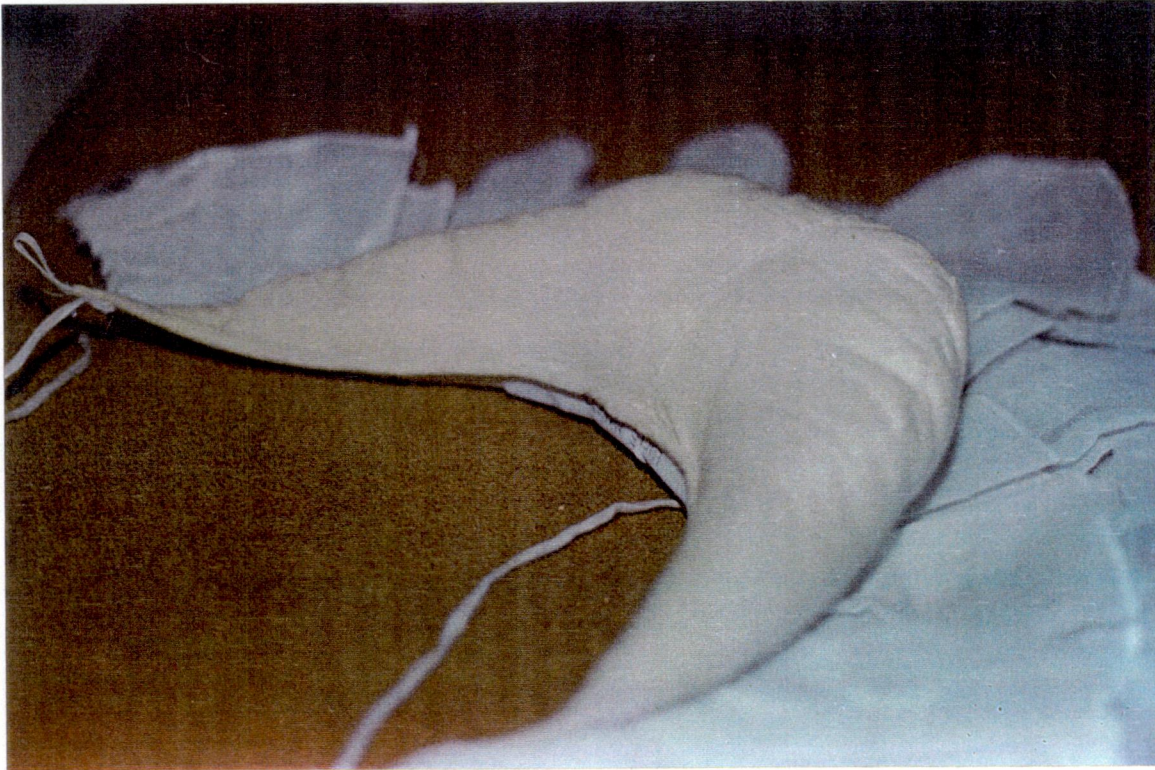
Ill. 21 Padded bum roll; worn under the women's costumes to pad out the hips.

Body shapes have altered much during the course of history. Because of this, mere period costumes alone are often not enough to denote authenticity of silhouette. This is why the understructure is so important. To achieve characteristic shapes it is often necessary to lace the body into a corset or to pad out certain areas of the body. Padding can also do much to indicate character.

> Like a modern building,
> a costume's foundation is
> as important as its facade.
> (Ingham, 1992, p.164)

As late as the 1890's, the fashionable silhouette of a thin waist and wide hips required some form of padding. This was usually in the form of fat sausage-like bum rolls, tapered hip rolls, bustle pads or hip pads. These were worn for many centuries by women and occasionally by men. A costumier is required to recreate these understructures when making period costume dresses in order to get the correct full skirted appearance. These are usually made from muslin or lightweight cotton and stuffed with wadding. It is essential that they are stuffed tightly so that they hold a definite rounded appearance, even when weighed down with layers of skirt fabric.

Bum rolls were used under the costumes of all the women in "A Tale of Two Cities" [Ill. 21]. Also in addition to the actual bum roll, stiff tarlatan has been attached to the outer edge to enable the dress to sit out from the hips in an even more rounded fashion. Strings are put at either end in order that the bum roll can be tied at the waist and removed quickly and easily. The ties also allow for reusing the bum roll again on a smaller or larger actress.

For even wider, larger skirts the understructure was even more elaborate. Hoops and crinolines were worn. These were 3-D structures which encircled the body and extended from the waist right down to the floor. These changed shape with fashion but the principle remained essentially the same. They would be quite uncomfortable and heavy to wear. Custumiers usually try to avoid making the full-length crinolines for stage. There are several reasons for this. One reason is because they are so large it is often difficult to find enough storage space in which to house them during a production. The cost factor and the time involved in making such large understructures is another reason. Also, from an acting point of view, it would impede the delivery of a performance by the sheer weight and awkwardness of the structure. Original dresses did not "move" with the body and the actor's movements would look stilted and sluggish, not something to enhance a performance. The more favoured method is to use half-crinolines. This will allow for more movement on stage. The size and shape of a skirt must always be considered in relation to the set design. A custumier must remember to check the width of all hoop skirts against the width of doors and staircases and in relation to the arrangement of furniture pieces. The proportion of the skirt must also reflect its setting or it will not work successfully. Most designers and actors alike prefer to make understructures or even mock-ups as early as possible, therefore the actor/actress can rehearse without the finished costume and yet be aware of the space they will eventually require on stage.

A costumier can be called upon to pad almost any part of the body. Padding can do much to indicate character. It is also useful to individualise

Ill. 22 Actor Philip O'Sullivan as "Stryver".

one character from another when they are clothed in similar costumes. As the human body ages it changes and becomes distorted. Vast differences body shapes occur due to differences of lifestyle, diet and even the environment in which you live.

Body padding is usually made separately and worn under the costume. This is usually more realistic than padding sewn directly into the costume. Body padding is also made from muslin or lightweight cotton padded with wadding. This is worked up on a tailor's dummy so that a snug fit is achieved. Hook and eye fastenings on side or back, and a crotch strap from covered elastic or spandex will ensure that the padded garment stays in place. It is essential that all padding is stitched in place securely so that it will keep its shape through several performances and will also withstand washing.

The placing of padding can be very effective when trying to create age or lifestyle. A plump stomach suggests jolliness, whereas a stomach which is completely rounded and protrudes over the top of a man's trousers can denote laziness and an unhealthy lifestyle. A woman's breasts and hips can be enlarged to suggest middle age or the whole body can be padded to suggest complete obesity. Asymmetrical padding can be used to portray deformed characters. Most period costumes for young men will require some padding around the shoulders, on the chest and at the back of the calves. This is due to actual physical change of the male body shape in modern times. The character of "Stryver" in "A Tale of Two Cities" wears a complete upper body padding to give him a plump appearance [Ill.22]. This is accentuated by his walk as he struts about the stage throwing his

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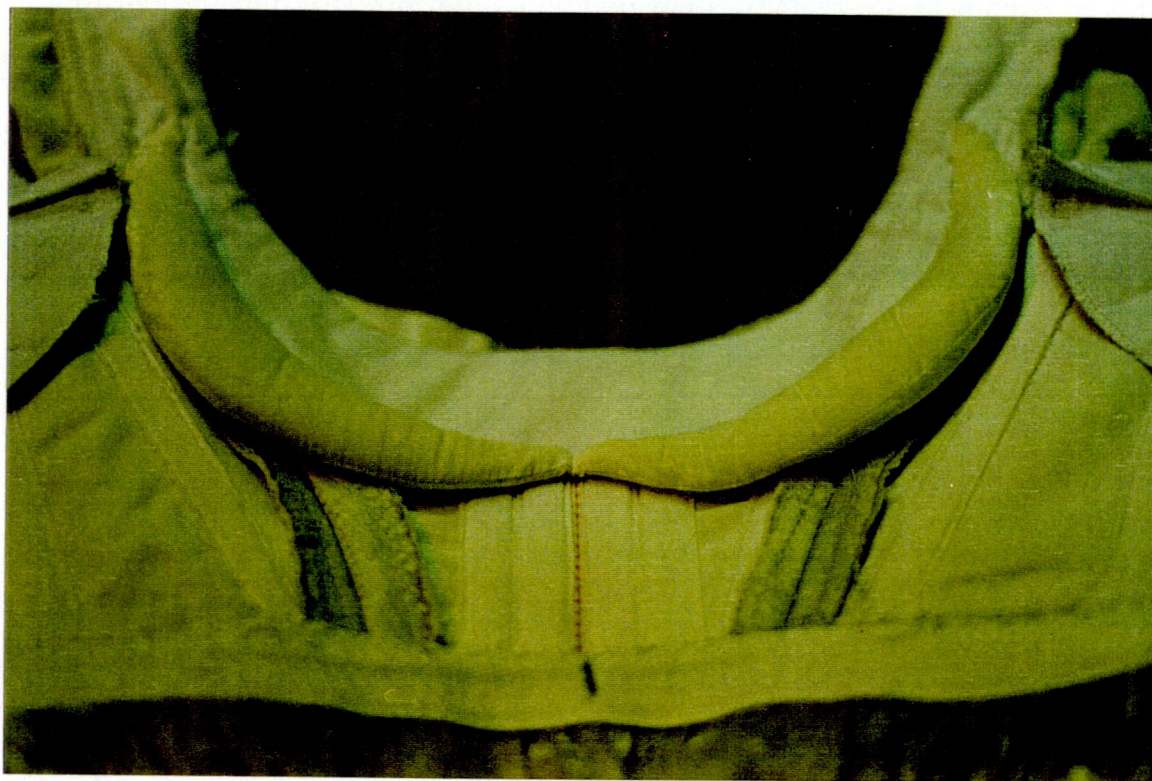
Ill. 23 Breast Pads; inside view of the dress worn by the little
seamstress.

shoulders back and his stomach out. He also wears a full lawyer's robe which makes him appear even smaller and plumper.

The dress of the young seamstress was also padded to give her a more protruding breast. It is not usual to sew padding directly into a costume but as the pads are quite small it was not necessary to make a whole body garment [Ill. 23]. Breast padding is not always needed as the correct tightness about the ribcage can create the appearance of a larger breast. Sometimes, if the required padding is only a simple thickening of the upper torso the padding can be sewn onto a simple, close-fitting T-shirt and covered with a second T-shirt and then sewn in place.

As with the large hoop skirts, it is a good idea if the actor rehearses in the padding as it is necessary to get a sense of the character. Padding is usually finished well in advance of the costumes as the measurements of the padded body are needed to make the costume patterns.

A necessary requirement for most female period costumes is the wearing of a corset. This is often extremely uncomfortable to wear, especially for someone who is encountering corsets for the first time. Many simply cannot tolerate the extremely tight lacing that our ancestors took for granted. The costumier must try to create the correct period shape without causing discomfort to the actor. For special cases, such as opera singers, millinery elastic can be threaded through as laces. This will facilitate the action of deep breathing.

Padding and understructures, therefore, can do much to alter body shape. It, in itself, creates character which costume alone cannot always do successfully. Research into actual historical dress understructures is always

a good idea to get familiar with what actually is going on beneath the outer framework of period clothing.

Chapter 5

Costume Construction

Although many stage costumes may appear to be made exactly like conventional clothing, this is often not the case. Even in replica period costumes many differences can be found in the construction, though the end result is quite similar. The designer must aim to create garments which look sufficiently similar to that which he is trying to recreate but must make allowances for the demands of the stage.

A costume must perform in many ways. It is essential that a costume is relatively easy to get in and out of. The time between scene changes is often quite short and an actor must be able to change into another costume in a speedy and efficient manner. Conventional clothing usually employs the use of buttons or zips. However, these are not suitable for stage costumes. Zips, although quick and easy to use, are not recommended by costumiers. Zips are usually quite fragile and if not employed in a smooth manner are liable to break. Unlike buttons or hooks and eyes, if one part of the zip breaks it is useless and there is absolutely no way of closing the garment. Also, zips are very difficult and time consuming to replace when they do break.

A very quick and easy closure is Velcro. It is also sturdy and allows room for small adjustments if a garment is a little too tight. However, it is not widely used in costuming as it makes a terrible sound when opening which is quite loud. In small theatres it would be quite possible that this sound would echo as far as the stage. The best and most widely used type of fastening in costuming is the hook and eye method. This is a simple closure where a bar is sewn to one side of the opening and a hook to the other and the hook catches the bar to close the garment. Very simple, yet amazingly effective. They are also relatively cheap to buy and easy to replace if needs

Ill. 24 Hook and eye closure; open.
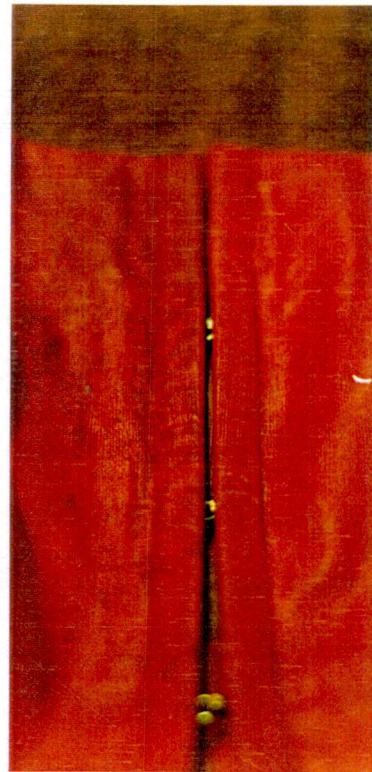
Ill. 25 Hook and eye closure; closed.

Ill. 26 Imitation buttons; used on the cuffs of the dress worn by "Lucie Manette".

be. An accepted practice among costume designers is to make all costumes fasten down the back. It is easier to get a good fit at the front this way and an opening at the back can be easily disguised. Sometime, decorative buttons are sewn on the outside of a closing to cover any visible hook and eyes. In "A Tale of Two Cities", Miss Pross' dress has a false front and the actual opening is down the back. The opening is boned on either side to keep it rigid and a hook and eye closing system is employed [Ill. 24] on the inside. This is an excellent method and is virtually invisible except at close range [Ill. 25]. A strip of dress fabric is then sewn behind the closure to avoid scratching the skin. A row of decorative buttons and a mock seam is then sewn down the front as an imitation opening [Ill. 18].

Mock buttons are also used on the cuffs of the dress worn by the character "Lucie Manette" [Ill. 26]. As the sleeves of the dress are relatively slim-fitting it was necessary to have an opening at the cuff. Working buttons would, however, be awkward to open and close. Instead, press studs are used to fasten the opening. This method is easier, cheaper and quicker to open and close as well as to make. The buttons are simply sewn on the outside. From the audience's viewpoint, this looks exactly like the normal three-button closure that was fashionable on ladies' sleeves at the end of the eighteenth century.

The men's breeches also require buttons, at the knees. Due to the amount of movement around the knee, however, it was necessary to use actual working buttons. Press studs are not suited to areas where lots of movement occurs. The buttons are very cleverly used, however; the trouser leg is cut in such a way that at the opening slit the front panel is longer than the back.

Ill. 27 Men's breeches; buttoned at the knees.
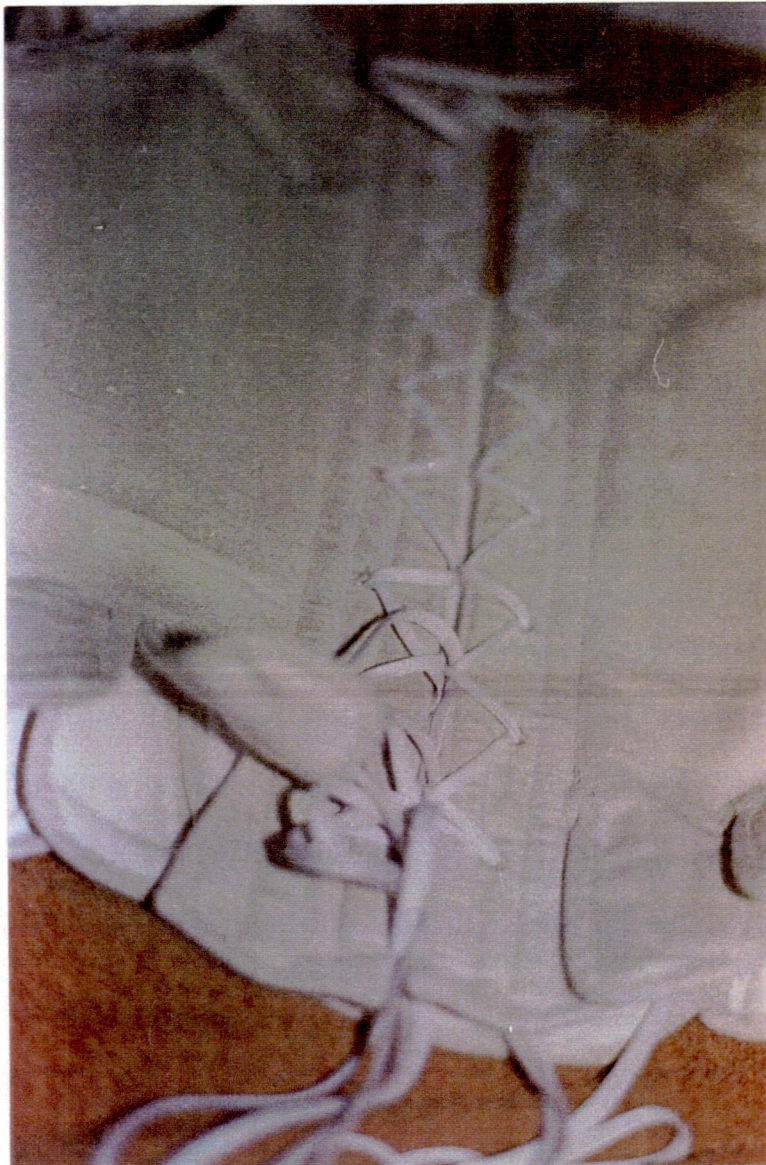
Ill. 28 Mock lacing; corset worn by "Mme. Defarge".

Thus, when it is buttoned the front bunches up and creates space for the knee and allows for ease of movement. This form of cutting and buttoning also creates a wrinkled effect around the knee which is in keeping with the rest of the costume [Ill. 27].

It must be appreciated that the wealthy often had an hour to dress even with the aid of a servant. There simply is not enough time for such luxuries in the theatre. Corset laces have therefore always presented a problem. A mock lacing is usually employed. This can be done in one of two ways. The first way is to draw separate laces through the eyelets from front to back on either side of the opening. This will give the same pattern as actual lacing when joined together. Hooks and eyes are then attached inside to close the garment. This can be difficult to close on the body, however, as there is absolutely no "give" in the hook and eye. The other way is to lace the corset as suggested above. A lace is then threaded from the bottom to the top, from right to left, catching the lacing as you go [Ill.28] and then tied at the top. This is the preferred method as it looks realistic and also leaves room for adjustment. As mentioned before, millinery elastic may be used to allow for more ease of movement. This type of elastic may also be used as the shoe laces to save time when changing shoes.

Sometimes, a set of hooks and eyes are also put up the front of the corset. This allows the actor to free herself from the corset in a speedy fashion as it is practically impossible to undo corset laces alone.

Cleaning large garments between performances is always a problem. Shirts, socks and underwear are laundered daily but large or heavy garments, or dry clean only fabrics, usually go the run of the performance before they

Ill. 29 Dress shield.

Ill. 30 Removable lace cuffs.

Ill. 31 Removable lace edging.

Ill. 32 Inside front bodice of dress worn by "Lucie Manette".

are cleaned. Cotton vests protect the insides of the garment and keep the actor feeling fresh. Dress shields [Ill. 29] are fastened under the armpits of close-fitting garments and these are also laundered daily. For the sake of cleanliness and laundering it is necessary to use mock cuffs [Ill. 30] and edgings [Ill. 31] on non-washable fabrics, especially as on the dress worn by "Miss Pross" and they are of white lace. These have been sewn onto a band and then tacked onto the cuff. Therefore, they are easily detachable for laundering. The fissue worn by "Lucie Manette" is also detachable for this purpose. It is fastened centre front and centre back with press studs [Ill. 32] and is attached in place after the dress has been fastened on the actress. This is for another reason also; due to the opening at centre back it would not have been possible to attach the fissue completely to the dress as it would impede the opening.

As theatre costume budgets are generally not very large, costumes must be constantly reused, reworked, hired out or indeed borrowed from other theatres. It is usually necessary to alter an old costume and it is unusual to find the exact costume in the exact size. For these purposes it must be noted that fully- or half-lined costumed are not sewn together in the same manner as conventional clothing. When making conventional clothing the outer shell of fabric, with inter-lining attached, and the inner shell of lining are made independently of each other. The two layers are then sewn together to complete the garment. In costume, it is usual to sew all three pieces i.e. fabric, interlining and lining together before sewing up the garment. All seams are, therefore, both visible and accessible from inside the costume. This saves time and also allows for ease of alteration. A dress may have to

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Ill. 33 Mock necktie; open.

be altered several times during rehearsal so it is wise to leave plenty of seam allowance.

Most of the main characters would have full, working pockets on their garments. If the design does not have pockets a secret pocket is sewn on the inside or in the side seam of a skirt. This was done for the dress of "Lucie Manette". This is useful to carry gloves in this character's case or any small items liable to get separated from the costume. The chorus line or actors with only very small parts usually have mock flaps instead of real pockets. This saves time and expense.

A problem in period costume is that of the high waistline often necessary to complete the silhouette. This was the case with "Mme. Defare's" dress. It was necessary that the waist of her skirt sat one and a half inches above her natural waistline and as such sits directly on her ribcage. This is a dreadfully uncomfortable position for a waistband. The problem was solved, however, by constructing an underdress which sits on the natural waistline and then constructing the actual dress over this. This allows for the waistband to be suspended by the underbodice and is thus much more comfortable for the actor to wear.

Mock neckties are also used on the man's shirts in "A Tale of Two Cities". Instead of using cravats of the type worn in the eighteenth century and extra piece of fabric is attached to a stand collar and is buttoned at the back [Ill. 33]. This gives the effect of a necktie but is much easier to put on the actor during a quick change. It also avoids the problem of the cravat opening on stage or even getting separated from the rest of the costume. [Ill. 34] shows the necktie in place.

Ill. 34 Mock necktie; closed.

When constructing costumes for theatre it is important to consider them as costume and not as conventional clothes. It must be possible to put a costume on speedily and it is essential that it looks exactly the same every time it is worn for the entire run of the production. If specific ties or drape is needed they must be securely fashioned by the costumier, and must go on the actor in an exact fashion. Tying or draping must not be left to the dresser to decide on the night.

Conclusion

Illusion is central to theatre as is telling a story. Effects and worlds that do not exist in reality are created on stage. The costumes and textiles used in theatre are a central part of this storytelling illusion. What I wanted to discover was the actual extent to which illusions are created within the realm of costume and textiles and the ways in which these illusions are created.

I examined the situation through secondary sources and then looked at this evidence in relation to a particular play being produced in Dublin. I discovered that central to the role of costume in theatre is the effect of a costume on the audience. With the help of costume the audience is able to identify with the character, the period, the social climate and the place.

The effect of costume on the actor is also important. The costume must look convincing to the actor if the actor is to be convincing to the audience. Correct fabrics or fabrics made to look like the real thing must therefore be used. As I discovered, substitute fabrics are often used to keep costs to a minimum. What appears like temporary or fragile effects in theatrical costumes and fabrics must in fact be permanent. Worn looking costumes must look convincingly aged, yet be strong enough to withstand weeks of sustained use. Cleanliness must also be maintained throughout the entire run of a production. Costumes can be made to look dirty and old without actually being dirty on the inside.

When designing for the theatre one is not only designing for a particular body but also for a particular character type. If the body of the actor or actress does not fully correspond with the physical requirements of the part,

the costume must compensate. Clever construction, together with padding are features used by theatrical costumiers to achieve this end.

These elaborate pieces of clothing are often complex and apparently cumbersome to put on and take off. The central concern for theatrical designers, therefore, is to retain the illusion of complexity but to devise easy and quick methods of dressing in these garments to allow for speedy costume changes.

Theatre is therefore one complete illusion. Nothing is as it seems. Without illusion there would be no theatre; without costume there would be no illusion.

Appendix

Programme from "A Tale of Two Cities", Gate Theatre.
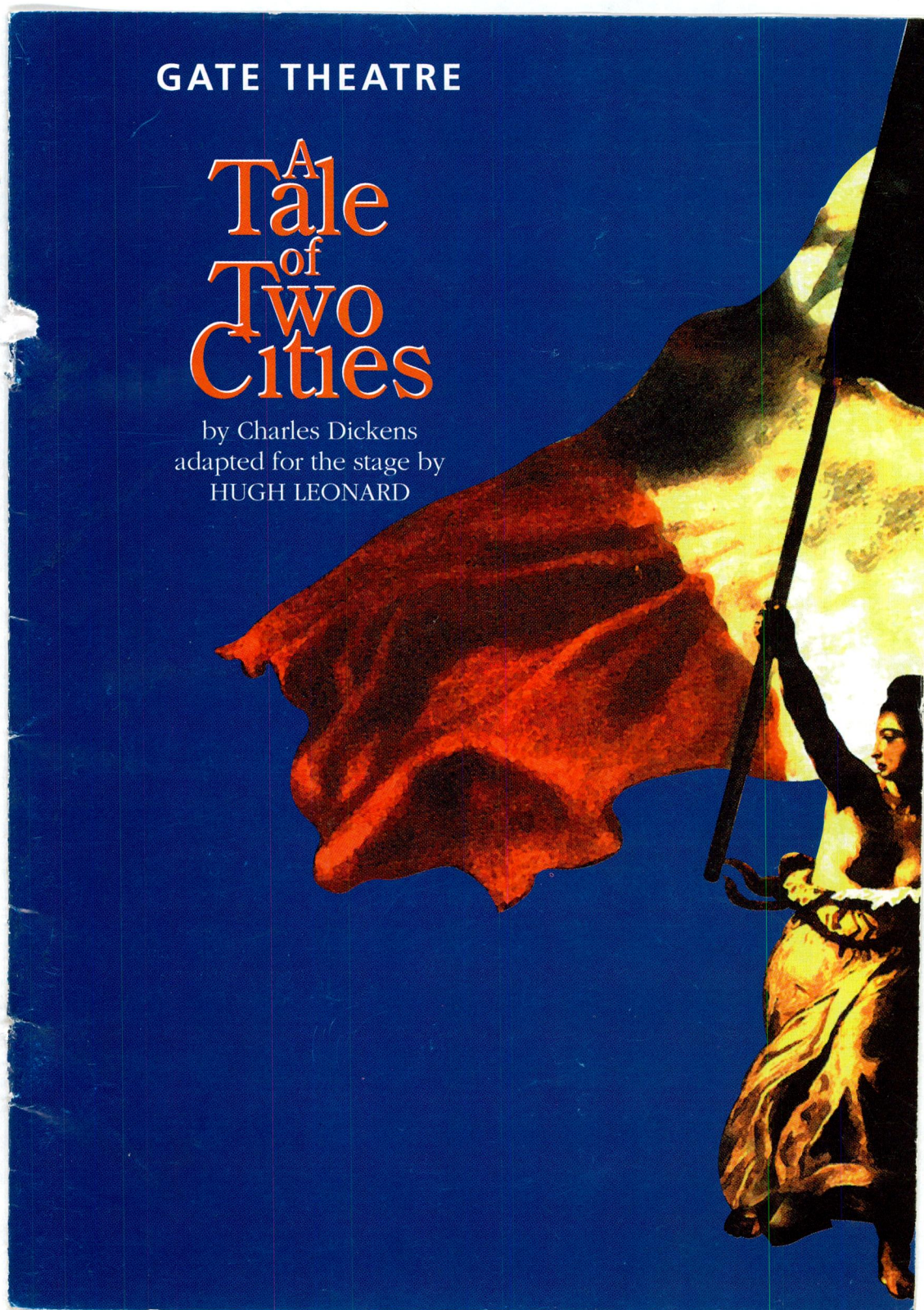
GATE THEATRE

A Tale of Two Cities

by Charles Dickens
adapted for the stage by
HUGH LEONARD
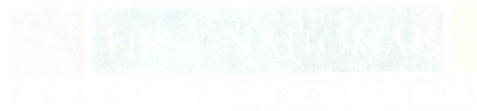
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Freeda Hoban, Trinity College, 30th April 1996.