

**From sketch to set :
draughtmanship and stage design
in the work of Christian Bérard for the classical theatre 1936-1947**

Ariane Vallée

Art History Master Degree

Institutt for Filosofi, Idé- og Kunsthistorie og Klassiske Språk,
Universitet i Oslo

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Cover page illustration: Christian Bérard at Villa Malcontenta, 1930. Photo Boris Kochno.

1 Introduction

The interwar period in France was highly propitious to the inter-relation of painting, theatre and ballet. A strong reaction had taken place against naturalism in the theatre as early as the 1880s, and some theatre directors had begun to commission painters such as the Nabis (Paul Sérusier, Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard and Maurice Denis). The ballet proceeded to take the cooperation between the painters and the stage to new heights with the glorious years of Serge de Diaghilev's Ballets Russes (1909-1929), Rolf de Maré's Ballets Suédois (1920-1925), and Etienne de Beaumont's Soirées de la Cigale (1924). Their set designers were Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Raoul Dufy, Giorgio di Chirico, Fernand Léger, André Derain, Georges Braque, etc. The ballet stage became an arena where any kind of stylistical experimentation could be conducted, from cubism to dadaism and from expressionism to surrealism. These efforts were not limited to contemporary styles; styles of the past also had to be reinterpreted for the design of period settings.

A young painter starting his career in the late 1920s would have been tempted to walk in the footsteps of these prestigious figures. Christian Bérard (1902-1949), a portrait artist who began to work for the stage in 1930, was no exception. But Bérard and the other members of the so-called "Neo-Romantics" group he initially exhibited with had chosen to remain on the sidelines of the new styles. They expressed a marked preference for representational art (portraits in particular), and renewed interest in humanism and earlier periods such as the Renaissance and the eighteenth century.

The painters of the Ballets Russes and the Ballets Suédois had worked mainly for the ballet. Working for the theatre was felt to be more of a challenge: the theatrical stage needed more than the painted backdrops which were easy for a painter to produce. Its sets had to support the movements of the actors. Here the painter had to comply with the requirements of the stage, the producer and the text, and he was not always willing to sacrifice his autonomy. Hostile reactions to his participation were particularly strong when it came to the staging of French classical plays. The classical plays of the baroque period which we will cover in this study, were an essentially literary phenomenon, and theatre critics were ready to pounce at the slightest breach of loyalty to the texts. Staging classical plays also raised the issue of the degree of stylisation and of the adequate balance between stylistical references and modernity.

By the beginning of the 1930s, no genuine renewal had taken place, and the awareness of the difficulties raised by staging classical plays in twentieth century France became more acute. One Molière admirer, the actor, producer and stage director Louis Jouvet (1887-1951), was particularly frustrated at seeing masterpieces of the French cultural heritage mistreated and embarked on a mission to restage them.¹ He proceeded to work, amongst others, on four classical plays which had fallen into neglect since the deaths of their authors. The first one was Molière's *L'École des femmes* which raised a number of unsolved problems in terms of scenic space (1936). It was followed by Corneille's *L'Illusion* which had been a success in his time, but came to be considered as something of an oddity (1937). Towards the end of his career, Jouvet took on the difficult roles of Molière's *Don Juan* and *Tartuffe* (1947 and 1950).

Jouvet had chosen plays with timeless characters and themes likely to appeal to any audience. Nonetheless, the characters and themes needed settings where they could be presented and made accessible to twentieth century theatregoers. Jouvet was anxious to find someone who could bring to his productions a poetic vision which remained loyal to the classical text while being in keeping with contemporary taste. His ideal designer turned out to be a painter who could understand theatre. Thanks to his multiple graphic skills, his culture and his social network, Bérard was to be Jouvet's sole designer for the productions of classical plays until his death in 1949.

This study aims to describe how Bérard's sets solved the riddle of the modernisation of classical plays, and the role graphic exploration played in this process. We will start by developing an understanding of the dilemmas classical theatre and stage design faced in the mid-1930s, and of how Jouvet and Bérard addressed them (chapter 3). We will then examine Bérard's background, sources and working methods (chapter 4), prior to performing a detailed analysis of the drawings and the sets made for *L'École des femmes*, *L'Illusion* and *Dom Juan* (chapters 5 to 7). We will conclude by showing how Bérard developed a specific architectural vocabulary and drawing technique for the stage, as he made the theatre and the visual arts meet in a common humanistic quest.

¹ Louis Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), 95.

2 *Research history and methodology*

2.1 *Research history*

The main publication worth mentioning on Bérard is the book published by his partner, Boris Kochno (1904-1990).² It is largely biographical and anecdotal and intends by no means to provide a technical analysis of his art, but provides a comprehensive list of all the paintings, stage and film sets and book illustrations he worked on, together with a selection of fashion and interior design drawings and a detailed bibliography.

A large number of newspapers published reviews of the plays and ballets for which he had designed sets, as well as the many eulogies written at the time of this death and in subsequent years. These publications are, again, largely anecdotal, but provide valuable insights into Bérard's sources and working methods.

A handful of more specific analyses of Bérard's oeuvre have been published. It is presented in Baird Hastings' 1950 exhibition catalogue with a selection of oils, stage designs and various drawings and sketches³. Hastings also wrote a short leaflet on Bérard's stage design.⁴ Jim Carmody published an article on various mises en scènes for *L'Ecole des femmes* giving a prominent place to Jouvet and Bérard's version.⁵ James Thrall Soby's book *After Picasso* discusses Bérard's portrait work as one of the Neo-Romantics.⁶

The versatility of this artist who was nearly impossible to classify probably explains why so little research material is available to date. Furthermore, the artists in the Neo-Romantics group were somewhat at odds with the principles and abstraction of avant-garde art which has attracted most of the art historians' attention. And last but not least, Bérard's eccentric lifestyle and activities within the world of fashion and stage design

² Boris Kochno, *Christian Bérard*, (Paris: Editions Herscher, 1987).

³ *Christian Bérard Painter Decorator Designer*, ed. Baird Hastings, (New York: Chantecleer Press, October 1950).

⁴ Baird Hastings, "The Theatre of Christian Bérard", *Chrysalis—the pocket revue of the arts* III, no. 1-2 (1950).

⁵ Jim Carmody, "Rethinking Realism in Molière's 'The School for Wives'": Scenographic Variations on the Place de ville", *Theatre Journal* 14, no. 1 (1989): 5-15.

⁶ James Thrall Soby, *After Picasso*, (Hartford: Edwin, Valentine, Mitchell, 1935), 13-23.

earned him the reputation of “one who could have been such a great artist if only he had kept to his paintings...”, reputation which this study will of course do its utmost to prove wrong.

Jouvet’s work, on the other hand, is extensively documented. He published a large amount of materials in the form of books, articles and conference papers, and it is primarily this material we have taken into account when discussing his ideas. His work has been covered through biographies, press reviews, theatre periodicals and books as well as documentary films (a list of relevant material for the purpose of this study is shown in the Bibliography).

2.2 Methodology

Our analysis focuses on Bérard’s set drawings and sets for Molière’s *L’Ecole des femmes* in 1936, Corneille’s *L’Illusion* in 1937 and Molière’s *Dom Juan* in 1947. Bérard also designed costumes for these three plays, but, although they were an important part of the performances, they are not discussed here. Priority has been given to the development of Bérard’s theatrical iconography for classical plays, together with his graphic technique and his handling of atmosphere.

We will cover the set drawings available at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF) in Paris, i.e. 18 drawings for *L’Ecole des femmes*, 81 drawings for *L’Illusion*, and 28 drawings for *Dom Juan*.⁷ The drawings are not presented separately, but inserted as relevant in the text of this study to facilitate reading. Although the number of drawings for *L’Illusion* is largely superior to those of the two other plays, the whole of the material is shown and used for the purpose of this study. Its unique breadth provides a complete overview of Bérard’s working methods in a way that no other performance material can match. As the drawings and the set photographs alone cannot provide a complete picture of the play, a selection of comments from viewers and critics have been included.

Each play offers a strong internal logic, and it was decided to analyse the drawings play by play instead of by theme. This choice was also dictated by the fact that Jouvet did

not believe in any standard approach to stage design, stating that settings could only be invented on the basis of the feeling contained in a play.⁸ As a consequence, our approach varies somewhat from work to work. In *L'Ecole des femmes*, two variants of the same décor are used throughout the play, regardless of the progression from act to act. The analysis deals first with their iconography and then with Bérard's graphic exploration technique. *L'Illusion's* complex structure and extensive material call for a review of the drawings act by act, followed by a study of Bérard's "impressionistic" drawing technique for the stage. As *Dom Juan* numbers seven different sets, the drawings are also analysed act by act, prior to dealing with Bérard's way of unifying the sets and achieving abstraction.

Generally speaking, this study is situated at the intersection between drama, theatre history and art history. This has made it necessary to research all three fields when analysing Bérard's sets for the plays. Literary criticism related to the plays, independently of their staging, has been reviewed for a better understanding of their structure and the issues they addressed. Theatre history of the Renaissance and the seventeenth century has provided essential input as regards iconography. Twentieth century theatre and ballet history has helped develop an understanding of the influence of the European theatre Reformers and the Ballets Russes, of Jouvét's role in the French theatre landscape and of the role of painters within stage design at the time. Scenography books related to Bérard's time have also been read for basic information on the requirements of the stage and the constraints it could place on the set designer, but this study does not claim by any means to cover all the technical aspects related to the stage. Art history has been searched for further information on iconography and Bérard's models in terms of painting technique.

Bérard's activities within oil painting, fashion illustration and stage design for the theatre and the ballet overlapped each other. His work within other areas than theatre sets is mentioned as relevant.

⁷ The Bibliothèque Nationale recently changed its name to Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF). Both names will be found in this study.

⁸ "Il n'y a pas de théorie de la décoration, pas de système, pas d'indication esthétique qui puisse servir à faire un décor, à créer un lieu dramatique. Le sentiment contenu dans la pièce peut seul servir à fabriquer, à inventer le lieu de l'action". Louis Jouvét, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, (Paris: Flammarion, 2002). 155.

3 Louis Jouvet, Christian Bérard and the dilemmas of drama in the first half of the twentieth century

When Bérard and Jouvet started their cooperation in the early 1930s, the staging of classical plays and contemporary set design seemed to be following very different paths. Classical theatre had kept to a long-standing status quo where the possibilities of coming with new interpretations had been hampered by strong acting traditions which actors were not expected or prepared to question.⁹ The only hope came from a new generation of avant-garde directors who had the cultural background and the holistic approach required to shift the focus from the acting of individual scenes to complete reinterpretations and staging of a play. The art of stage design, on the other hand, had gone through four decades of experimentation and creative turmoil with the advent of high profiled painters on the ballet stage. Their knowledge of iconography and art history, as well as their feeling for contemporary trends and tastes meant they could break the barriers of the old order, leaving the traditional stage designers behind.

These disruptions in the “sociology” of the stage resulted in power shifts from the actors of the classical theatre to the producers, and from the traditional stage designers to the painters. This triggered tensions between the professionals of the stage, a wealth of new ideas and a high level of involvement from the critics and the audience. Jouvet and Bérard’s forays in the field of classical theatre benefited from a stimulating context, in which the apparent antinomies of the classical theatre and twentieth century stage design still remained to be resolved.

3.1 Rejuvenating classical theatre

Much of the discussions in the field during the period revolved around finding solutions which could preserve the supremacy of the text, whilst at the same time creating openings for change. From baroque times on, French theatre had largely been a literary theatre. In a broader European context however, the European Reformers had questioned the supremacy of the text since the end of the nineteenth century. In England, Edward Gordon Craig (1872-1966) advocated theatre as an autonomous art,

⁹ Maurice Descotes, *Les grands rôles du théâtre de Molière*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), 8-9.

independent from the text, where the director was to supplant the playwright. In Switzerland, Adolphe Appia (1862-1928) considered the theatre as being a global art with literary and visual elements. In Russia, the revolution brought about a new type of theatre, with Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940) who focused on the actor's movements using commedia dell'arte and circus techniques, and Constantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938) who made the actors go deep into their own feelings to better enact those of the character's. The ideas of the Reformers were spread in France through books such as Jacques Rouché's (1862-1958) *L'Art théâtral moderne* in 1910, but never totally caught on due to commitment to the text. France became in this respect an exception within European theatre.¹⁰

These modern approaches were nonetheless impossible to ignore. As Vsevolod Meyerhold pointed out, "Drama is an art of today, of the moment ... It is precisely for this reason that drama is an ideally contemporary art. When a theatre breathes the air of its times, it can become the great theatre of its time, even if it plays Shakespeare and Pouchkine. A theatre that does not breathe the air of its times is an anachronism."¹¹

France had one institution responsible for the defence of the classics, the state-subsidised theatre of the Comédie-Française, but it kept to a fairly routine approach. The real driving forces for change were those of the avant-garde with Jacques Copeau (1879-1949), a leading figure of the French theatre in the first half of the twentieth century, and the Cartel, an association which numbered two of his followers, Juvet and Charles Dullin (1885-1949).

3.1.1 Jacques Copeau, Louis Juvet and the Cartel

Copeau was a literary critic, a translator, and actor and a producer. He felt French theatre was becoming far too commercial and aimed to reform it through radical changes in stage design, and acting techniques based on work on the text, physical training and improvisation. He conducted a number of experiments at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier in Paris between 1913 and 1924. Influenced by the European reformers (Craig and Appia in particular), he opted for the architected scene as

¹⁰ Jacques Rouché was director of the Théâtre des Arts (1907-1913) and of the Opéra de Paris (1915-1945).

opposed to the traditional painted one.¹² He called for new forms of theatre to emerge, but felt that, in the meantime, the classics were the only genuine reference he could use to form an vision of the dramatic ideal and of the essence of the theatre.¹³ One had to return to classical plays to get rid of contemporary errors and excesses, and to compensate for the lack of significant contemporary playwrights. Despite his interest in the theories of the Reformers, Copeau's dedication to the text was high, and his commitment to French classical playwrights was to open a new era for classical theatre in twentieth century France.

Jouvet was highly receptive to Copeau's theories on classical theatre and was a part of the Copeau adventure from the start until they parted ways in 1922. Jouvet was Copeau's Jack of all trades at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, learning all the technical aspects of the profession with the stagehands, producing meticulous set drawings and even inventing the "Jouvet" spotlights in addition to acting. Jouvet left Copeau for the Théâtre des Champs Elysées from 1922 to 1934 where he started his own troupe. He took over the Théâtre de l'Athénée in 1934 and also began to lecture at the Conservatoire National du Théâtre which had initially turned him down as a student. Nicknamed "le patron" (the boss), he was in many ways Edward Gordon Craig's ideal director: the one who could be actor, stage manager, set designer and director at the same time.¹⁴ Jouvet had had little formal training, but had learned very much on the job.

Despite his difficult relationship with Copeau, Jouvet saw him as a key influence, and is reported to have said that one could do no more than follow in his footsteps.¹⁵ Copeau's staging of the classics had remained avant-garde and never became truly popular. Jouvet, on the other hand, was to succeed in presenting them to a much wider audience and gaining its endorsement.

¹¹Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, comp. and trans. Béatrice Picon-Vallin, (Arles: Acte Sud/CNSAD, 2005), 146. My translation.

¹² The architected scene is a scene involving tri-dimensional elements such as columns, platforms and stairs, whereas the traditional painted scene involves painted backdrops and painted wing flats. Wing flats are thin rectangular canvas-covered panels which are painted and which do not have any depth. Rows of flats set in perspective on each side of the stage parallel to the footlights were used from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century.

¹³ Clément Borgal, *Jacques Copeau*, (Paris: L'Arche Editeur, 1960), 94.

¹⁴ Edward Gordon Craig, *De l'art du Théâtre*, (Paris: Circé, 2004), 67.

¹⁵ "... où qu'on aille, dans l'avenir, on ne pourra jamais faire que du Copeau." Borgal, *Jacques Copeau*, 295.

Jouvet was not alone in his efforts to promote classical theatre. Between 1927 and 1939, he entered into an informal association with Dullin, and two others. Gaston Baty (1885-1952), and Georges Pitoëff (1886-1939) had both been trained by Firmin Gémier (1869-1933), a promoter of popular theatre and Shakespearian theatre. The four men vowed to defend the interests of non-commercial theatre, which included staging antique, Shakespearian and classical plays on a regular basis, introducing foreign playwrights, and encouraging contemporary French playwrights to produce high quality works. They also had an administrative and marketing cooperation to save costs. Their repertoire was diversified, despite some degree of specialisation, such as foreign nineteenth century playwrights for Pitoëff, or Jean Giraudoux (1882-1944) and the classical French theatre for Jouvet.

This alliance became ultimately considered as the saviour of classical theatre when, some ten years later, injecting a new life in classical plays had become a genuine issue. Few believed that The Comédie-Française actually fulfilled its role and its passive approach to the classics generated heated debates¹⁶

The vacuum in which the classical theatre had ended up was of some concern at high political levels. It seems that the authorities saw the Cartel as being the natural heir of France's theatrical tradition, rather than the Comédie-Française. Thus, when the Education Minister, Jean Zay, was looking for an administrator for the theatre in 1935, he offered the position to Jouvet who was one of his friends. Jouvet declined, wanting to keep his hands free, and the position was given to Edouard Bourdet (1887-1945) on the basis of Giraudoux's recommendations. Bourdet accepted on condition that he could have a close cooperation with the Cartel, that he would be the one, and not the actors, to choose the plays and allocate the parts.¹⁷ The formal decree appointing him on August 19, 1936, confirmed his employment, but also mentioned that the Cartel members were responsible for the *mise en scène*. In practice, three of its members (Jouvet, Dullin, Baty) and Copeau were asked to stage one performance each between 1936 and 1940 (the authorities did not include Pitoëff on this list due to the fact he was Russian).

¹⁶ Descotes, *Les grands rôles du théâtre de Molière*, 33.

¹⁷ Jean Marc Loubier, *Louis Jouvet: le patron*, (Paris: Editions Ramsay, 2001), 166.

Thus, in the twenty-three years between Copeau's start at the Vieux-Colombier in 1913, and the Cartel's cooperation with the Comédie-Française in 1936, the outsiders had in fact been appointed as the new guardians of tradition. The renewal of classical theatre had not come from within its own ranks, but from an avant-garde largely influenced by the Reformers.

3.1.2 *The debate around classical theatre*

The Comédie-Française regained its prestige, but the debate was by no means over. Should one try to recreate the original play, or was it preferable to come up with a modern version? Attempts were made at finding compromises. For the stage designer André Boll (1896-1983), even though the feelings of modern man did not differ very much from those of the antique audience, he operated in a totally different context. This made it necessary to transpose the classics so they could trigger in him the same emotions as they did at their beginnings.¹⁸ George Pitoëff went one step further when he explained in 1925 that the question of how Hamlet was played in Shakespeare's days was irrelevant.¹⁹ What interested him was what a twentieth century mind could get out of the play. Contemporary plays were easy to approach, but as regarded classical plays, it was in their timeless humanity that modern man could find answers to the questions which troubled him. The plot was no longer the key issue: what modern man was after was the thinking, the quality of the emotion, the philosophy of the play and the answer to the questions he asked the play. This justified a new approach to the *mise en scène* of the classical plays, but it had to be consistent with the spirit of the plays.

The need for a new interpretation inevitably raised the issues of the set in which it was to be showcased, and of the relevance of modern stage design. Critics often thought that contemporary décors and special effects overemphasised the visual element and distracted the audience's attention from the classical text, challenging its supremacy. Audiences, on the other hand, were more receptive to change.

¹⁸ André Boll, *La mise en scène contemporaine*, (Paris: Editions de la Nouvelle Revue Critique, 1944), 66-73.

¹⁹ Georges Pitoëff, "Mise en scène" in *Jouvet, Baty, Dullin, Pitoëff: Le Cartel*, (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1987), 58. Notes from 1925, originally published in *Notre théâtre*, comp. Jean de Rigault, (Paris: Messages, 1949), 7-18.

3.2 *Modern stage design in the making*

The role of the visual element had been considerably reinforced during the first half of the twentieth century. The theatre had distanced itself from the naturalism of the nineteenth century and directors had developed a more holistic approach to productions. Two contradictory forces prevailed during the years between 1900 and 1930: the progress of the architected stage advocated by the European Reformers and the return of the painters to the stage.

The stark architected set was the hallmark of the Reformers. The advent of electricity had changed stage design conditions dramatically. It signed the death of the painted backdrop as it created shadows difficult to harmonise with the painted elements. Conversely, it created desirable contrasts on architected sets. Craig designed sets based on all-purpose portable folding screens and sophisticated lighting. He saw architected working scenery as the solution to the incompatibility between the movements of the actors and the rigid backdrops, and wanted the scene to be genuinely three dimensional instead of two dimensional, in keeping with the actors' bodies.²⁰ This excluded de facto any kind of painted elements from the stage. Appia did away with the footlights and the curtain in order to link up the stage and the audience. His décors were based on working sets (walls, staircases, and slopes) which could be moved and grouped into a vast number of combinations. Numerous experiments were conducted in Germany and Russia. In France, Copeau's approach was representative of this trend, and Jouvet operated along those lines when working with him. The Cartel showed interest in the Reformers, but in 1944, Baty could write that the "excesses" of the Reformers which came mainly from Germany and Russia were now outdated, and that France had never really followed suit.²¹

The return of the painters to the stage was not revolutionary per se, as painters had worked actively for the stage in the Renaissance and in baroque times. What had happened was that this practice had more or less become obsolete in France with the Revolution.²² The nineteenth century was less concerned with décors and it was then

²⁰ Raymond Cogniat, "L'évolution du décor", *Comoedia*, 1923, Recueil factice L'évolution du décor.

²¹ Gaston Baty, "Le metteur en scène" in *Jouvet, Baty, Dullin, Pitoëff: Le Cartel*, 77. Notes from 1944, originally published in Gaston Baty, *Rideau baissé*, (Paris: Bordas, 1949), 205-219.

²² Christophe Deshoulières, *Le Théâtre au XXe siècle en toutes lettres*, (Paris: Bordas, 1989), 15.

that set production had gone over to far less talented technicians.²³ They had continued to work much in the same way as before, and had failed to update themselves on artistic and technical developments both inside and outside the theatre.²⁴ Many directors felt that their contribution was too limited and some of them solved this by resorting to painters. Painters had an eye for colour which enabled them to develop harmonious colour schemes and effective lighting solutions. There was, however, a price to pay, as they were largely unfamiliar with the constraints of the stage.

Furthermore, painters were not set designers and this shift resulted in a disruption of the value chain, separating design from production.²⁵ Up until then, the same person had controlled both. Now it was up to a painter (and often a prestigious one at that, with his own style and opinions) with a limited experience of the theatre to sketch the sets, and it was up to the set designer to produce them. This triggered a number of conflicts, as the painter often felt his work had been betrayed when he saw the finished set in place. Neither was the set designer wholly comfortable with solutions which were often difficult to adapt to the reality of the stage. This situation was one of the aspects of the “décor crisis” of the 1920s.²⁶ Its outcome appears to have been favourable to painters, as the recruitment of traditional set designers was already on the wane.²⁷

Regardless of the respective positions of directors, critics, and stage designers, there appeared to be an implicit agreement as to the benefits of a more holistic approach to performances. All the components needed to be harmonised: colours, lighting, music, the mobile body of the actor, the static structure of the sets. Rouché concluded that the characters and the sets were inseparable and were to contribute to shaping a single impression.²⁸ The actor Charles Granval expressed the same call for unity, as the basis for the general balance of the performance. He even went so far as to say that, “Without unity there can be no art”, art being the composition of shapes, colours and movements

²³ Raymond Cogniat, “Les opinions de Mme Gontcharova et de M. Larionov”, *Comoedia*, October 17, 1923, Recueil factice L'évolution du décor.

²⁴ André Boll, *Du décor de théâtre*, (Paris: Etienne Chiron, 1926), 8-9.

²⁵ Raymond Cogniat, “Ce que nous dit Monsieur Georges Ricou”, *Comoedia*, September 16, 1923, Recueil factice L'évolution du décor.

²⁶ Boll, *Du décor de théâtre*, 75-78. The term is also used by Raymond Cogniat in his introduction to a series of interviews run in *Comoedia* in 1923 and 1924 with painters, set designers and directors. Cogniat, “L'évolution du décor”.

²⁷ Cogniat, “Ce que nous dit Monsieur Georges Ricou”.

²⁸ Jacques Rouché, *L'Art théâtral moderne*, (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1924), 7.

which allowed the work to express itself completely.²⁹

As a result, a new definition of the ideal stage designer came into shape. One needed primarily a painter who could contribute to harmonising all the visual elements, colour and lighting in particular. But the painter could not work with the theatre in a traditional way: as mentioned by Leon Bakst, he needed two to three years to study drama, theatrical perspective and the specific constraints of the stage. Designing sets required capabilities which were closer to architecture and painted sculpture than to painting as such.³⁰ It also required a good understanding of the theatre.

In sum, at the beginning of the 1930s, an underlying consensus emerged in each of the two fields studied above. There was no doubt that the staging of classical theatre had to be modernised. Neither was there any doubt that stage design required new competencies. The question was no longer “if” but “how”.

3.3 Louis Jouvet and Christian Bérard's response

The starting point of Jouvet and Bérard's answer to the question was what Jouvet called the “theatrical feeling” (“le sentiment dramatique”), the mechanisms by which it was triggered and its implications in terms of stage design.

3.3.1 The theatrical feeling and its application to the set

Jouvet's concept of theatre can be likened to a triangle, with the playwright and his text at the top angle, and the actors and the audience at the bottom ones. He saw the writer as the cornerstone of the theatrical process, whether it was Molière or the contemporary playwrights he did his utmost to support³¹ The director's role was therefore to give a faithful reproduction of the text, as the text dictated both the acting and the décor. The actors were to repeat the text until they succeeded in getting back to the underlying spirit of the author when he was writing it (Molière had also been an actor). This could be done by finding the adequate phrasing and developing the correct breathing pattern, Jouvet even defined the text as “written breathing”. “Breathing” the text was the basis

²⁹ Raymond Cogniat, “M. Granval estime qu'il faut suggérer au spectateur ‘les images qu'il complètera selon ses moyens’”, *Comoedia*, September 22, 1923, Recueil factice L'évolution du décor.

³⁰ Raymond Cogniat, “Opinions de M. Léon Bakst”, *Comoedia*, September 3, 1923, Recueil factice L'évolution du décor.

of his acting technique and the main means of ensuring loyalty to the text.³² Likewise, the designer's vision of the décor had to come from his perception of the atmosphere of the text.

In addition to the text, the part played by the audience and its endorsement of the performance were a major concern. Jouvet saw success as the one and only benchmark for the quality of a performance.³³ This was far from an apology of the commercial theatre, but an acknowledgement of the fact that a play could not have any genuine existence without appealing to an audience who contributed to keeping it alive.

The playwright/actor/audience triangle operated on the basis of a covenant between the parties. They implicitly accepted that what was taking place on the stage was not a part of every day reality, but a step in the direction of a higher reality, that of the theatre. This had important consequences in terms of set design, as any kind of attempt to produce a naturalistic set became pointless and even counterproductive. It would have hindered the parties from accessing the higher reality they were trying to enter. The set had to be fictional and indicate its distance from day to day life.

Finally, Jouvet saw drama as humanist enterprise, made of timeless human feelings and aimed at shedding a light on the mystery of each human being.³⁴ Theatrical feeling was the basis of humanity. It involved going beyond appearances, beyond the fakeness of reality, in order to understand one's fears and feelings of anxiety.³⁵ The theatrical feeling was not unlike the Platonic quest, but here it was the truth of man that was at stake. In this quest, man could enter into another dimension, a genuine reality, where he was revealed to himself and freed from his fears. The outcome of this quest was that man was reconciled with man, and could experience a feeling of "tenderness" (one of Jouvet's favourite words) for the rest of humanity. Thanks to this reconciliation, theatre became an act of love and communion.³⁶

³¹ "L'écrivain est l'élément principal et actif et le véritable directeur : "au commencement était le verbe." Louis Jouvet, *Réflexions du comédien*, (Paris: Librairie Théâtrale, 1941), 205-206.

³² "Le texte n'est qu'une respiration écrite". Louis Jouvet, *Molière et la comédie classique*, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1965), 104.

³³ Jouvet, *Réflexions du comédien*, 141.

³⁴ Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 88.

³⁵ Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 133-143.

³⁶ Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 199.

Jouvet felt that the theatrical feeling could not be achieved in an ordinary setting and required specific décors. Viewers needed to feel the distance between the stage and ordinary reality the moment the curtain went up. This could be achieved with the unrealistic décors and special effects produced by stage machinery. Jouvet was an enthusiastic advocate of machinery because it enabled viewers to make the transition into another dimension.³⁷ Machinery had its secrets. They were not disclosed to the audience and had one main purpose: to unveil the ultimate secret, the human secret.³⁸ Characters were immaterial and timeless and required sets to match. This made the sets an integral part of the performance and of the humanist quest of the stage, as they were to provide the characters with an environment in which they could operate. In short, a set was also a theatrical feeling.³⁹ Jouvet elevated the sets and the characters to the same level, they were both essences.

This did not mean that Jouvet was in favour of overelaborate sets. Using special effects and unreal architecture was no excuse to place undue emphasis on visual elements. Quite to the contrary, sets were to be kept to a minimum. Thanks to Copeau and the ideas of the European Reformers used at the Vieux-Colombier, Jouvet was fully familiar with the construction of stark architected sets. This minimalist approach was also shared by other Cartel members. Baty maintained that décor in general could never be autonomous, but that it now had to become an actor and to play the role dictated by the text.⁴⁰ The concept of the “vanishing décor” is echoed by contemporary stage set specialists such as Boll (the décor should set the scene in the first minutes, and then merge with the performance).⁴¹

Defining décor as theatrical feeling and applying minimalism to stage design were Jouvet’s way of ensuring that sets would serve the interests of the text. Sets were to be simple but naturalism was banned to facilitate the passage into the theatrical dimension.

³⁷ Theater machinery consists of equipment used for scenic changes and special effects.

³⁸ Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 138.

³⁹ “C’est ... dans ces paysages, ces sites, ces cavernes, ces carrefours irréels modelés par l’imagination que les personnages du théâtre se perpétuent, s’éternisent: dans ce lieu, à cette altitude choisie par le décorateur, ils s’entretiennent, gardent leur vie latente, s’assurent de leur longévité. Disponibles, radieux, c’est au décors qu’ils doivent une efficacité accrue, perpétuée. C’est le décor qui assure leur parfait éclat. Un décor est un parfait sentiment dramatique.” Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 147.

⁴⁰ Baty, “Le metteur en scène”, 77.

⁴¹ Boll, *Du décor de théâtre*, 82.

3.3.2 *Louis Jouvet, Christian Bérard and the classical theatre*

Jouvet's views on the theatrical feeling in general and the décor as theatrical feeling applied fully to his treatment of classical French plays. What interested Jouvet most of all in the French classical theatre was its capacity to reflect Man in a timeless perspective. Jouvet's dedication to the original text was stronger than ever as far as classical plays were concerned. The psychology of the human types portrayed by, for example, Molière, was contained in the text of the plays, the monologues and the lines of the characters. Jouvet even wrote that characters were first and foremost a text.⁴² It was only by keeping totally to the text that one could divest the classical play of all the preconceptions and "abuse" it had been subject to through the ages (through rewritings, cuts, additions, etc.). After all, as Copeau had pointed out, the text was the only reference, the only way a man from 1680 would be able to communicate with one from the year 2000.⁴³ Jouvet reframed the whole issue of theatrical tradition and the plays' reception history. He refused to see classical plays merely as classical plays, considering instead that they were plays to be performed regardless of their origin in time and the tradition attached to them.

Jouvet was sufficiently concerned with gaining the endorsement of his audience to understand that coming up with new interpretations of classical plays would not suffice. Heavy promotional efforts were also required, and a brief review of his tactics shows how he succeeded in putting classical plays back on the agenda.

- ◆ He chose roles he had a strong personal connection to (Arnolphe in *L'Ecole des femmes*, Dom Juan and Tartuffe as he grew older), and let them "mature" for a long time before playing them so as to be fully prepared.
- ◆ He deliberately selected plays which had had limited popularity, and which audiences were not familiar with. This put him in a better position to take any liberty which he found relevant, a possibility he made full use of. It also meant that public interest could be more easily aroused by the idea of seeing something unfamiliar (and therefore "new"). Audiences were given the feeling that they would be initiating the play's reception history.

⁴² "Le personnage est d'abord un texte." Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 177.

⁴³ Le texte seul compte; il n'y a que le texte!" "C'est seulement par le texte qu'un homme de 1680 pourra faire signe aux hommes de l'an 2000..." Jacques Copeau, *Les fourberies de Scapin*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983), 22.

- ◆ He invested heavily in the visual aspects of the performances to make them attractive despite the occasionally dry aspect of the texts and used composers to introduce a musical element.⁴⁴ He enlivened performances by adding numerous scenic movements and special effects. He even supplemented the text in order to make it more accessible, actually playing out scenes which were only mentioned in the text to make sure the audience understood the reference. All this created additional challenges in terms of set design, as the sets had to accommodate elements and movements which were not part of the initial text, whether it was a ballet or a new scene.
- ◆ But Jouvét was also very careful to anchor his work in the traditions of the Renaissance and the Golden Age, and always had a wide range of arguments to fend off the critics when they felt he was going too far. The liberties he took were always in keeping with historical trends (there were ballets in Molière's plays, machinery in some of Corneille's plays, etc.), and he used historical iconographical sources.

Visual elements played an important role in Jouvét's intermediation of the text to the audience. He freely admitted that he had major problems "translating" the text into sets and visualising colours and lines.⁴⁵ This made him particularly dependent on his cooperation with his stage designer. For Bérard to provide Jouvét with the "translation" required, he first had to subscribe to Jouvét's approach. Indeed, he submitted to the text to the extent that Jouvét could write that his submission made him equal to the playwright.⁴⁶ Testimonials indicate that he read plays again and again, which was rather unusual for a stage designer at the time: many of them felt the director's instructions were enough to go by.⁴⁷ He also shared Jouvét's concern for minimalism, explaining that décors were to be invisible as far as he was concerned.⁴⁸ His interest for the Renaissance and the classical period meant that he had a thorough understanding of their styles and could perform relevant stylisation for classical plays.

⁴⁴ Louis Jouvét used the composers Vittorio Rieti (1898-1994) for *L'Ecole des femmes* and *L'Illusion*, and Henri Sauguet (1901-1989) for *Dom Juan*.

⁴⁵ "L'imagination que donne une pièce pour le décor n'est qu'une sensation confuse; intraduisible; je ne saurais dire ni les couleurs; ni les lignes ... cette imagination (transposition décorative), je ne l'ai pas:" Jouvét, *Le comédien désincarné*, 240.

⁴⁶ "Il a l'esprit même d'un auteur dramatique. Le don de Bérard, c'est de savoir pratiquer, dans l'art du théâtre où tout est dépendant, cet art de subordination qui le rend égal au créateur." Louis Jouvét, Program for *La Machine infernale*, 1934, Fonds Louis Jouvét, BnF, Paris.

⁴⁷ Jouvét, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 153.

⁴⁸ Christian Bérard to Louis Jouvét, drawing 17763 for *L'Ecole des femmes*, 1936, Fonds Louis Jouvét.

The main result of this cooperation was a unique way of combining the present and the past in the staging of classical plays. Jouvét tried to pinpoint exactly what this involved. Presenting *L'Illusion* to the press, he declared that, in line with tradition, he and Bérard had tried to come up with something new.⁴⁹ In other words, one had to innovate, in the same way as Molière and Corneille had done in their time, and be radical enough to provoke strong reactions, as had been the case for Molière and Corneille's works. Speaking of the production of *L'Illusion*, Bérard even said that he would have been pleased if it provoked a scandal, as this was the hallmark of all-important works.⁵⁰

Making the new out of the old was Jouvét and Bérard's way of solving the antinomies of the classical theater and modern stage design. Four decades of tensions had laid the ground for renewal, thanks to forces from outside the fields of classical theatre and traditional stage design. The staging of classical plays had become a humanist attempt to bring forth the timeless aspects of man and human situations. The décor was to partake in this process and make this timelessness obvious from the moment the curtain went up. The twentieth century décor for classical plays was by now a complex equation involving many skills which Bérard acquired early on and developed throughout his entire career.

⁴⁹ "Nous avons tenté de faire, suivant un vrai sens de la tradition, du nouveau. Du nouveau qui soit la suite légitime du passé, "du nouveau enfin, comme dit P. Claudel, qui soit exactement semblable à l'ancien". Louis Jouvét, "Nous avons tenté de faire du nouveau qui soit la suite légitime du passé", *Paris Soir*, February 2, 1937. Recueil factice *L'Illusion*.

⁵⁰ "Tout sera remis en question. On se battra peut-être dans la salle, ce qui ne me déplairait pas, car le scandale entoure les seules oeuvres importantes". Jean Desbordes, "Louis Jouvét et Christian Bérard travaillent à la mise en scène de 'L'Illusion Comique'", *Comoedia*, December 22, 36. Recueil factice *L'Illusion*.

4 *Christian Bérard*

Reworking things of the past was no doubt one of Bérard's specialities. Kochno, summed up numerous testimonials when, commenting Bérard's décors for a ballet, he stated that Bérard had remembered that nothing was as new as what had been forgotten...⁵¹ But the ability to recreate the spirit of the past would not have been sufficient to attract audiences to performances of classical plays: Bérard's insight into contemporary trends and preferences and his theatrical sense as well as the humanism he applied to his portrait work were not the least of his assets.

4.1 *The many skills of Christian Bérard*

Nothing in Bérard's origins suggested that he would become so heavily involved in the stage. He was born in Paris on August 20, 1902 and came from a family of architects, but started to train as a painter at the Académie Ranson with Maurice Denis (1870-1943), Paul Sérusier (1863-1927) and Edouard Vuillard (1868-1940), who was also active as set designer.⁵² During this time, he made drawings at the Louvre and attended classes at Académie Julian. He made his début as a professional portrait painter around 1925, setting up the Neo-Romantic group with the Berman brothers (Eugène (1899-1972) and Leonid (1896-1976)) and Pavel Tchelitchev (1898-1957). At the beginning of the 1930s, he moved on to stage design, and worked both for the ballet and the theatre. During the same period, he started working with book illustration, fashion drawings and interior design and was active in all the above mentioned fields until his premature death on February 12, 1949.

This variety of skills was by no means unique at the time, and can be frequently found in many artists of the period, from the other Neo-Romantics to Picasso, Derain and Léger. What was unique in Bérard's case was his versatility in terms of techniques and personal styles, due to his extensive artistic culture and to his mastery of a number of disciplines. His style when painting oil portraits differed considerably from the style of his gouache set drawings, which again differed from the style of his India ink drawings. The styles of artists working with different media were usually more predictable. This

⁵¹ Boris Kochno, *Le Ballet en France du quinzième siècle à nos jours*, (Paris: Hachette, 1954), 291.

⁵² Waldemar George, *Arts*, February 18, 1949, Recueil factice Christian Bérard Biographie critique 1931-1960, BnF, DAS, Paris.

ability to switch between media and styles proved to be particularly useful when he worked for the stage and had to adapt to the requirements of the text and the director. And the ability to transfer skills and artistic culture from several areas also meant that he could contribute with novel solutions. His work for the classical theatre largely benefited from this cross-fertilisation.

Bérard's artistic culture was initially developed within painting. His work in this field was anchored in tradition, particularly the Italian, French and English ones. In 1922, he made a decisive trip to Italy with the Berman brothers, during which he developed a lifelong passion for Italian paintings, Piero della Francesca and Raphael in particular.⁵³ Hastings mentions his preference for Faïum portraits, Toulouse-Lautrec, early Courbet and Degas works, as well as Vuillard and Redon.⁵⁴ He mastered eighteenth century drawing techniques, as shown by a sketch of a set inspired by a Fragonard drawing.⁵⁵ Other preferences developed during his lifetime were Delacroix, Géricault, Moreau, Carrière, Puvis de Chavannes, and Fantin Latour, as well as Turner, the Pre-Raphaelites, Beardsley and Whistler.⁵⁶ He was also heavily influenced by Picasso's pink and blue periods, with their melancholy figures. All this trained his eye in terms of style, colour, and light, and gave him a valuable starting point in terms of working for the stage.

Bérard specialised in portraits and remained loyal to this choice all his life (figs. 1-3). He first shared with the Neo-Romantics a wish to react against abstract art and reintroduce the human element in painting. Later, he went deeper and deeper in the personality and the frailty of his sitters. His painter and stage designer friend, Jean Hugo (1894-1984), quotes him for saying that what he was after was to capture their uneasiness.⁵⁷ This uneasiness was probably in fact no other than his own. Bérard was known for his anxiety and impending sense of doom, as well as for his addiction to opium.

Of the Neo-Romantics and other artists of the period who worked for the stage, Bérard

⁵³ James Thrall Soby, "Death of a prodigal", *Saturday Review of Literature*, April 2, 1949. This is also confirmed by George, *Arts*, February 18, 1949.

⁵⁴ Hastings, *Christian Bérard Painter Decorator Designer*, 11.

⁵⁵ Kochno, *Christian Bérard*, 54 .

⁵⁶ Hastings, *Christian Bérard Painter Decorator Designer*, 11.

was probably the only one to focus solely on portraits when painting. This attempt to gain insight into characters was in many ways reminiscent of the work of the playwright.

In 1925, Bérard's life and career took a major turn as he met the writer, playwright and producer Jean Cocteau (1889-1963). The latter introduced him to Diaghilev (1872-1929) in 1926. Although Bérard never worked for Diaghilev, this encounter proved to be decisive as he was accompanied by his secretary, Kochno, who was later to become Bérard's companion.

Kochno and Cocteau launched Bérard as stage designer in 1930 with the ballet *La Nuit* and the play *La Voix humaine* (fig. 4). Cocteau also introduced him to Jouvet, praising Bérard's understanding of the theatre (fig. 5).⁵⁸ Bérard was equally impressed by Jouvet's knowledge of the theatre, and the three worked on Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale*, a modernised version of the myth of Oedipus, in 1934.

Bérard designed costumes and sets for some eighteen ballets (working with Kochno, George Balanchine, Leonide Massine, Roland Petit and David Lichine), thirty-three plays (mainly with Jouvet and Cocteau.) ,and Cocteau's films (*La Belle et La Bête*, *L'Aigle à deux têtes*, *Les Parents terribles*, *Orphée*). In addition to the classical theatre, he therefore contributed to a large number of new ballets and to plays by contemporary authors such as Giraudoux (*La Folle de Chaillot* in 1945) and Jean Genêt (*Les Bonnes* in 1947). The performances did not only take place in Paris, they toured the Riviera, the United Kingdom and the United States, not to mention Jouvet's four year tour in South America during World War II.

Thus, Bérard's work for the stage mixed tradition and modernity, featuring avant-garde works and classical plays. His cooperation with the leading producers, choreographers

⁵⁷ "Chère peinture! ... Ce que je cherche, c'est le malaise." Jean Hugo, *Le regard de la mémoire*, (Paris: Actes Sud, 1994), 355-356.

⁵⁸ Jean Cocteau wrote to Louis Jouvet in February 1933: "Je voudrais beaucoup que vous rencontriez Bérard, que vous appreniez à le connaître. C'est la première fois qu'on trouve chez un grand peintre et chez un homme si jeune le génie absolu du théâtre et de ses ressources." After the meeting, he wrote "Christian Bérard me dit ... qu'enfin il avait vu un homme de science du théâtre, de science et d'amour." Jean Cocteau to Louis Jouvet, February 1933, in *Louis Jouvet: Exposition organisée pour le dixième anniversaire de sa mort*, ed. André Veinstein, (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1961), 39.

and dancers of his time gave him access to a wealth of experience, culture and novel ideas. His contacts with artistic circles and the high society of the day enabled him to understand what could attract trend-setters to the performances he worked on, and it did not take long before he became a trend-setter himself.

He owed this position not only to his theatrical activities, but also to his work for fashion illustration (figs. 6-8). His keen sense of costume and dress made somewhat of a fashion guru out of him in high society circles. He started to work for *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* (as did many of the leading contemporary artists from Dali to Picasso) at the same time as he started working with stage design. Soby saw more than mere commercial motives behind this co-operation. "The justification for this aspect of his work lies in the fact that several years ago Bérard is said to have decided to do for his generation what Van Dongen failed to do for his: to document, like Proust, the *haut monde* of society and art. Bérard is ideally suited to such a task".⁵⁹

The influence of fashion drawing is highly visible in Bérard's sketches for the stage. The ability to conjure the essence of baroque or rococo times in a brushstroke was similar to the one needed to describe the specific elegance of a given season. In turn, Bérard theatricalised fashion, often introducing masques or décors in his fashion illustrations, or even staging fashion as when he decorated the *Théâtre de la Mode*, an exhibition which toured several countries after World War II in 1945 to relaunch French fashion (fig. 9).

This taste for theatricalisation was one of the salient features of Bérard's personality. There was a thin line between life and the stage, and this line could easily be crossed when, for example, he was asked to produce sets and costumes for the fancy dress parties of his high society friends. Unsurprisingly, he worked more for the theatre than for the ballet or the opera, whereas other painters similar to him did the contrary. All the directors with whom he co-operated praised his sense of the theatre. As described by Cocteau, his décors played and he worked in fact like a stage director.⁶⁰ It seems he had

⁵⁹ Soby, *After Picasso*, 19.

⁶⁰ "Bérard, c'était le théâtre ... il était davantage qu'un décorateur, ... ses décors jouaient et ... il était en somme un metteur en scène." Jean Cocteau in *Christian Bérard décorateur*, ed. Pierre Chanel, (Nancy: Musée des Beaux-Arts, 1966), (Cocteau's italics).

understood better than others how to make sets a part of the performance, and how to address the specific challenges related to scenic space in the theatre.

4.2 Working methods

Indeed, the “architecture of the décor” was Bérard’s first concern when starting to work on a play.⁶¹ First of all, he checked the text for stage movements and interactions between characters, and designed the architecture of the décor accordingly. Having done this, he was in a position to place objects on the stage. This required knowledge of what would have an effect: a large object could remain invisible, whereas a smaller one placed adequately could attract maximum attention. Stage directions given by the playwrights then had to be interpreted and effects could be reached by doing the opposite of what would be expected (i.e. designing a high ceiling instead of a low one for the cellar in *La Folle de Chaillot*). Colours were to be used with care so as not to distract the viewer from the text, and the text was to be the guiding principle when choosing them. Minimalism was an absolute must. He started by drawing complete sets and gradually removed most of the components to reach the essence of the décor. In this manner, the little that was left was in essence still full of what had been removed. Then came lighting, which was dangerous because it could make a bad set look good. It was only to be used to reinforce colour effects.

In practical terms, this was carried out through a four-stage approach :

- ◆ reading the play repeatedly (and seemingly without result),
- ◆ conducting extensive preliminary research in a variety of iconographical sources,
- ◆ “firing off” large quantities of drawings until the final (and considerably trimmed down) composition was found. It was then often placed on black paper with vivid colours in gouache.
- ◆ producing the actual sets (together with the stagehands) which he partly painted himself, and working on the lighting, adjusting both in minute details.

The features common to the plays studied hereafter (and to a large part of Bérard’s work for the theatre) are described below.

⁶¹ See Bérard interview in Exhibit 1.

4.3 Readings

As testified by Jouvet and others, reading the play appears to have been a particularly frustrating part of the process for Bérard. He would read it up to a dozen times, but this did not lead to any immediate productive activity, only to a long phase of procrastination (Bérard's correspondence files are full of reminders from distracted directors).⁶² Jouvet held the novelist Honoré de Balzac in high esteem and made all those who worked with him read his novels, so they could learn to visualise décors and scenic movements.⁶³ Bérard became a keen Balzac reader and could discuss his descriptions at length.⁶⁴ He was thus trained in visualising texts, a particularly critical activity as far as classical theatre was concerned given the importance of the text.

4.4 Research techniques

Readings were followed by intensive research work. Bérard's first period play was *Margot*, a play on Marguerite de Valois in Renaissance times written in 1936. It is probably at this time that he began to develop an approach to classical plays based on detailed iconographical research.⁶⁵ Such research work was of course part of a stage designer's tasks. Hugo relates that when he received a commission for a film in 1925, he visited the Cabinet des Estampes at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the library of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and subsequently made numerous sketches.⁶⁶ But it seems that Bérard took the process particularly seriously. This involved spending many hours in museums and libraries, visiting buildings or even demanding to see the cellars of all his friends for the cellar set in *La Folle de Chaillot*. Jouvet would also have provided him with motives, as he was also a keen theater historian and collected a large amount of iconographical information.

The main theater library of the time was the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, an annex of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. One of Bérard's visits is even documented in a letter from Jouvet when the two men were working on *L'Illusion*.⁶⁷ L'Arsenal housed the Fonds Rondel, a collection of writings and graphic material from the Renaissance to the

⁶² Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 153.

⁶³ Michel Etcheverry, "Jouvet et l'acteur", *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, no. 158 (1988-2): 41-42.

⁶⁴ Hugo, *Le regard de la mémoire*, 356.

⁶⁵ Kochno, *Christian Bérard*, 45.

⁶⁶ Hugo, *Le regard de la mémoire*, 246-247.

⁶⁷ Louis Jouvet to Christian Bérard, October 12 1936, file L'Illusion, Fonds Louis Jouvet.

beginning of the twentieth century given to the library in 1935. Other departments of the Bibliothèque Nationale such as the Cabinet des Estampes would also have had relevant material such as engravings. Jouvét had a wide range of theatre related publications, and Bérard had access to architecture and art history books in a number of other private libraries such as his father's, and those of the high society personalities he and Kochno often stayed with.⁶⁸

Jouvét provided a number of useful indications regarding Bérard's sources, mentioning Serlio, and Palladio in one of his writings.⁶⁹ He also listed Vitruvius, Inigo Jones, Laurent, Mahelot, Serlio Bibiena and Gordon Craig in another text⁷⁰. Nicola Sabbatini and others should be added to this list.

4.4.1 *Renaissance, seventeenth century and eighteenth century sources*

These sources consisted mainly of architectural and theatre treatises, as well as engravings of set designs.

Bérard used the two main illustrated architectural treatises of the Renaissance. The first one was Sebastiano Serlio's (1475-1554) *The Five Books of Architecture*.⁷¹ It was published in 1545 and codified sets for comedies, tragedies and pastorals. Serlio linked up perspective and stage design, making full use of Renaissance paintings' discoveries as regards perspective. The second one was Andrea Palladio's (1508-1580) *The Four Books on Architecture*.⁷² Bérard also had direct knowledge of Palladio's works thanks to several trips to Italy. Eugene Berman visited the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza in 1922 during their trip to Italy, and it is likely that Bérard accompanied him.⁷³ The principle of the frons scenae with openings is recurrent in Bérard's work. He also visited Palladio's villa La Malcontenta when touring Italy with Kochno in the early 1930s.⁷⁴ Both

⁶⁸ Bibliore.com, "Livres (1) + Livres (2) + Livres (3)", *Résultats Vendredi 11 avril 2005 Bibliothèque Louis Jouvét, Souvenirs et objets personnels, Succession Liza Jouvét*, http://www.bibliore.com/cat-vent_drouot1-4-05.htm (accessed May 12, 2007).

⁶⁹ Jouvét, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 155.

⁷⁰ Jouvét, Program for *La Machine Infernale*.

⁷¹ Sebastiano Serlio, *The Five Books of Architecture*, English ed. of 1611, (NY: Dover Publications Inc., 1982).

⁷² Andrea Palladio, *The Four Books on Architecture*, trans. Robert Tavernor and Richard Schofield, (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1997).

⁷³ Michael Duncan, *High Drama: Eugene Berman and the Legacy of the Sublime*, (Vermont: Hudson Hills Press, 2004), 131.

⁷⁴ Kochno, *Christian Bérard*, 23.

treatises provided many representations of buildings and ornaments which Bérard stylised in his drawings in order to express the essence of classical style.

Bérard could find a wealth of information on Renaissance stage machinery in Nicola Sabbatini's (1574-1654) *Manual for Constructing Theatrical Scenes and Machines*, first published in 1638. Sabbatini worked with perspective and described a method for identifying the ideal viewing point ("l'oeil du prince"), from which he derived the measurements and proportions of his sets. He also described ways of producing special effects (sea waves, storms, ascensions and descents, etc.). It is most likely that Bérard and Jouvett turned to Sabbatini for inspiration when Bérard designed the machinery which made it possible to open and close the garden walls in *L'Ecole des femmes*.⁷⁵ It would also have been natural for Bérard to look up Sabbatini's suggestions when designing the special effects used in *L'Illusion*, and *Dom Juan*. Jouvett very much admired Sabbatini, and personally saw to it that the book was translated from Italian into French in 1942. His preface to the translation is a eulogy of stage machinery. This reference to Sabbatini was really a case of making the new out of the old: Bérard reworked Sabbatini's special effects having in mind those of the music hall and the fun fair to produce a modern version.

Italy was not the only country Bérard turned to for inspiration. He was well acquainted with English culture and history and visited England on a regular basis either for work reasons or to meet his high society friends. It is probably on these occasions, and through his cooperation with Jouvett, that he became familiar with the works of Inigo Jones (1573-1652). Jones had introduced Italian Renaissance architecture, and particularly Palladio, in England at the turn of the sixteenth century. He designed numerous décors for court masques. These theatrical spectacles were divided in two with an anti-masque involving professional actors and a ballet in which the dancers invited the aristocratic audience to take part. In addition to sets, he drew elaborate proscenium arches (Proscenium and standing scene for *Artenice*, Proscenium and standing scene for *The Sheperd's Paradise* Proscenium for *The Temple of Love*).⁷⁶

⁷⁵ A full description of the machinery is given in Pierre Sonrel, *Traité de scénographie*, (Paris: Librairie Théâtrale, 1984), pl. LVIII.

⁷⁶ John Peacock, *The stage designs of Inigo Jones: the European context*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pl. 33, 114, 144.

The seventeenth century perfected the Renaissance usage of perspective and machinery. Stage design acquired a new status thanks to the prodigies of court entertainment. As stated by Wendell Cole, “[Bérard] was greatly influenced by the balance, proportion, scenery and decorative details of the perspective scenery used in the baroque theatre”.⁷⁷

Theatre sets of the period are well documented thanks to a register of sets and numerous engravings. The register is Laurent Mahelot and Michel Laurent’s work known as *Le Mémoire*.⁷⁸ It is a register of stage sets for the Troupe Royale who performed at the Hotel de Bourgogne in Paris in the 1630s. The work consists of a description of the sets required for a number of plays and of related drawings for some of these plays. New editions were published in 1902 and in 1920, testifying to an increased interest in historical sets around that time. Bérard used it (albeit loosely) for *L’Illusion*.

The more prestigious sets used for court entertainment became well known thanks to engravings, and can be related to four main personalities. Jean Bérain (1638-1711) produced costumes and sets for opera, plays and other forms of entertainment staged at Versailles for Louis the XIVth. He also provided useful indications in terms of machinery. Giacomo Torelli (1608-1678) was Sabbatini’s pupil and had been hired by Mazarin, chief minister of France from 1642 to 1661, to develop the use of machinery on the Paris theatre scene. Another Italian, Carlo Vigarani (1637-1713) overtook after him and was responsible for entertainment at the court of Louis the XIVth, his best known work being *Les Plaisirs de l’Ile Enchantée* which was staged over several days in Versailles in 1664. The three men were the leading figures of French baroque stage design and Bérard used their motives on a number of occasions, both in terms of design and of colour combinations.

The fourth figure was an Italian designer who was not present at the court of France, Ferdinando Galli-Bibiena (1657-1743). He published *Civil Architecture*, which includes some views of stage sets. He distanced himself from traditional perspective, and placed

⁷⁷ Wendell Cole, “Current trends in European scene design”, *Educational Theatre Journal* 5, no 1, (March 1953): 27-28.

⁷⁸ Laurent Mahelot and Michel Laurent, *Mémoire*, (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005.)

his constructions in the middle of the stage, often following diagonal lines (*scena per angolo*). His baroque architecture differs of course from his classical predecessors: unusual angles prevail and the single vanishing point is replaced by two or more. “The stage designs that resulted no longer confined or demarcated the spectator’s view: they were more dynamic, closer to reality, employing unprecedented asymmetrical and infinite lines. The audience thus had the impression it was sharing the scenic space with the characters.”⁷⁹ Bérard made use of the possibilities offered by the *scena per angolo* in *L’Illusion*.

As regards the eighteenth century, Bérard’s favourite architect appears to have been Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736-1806).⁸⁰ Ledoux was one of the inventors of the neo-classical style and developed a utopian approach to town planning, drawing increasingly visionary designs in the course of his career. His works include the building of the salt works at La Saline and a theatre in Besancon. Charles Henri de Noailles confirmed Bérard’s interest in Ledoux in an invitation where he mentioned that Bérard would have the possibility of visiting Ledoux’s houses in the vicinity.⁸¹ It is highly likely that Bérard was familiar with Ledoux’s architectural treatise, which would have been a natural item in his father’s library, or which he may have come across in the course of his research work. Ledoux’s work featured heavy rustication which is often visible on Bérard’s drawings and the somewhat unusual grotto entrance at La Saline may have inspired the grotto used in *L’Illusion*.

What Renaissance, seventeenth century and eighteenth century sources provided was an architectural and a theatrical vocabulary based on classical motives and their baroque versions. Bérard could then extract the essence of these motives and form his own vocabulary for the stage.

4.4.2 *Twentieth century sources*

When handling classical and baroque motifs, Bérard also had contemporary sources very much in mind. Some of them provided him with a new interpretation of these

⁷⁹ National Arts Centre Théâtre Français, *Major Designers*, ArtsAlive.ca, <http://www.artsalive.ca/en/thf/histoire/concepteurs.html>, (accessed May 12, 2007).

⁸⁰ Jouvett, *Témoignages sur le Théâtre*, 155.

motives.

Bérard had acquired a good knowledge of the European Reformers, no doubt through Jouvet. Hastings describes Bérard's relationship to the European Reformers as follows: "...Bérard utilized the reforms of Stanislavsky, Appia, Craig, Meyerhold... he was one of the very few artists working in the commercial theatre who made practical use of the great work of the reformers of our time, and in so doing he perpetuated their contribution, while adding his own imaginative creation to their work."⁸²

Craig spent a large part of his life in France, and two hand written messages found in Bérard's correspondence document the fact that contact had been established between the two.⁸³ Craig had even written "As it is necessary that we keep in touch...", which can indicate that a common project may have been considered at one stage.

As regards Meyerhold, Bérard directly referred to one of his productions, Ostorovsky's *The Forest*, which he probably attended when the Cartel invited Meyerhold to Paris in 1930.⁸⁴ Meyerhold had a minimalist approach to stage sets, and advocated using only what was absolutely necessary. This was an integral part of the relationship between the production and its audience. It was up to the audience to complete the picture it was being presented with. The idea was to offer combinations which could trigger associations in the mind of the viewer. "The more subtle the associations, the greater the success"⁸⁵.

Bérard's sets were generally architected sets, given their benefits in terms of the optimisation of scenic space. He was also very much influenced by Meyerhold's minimalism and the way it triggered the participation of the audience, as shown in the interview in Exhibit 1.

In addition to the work of the Reformers, Bérard was fully familiar with the

⁸¹ "D'un autre côté, la maison de Ledoux, et les deux autres maisons de Ledoux, tout à côté, car c'est l'endroit où il travaillait, vous intéresseront certainement". Charles Henri de Noailles to Christian Bérard, May 12 1947, Correspondance Christian Bérard.

⁸² Hastings, *Christian Bérard Painter Decorator Designer*, 30.

⁸³ Edward Gordon Craig to Christian Bérard, n.d., Correspondance Christian Bérard.

⁸⁴ See interview in Exhibit 1.

development of ballet since the beginning of the century. His relationship to Kochno who had been Diaghilev's secretary, and his cooperation with Massine (1896-1979) who had also worked with Diaghilev gave him first hand information on the performances of the Ballets Russes. There were two main lessons to be learned from their experience.

First of all, ballet had been exposed to the increasing importance of the visual element in the same way as classical theatre, but had been able to accommodate it much more easily than the classical theatre had done. As demonstrated by Lynn Garafola, Diaghilev and Massine had fully accepted and even welcomed the fact that the visual element had taken the lead, supplanting music and choreography.⁸⁶ Ballet taught Bérard that it was possible to perform a synthesis and solve the apparent conflict between the text of the classical theatre and the visual element.

Secondly, Diaghilev's rediscovery of seventeenth and eighteenth century French and Italian music as well as of the *commedia dell'arte* in the first quarter of the twentieth century was the ballet equivalent of Bérard and Jouvett's rejuvenation of classical theater more than a decade later. Lynn Garafola describes how Diaghilev had conducted intense historical research to create what she calls "period modernism".⁸⁷ In 1920, he succeeded in convincing Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971) to write a score based on the music of eighteenth century Italian composer Pergolesi for the ballet *Pulcinella* choreographed by Massine. Picasso designed the décors, blending cubism and Neapolitan street scenes, "a visual analogue of Stravinsky's modernised Pergolesi and Massine's 'futurised' *commedia dell'arte*".⁸⁸ Other ballets inspired by Rossini and Scarlatti followed. Garafola mentions that the works "indicated a way in which period material might be updated, streamlined, and most importantly, transposed from a key of neoromantic sentimentality ... to one of ironic detachment".⁸⁹ Ironic tones are often present in Bérard's stage drawings, and it seems he shared to some extent the pastiche spirit of Diaghilev's period ballets. Pastiche ballets had also been staged by the Count Etienne

⁸⁵ Vsevolod Meyerhold, *Vsevolod Meyerhold*, 146. My translation.

⁸⁶ Lynn Garafola, "The Making of Ballet Modernism", *Dance Research Journal* 20, no. 2, Russian Issue (Winter, 1988):26.

⁸⁷ Garafola, "The Making of Ballet Modernism", 29.

⁸⁸ Lynn Garafola, "The Making of Ballet Modernism", 30.

⁸⁹ Lynn Garafola, "The Making of Ballet Modernism", 30.

de Beaumont during his *Soirées de Paris* at the Théâtre de la Cigale in May and June 1924. Beaumont had used many of the artists who worked for Diaghilev, much to the latter's displeasure. One of these ballets was *Gigue*, inspired by Haendel and Bach, and for which Derain had provided a highly stylised and minimalist décor, described by Beaumont as "the essence of Versailles".⁹⁰ The Ballets Russes, the Ballets Suédois and the *Soirées de Paris* provided many examples of successful period modernism. Their legacy could easily be transposed to the theatrical stage.

Of the painters who worked for the ballet, two should be mentioned more specifically. Giorgio di Chirico (1888-1978) painted a number of classical motifs such as arcades or ruins which Bérard used in his sets as modernised versions of Renaissance architecture. Hugo was a highly cultured painter and stage designer, and a close friend of Bérard. He drew stage sets in a stylised graphic technique and used the same stylisation for architectural ornaments on the stage set as early as the 1920s, and Bérard's work shows that it is likely that he reproduced this approach.

The ballet was not the only form of entertainment to inspire Bérard, and the influence of the music hall, the circus, and the fairground should not be neglected. They had been given a new impulse by the advent of electricity. These were popular forms of entertainment at all levels of society, including aristocrats, artists and trendsetters. The ballets organised by Beaumont at the Théâtre de la Cigale owed much to the music hall. Bérard was known for his appreciation of these forms of entertainment and recreated their atmosphere and special effects in a number of his set designs, particularly those of *L'Illusion*.

When he started to design for the stage in the early 1930s, Bérard's timing could probably not have been better. He could consolidate the findings of his predecessors and transfer them to, amongst others, the classical theatre where they had been little used up until then.

4.5 Drawing techniques

After he had completed his iconographical research, Bérard began his graphic

⁹⁰ Etienne de Beaumont, "Le flambeau de la danse aux Soirées de Paris", Recueil factice Théâtre de la

exploration of the motives he had identified. Whereas most stage designers drew sets in a bi-dimensional way, even when working with architected décors, Bérard drew three-dimensional architected décors from the start. This makes his drawings very different from those of his contemporaries.

It appears that Bérard had a tendency to produce less drawings at the end of his career and that he would test out various solutions of the stage itself with plastic elements. This confirms that the plastic element was very much on his mind from the beginning. It might therefore be tempting to dismiss the drawings as preliminary sketches which became less and less critical as Bérard's stage design capabilities matured. However, their richness leads one to believe that there is more to them than meets the eye.

As shown hereafter, they are often a microcosm in their own right, with their own composition, their own style, their own technique, their own colours and lighting effects. They constitute a stage in the creative process, but the process is not linear and more akin to fireworks going off in several directions.⁹¹ The most striking feature is the change of style which accompanies almost inevitably each change of composition. Bérard cannot conceive a new motif without changing his style, as if the primary purpose of the drawing was to give a complete expression of an atmosphere, hence the "world of its own" impression each drawing conveys. Moreover, drawings were very much his way of expressing ideas and communicating them.

Bérard often chose one colour combination for a given play and to keep to it, thus creating an impression of consistency and harmony, even if moods could change dramatically from one set to the next due to slight variations in hues and shades. Colours were applied symmetrically with numerous correspondences within the set, within the costumes and between the sets and the costumes. Lighting effects were simulated with the help of different media such as India ink washes, gouache and pastel.

4.6 Set production and lighting

Once the drawings were finished, cardboard models were made. It seems Bérard painted

Cigale Soirées de Paris, BnF, DAS, Paris.

⁹¹ "... Jouvét questionnant, Bérard répondant comme une table tournante se met à parler, précipitant sur le papier les esquisses, les dessins, les précisions, les idées au rythme éblouissant d'un feu d'artifice," Henri Sauguet, "Louis Jouvét et la Musique", *Louis Jouvét: Exposition organisée pour le dixième anniversaire de sa mort*, 147.

them himself at times, at least those of *L'Illusion*: a letter from Jouvet to Bourdet explains that Bérard was causing some delays, as he was painting the models and that Jouvet needed to have the models back so they could be taken apart and measurements drawn up prior to the production of the life size sets.⁹²

Bérard drew and painted himself the finished sets to a certain extent, standing and painting on the very stage.⁹³ What is most likely is that other painters handled the bulk of the paintwork and that he provided the outlines and the finishing details.⁹⁴ Two testimonials, amongst others, provide evidence of this. Jouvet recalls seeing him making preliminary charcoal outlines on the sets with two hands (he was ambidextrous).⁹⁵ Bérard's correspondence contains a message from Bourdet related to *L'Illusion*, where the latter asks him to be punctual so that there is sufficient time to paint the items which remain to be painted and for the paint to dry. He also reminds him of props and accessories which remain to be finalised.⁹⁶ It is often mentioned that Bérard participated in the assembly of the sets and was as capable as any trained stagehand of finding technical solutions to construction problems.⁹⁷ He therefore had sufficient technical autonomy to introduce changes if he was not satisfied with the initial results (which was the rule more than the exception).

The painter's work did not stop there and lighting and colour were one area where he could make a significant contribution beyond the drawing board. A letter from Jouvet for *L'Illusion* testifies to this. Jouvet informs Bérard that he will work on lighting effects and various accessories that very evening and asks him to attend.⁹⁸ A critic confirmed that Jouvet had fine-tuned all the lighting effects with Bérard and that the latter had "painted with spotlights".⁹⁹ The actual sets were kept fairly neutral, being often in black and white so they would not interfere with the lighting.

⁹² Louis Jouvet to Edouard Bourdet, January 6, 1937, file *L'Illusion*, Fonds Louis Jouvet.

⁹³ Kochno, *Christian Bérard*, 136.

⁹⁴ Louis Jouvet mentions that the set for the basement of *La Folle de Chaillot*, was finished and painted and then presented to Bérard. Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 155.

⁹⁵ Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 155.

⁹⁶ Edouard Bourdet to Christian Bérard, 1936, Correspondance Christian Bérard. It should be mentioned that the Comédie-Française had in its basement all the workshops necessary to produce the sets (carpentry, painting, metalwork), so that everything was done on site. André Le Bret, "Le Décor au Théâtre", *Miroir du monde*, October 18, 1930.

⁹⁷ Colette, "Nous avons perdu Christian Bérard", *Vogue*, French edition, (March 1949).

⁹⁸ Louis Jouvet to Christian Bérard, February 6, 1937, file *L'Illusion*, Fonds Louis Jouvet.

⁹⁹ "... on peut affirmer que [Bérard] a peint également à coups de projecteurs. *Jouvet n'a pas réglé un seul éclairage sans Bérard*". Richard Borel, "Décors et musique de *L'Illusion* à la Comédie-Française",

In short, Bérard mastered the value chain of stage design from sketch to set. He was able to control the process from beginning to end, ensure that his ideas were faithfully implemented and make last minute adjustments which could prove to be decisive but were impossible to foresee at drawing board stage. It was a form of “vertical integration”, as he was present in all the stages of the value chain. Bérard also mastered art history, iconographical sources and a number of artistic skills, which in turn constituted a form of “horizontal integration”. It was first and foremost at the drawing board that the two integration modes came together and that Bérard began to devise his own version of “period modernism” for classical plays. The analysis of the drawings for *L’Ecole des femmes*, *L’Illusion* and *Dom Juan* hereafter will show how this was achieved through graphic exploration.

Ami du Peuple, February 22, 1937, (Borel’s italics).

5 *L'Ecole des femmes*

Staged at the Théâtre de l'Athénée in May 1936, *L'Ecole des femmes* constituted the first foray of the Juvet-Bérard team in the realm of classical theatre. Juvet had taken over the Théâtre at the end of 1934 and was now master in his own house when it came to choosing his repertoire. He had played the role of the leading character in the play for the first time in 1909 and had nurtured this project over nearly 30 years before bringing it to the stage.

L'Ecole des femmes was nevertheless no easy choice for a director making a fresh start. Although it had been highly successful in Molière's time, the play had subsequently acquired the reputation of being difficult to handle due to awkward stage directions, limited action and the long soliloquies of the main protagonist. Up until then, no one had succeeded in coming up with a convincing version of the play. This made it easier to come up with something radically new, and success with *L'Ecole des femmes* would ensure a genuine breakthrough for Juvet's approach to classical theatre.

5.1 *The play*

L'Ecole des femmes is a variation on the commedia dell'arte plots of the duped husband and of the forced marriage. A rich bourgeois, Arnolphe, has his ward, Agnès, brought up in a convent in utter ignorance of the facts of life. He now plans to marry her and brags that he will succeed where so many other men have failed, namely in being married without running any risk of being duped. He has hidden her in a secluded house he owns in the city. During his short absence however, Agnès has met the young Horace whilst he was strolling under her balcony. The play starts when Arnolphe returns and meets Horace in the square outside his house: Horace recognises him as a friend of his father and tells him about his new conquest, but does not know that Arnolphe is Agnès' tutor and plans to marry her. A series of cases of mistaken identity follows. Arnolphe repeatedly attempts to counteract Horace's efforts to enter the house, but his plans inevitably backfire and he has to listen to Horace's repeated descriptions of their failure. Agnès develops rapidly and rebels against the physical and mental imprisonment she is subject to, Arnolphe on the other hand discovers that he is genuinely in love with her. A "deus ex machina" ending brings the play to a close, as Horace's father and one of his friends appear the latter turns out to be the real father of Agnès and it transpires that the

two had already agreed that their children should marry before the beginning of the play...

L'Ecole des femmes is generally considered as the first of Molière's major plays, followed by *Tartuffe*, *Don Juan* and *Le Misanthrope*. Here Molière departed to a certain extent from traditional commedia dell'arte comical mechanisms, to create a new genre, that of the great comedy. It still intended to make people laugh, but also had moralising and psychological aspects. The traditional theme of the duped husband developed into an appeal in the favour of female education (Molière was a humanist and as such deeply opposed to ignorance). Arnolphe himself was portrayed as a passionate and suffering being, thus becoming much more than the buffoon of the farce and acquiring a new human and psychological depth. Formally also, comedy as a genre needed to be upgraded to support this change, and, for the first time, a comedy was written in five acts and in alexandrines. Such an upgrade involved complying with the rules of unity of time, place and action used for tragedies. If Molière had no problem achieving unity of time (the action takes place over twenty-four hours), and action (Arnolphe's attempts to implement his marriage plans and thwart Horace's), unity of place proved to be more problematic. He had all the scenes take place on a city square to satisfy the requirements of this last rule.¹⁰⁰ He was subsequently criticised for a certain lack of verisimilitude. The critics felt it unlikely that scenes of a more intimate character could take place in the open. Furthermore, the original set, as described in Mahelot's *Mémoire* involved two houses (the one where Arnolphe lives and the one where he hides Agnès), which was seen as an infringement of the rule.¹⁰¹

As depicted in the frontispiece of the first edition of the play, the original set consisted of a narrow street between the two houses with a square at the back and overhanging trees which are mentioned several times in the play. The scene shown here is one of the "indoor" scenes between Arnolphe and Agnès, which explains why Arnolphe is seated although the scene takes place in the street (fig. 10). It also shows that, as early as the first performances, one had tried to find a solution with respect to the location of the

¹⁰⁰ This can also be explained by the influence of the commedia dell'arte, where all the scenes take place outdoors, and which is very present in Molière's early works up to *L'Ecole des femmes*. Sonrel, Pierre, *Traité de Scénographie*, 57.

¹⁰¹ Laurent Mahelot and Michel Laurent, *Mémoire*, (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2005), 332.

indoor scenes, hence division of the scenic space between the narrow street at the front and the more open square at the back.

The problem persisted in the centuries that followed. The more naturalistic stage directors of the turn of the nineteenth century attempted to make the set as credible as possible. One director, Adolphe Montigny set up a new alternative in 1873, where he introduced a garden in the middle of the square for the more private conversations. Another director and leading figure of the naturalistic theater, Antoine, followed suit in 1908, this time with a hanging garden within the house walls. As mentioned by Jim Carmody, "...Montigny's three-fold division of the scenic space (house, garden, public area that surrounded both) continued to influence every major production in France, including Juvet's, until Antoine Vitez took a radically different approach to the problem in 1978."¹⁰² Even so, the question of the stage directions was still being discussed at length well into the 1930s, and, in 1936, Jacques Arnavon devoted an entire book to the issue coming up with numerous and complex alternatives.¹⁰³ *L'Ecole des femmes* was a play where the set represented a genuine issue which remained to be solved.

5.2 *Louis Juvet's preliminary drawings*

For Juvet, classical theatre was based on a tacit agreement between the audience, the actors and the authors that they were operating within a theatrical illusion. Juvet was highly critical of the naturalistic theatre of the second half of the nineteenth century which focused on verisimilitude and where the audience was reduced to the mere role of a voyeur looking at a "slice of life".¹⁰⁴ He was particularly opposed to the principle which prevailed in terms of décor from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, namely the introduction of the fourth scene wall, which banned illusion to the benefit of naturalism. It seems, however, that the question raised by the naturalistic theatre of finding a credible location for the intimate scenes was one of the starting points of his approach to the play.¹⁰⁵ As Copeau's technical director, he was well versed with the art of producing models and after some efforts, came up with a solution in 1932 during a

¹⁰² Jim Carmody, "Rethinking realism in Molière's 'The School for Wives'", 5-15.

¹⁰³ Jacques Arnavon, *L'Ecole des femmes de Molière*, (Paris: Plon, 1936).

¹⁰⁴ Juvet, *Réflexions du comédien*, 123-124.

¹⁰⁵ Juvet, *Le Comédien désincarné*, 200.

stay in London.¹⁰⁶ He took Antoine's solution one step further and designed a set which could be either closed to simulate the street or opened to show the inner garden of the house (fig. 11).

This layout was somewhat reminiscent of the design of the Shakespearian stage Jouvet was familiar with (fig. 12). The Shakespearian stage comprised a front stage for battles, soliloquies and festivities, a middle stage, a back stage for indoor or private scenes, and a central structure with a balcony.¹⁰⁷ Jouvet's design, with a main central structure, a balcony and protruding front stage, is sufficiently unusual for the resemblance to be a mere coincidence. As regards the spearheaded shape of the walls of the gardens which meet at an angle, Copeau related it to typical *commedia dell'arte* sets.¹⁰⁸

One problem still remained to be solved however: keeping the garden on the same level as the street in order to comply with the rules of unity of place which did not allow for several scenic spaces and for set shifts. Bérard used machinery to make the walls open and close as relevant, so that the same scenic space could be used for all the scenes in full compliance with the rule. Jouvet saw this use of machinery as highly instrumental in creating theatrical illusion and taking viewers into a different reality. Thus a naturalistic concern had resulted, paradoxically enough, in a most unrealistic set.

Equally paradoxical was the fact that the set for *L'Ecole des femmes* became Bérard's best known work, knowing that it was Jouvet who had produced the actual concept. But, as Copeau put it, it was Bérard who gave the set its proportions and its colours, and this made a major difference.¹⁰⁹ It is actually by comparing Bérard's drawings with Jouvet's, and measuring the distance between them, that Bérard's working methods can best be understood.

5.3 *The architecture of the situations*

Bérard's avowed first concern when designing a set was to find the architecture of the situations (see interview in Exhibit 1). In Jouvet's drawings, the house occupied most of

¹⁰⁶ Mignon, *louis Jouvet*, 72.

¹⁰⁷ André Degaine, *Histoire du théâtre dessinée*, (Saint Genouph: A.-G. Nizet, 1992), 112.

¹⁰⁸ Jacques Copeau, "L'Ecole des femmes' à l'Athénée", *Registre II Molière*, (Paris: NRF Gallimard, 1976), 55. Originally published in *La Nación*, Buenos Aires, August 30, 1936.

¹⁰⁹ Copeau, "L'Ecole des femmes' à l'Athénée", 55.

the scenic space, despite the critical role of the town square. It seems Bérard started by rescaling the house (figs. 13-14): its height was increased and its width narrowed. This left sufficient room to fit in elements which could suggest a town square without taking up much space, i.e. a row of arches on the opposite prompt side of the house (fig. 14).¹¹⁰

Actors could now make their entrance and exit through the arches. Jouvét had added a ballet and a chase which were not part of Molière's text, and the set had to facilitate this. The arches thus offered a number of logistical possibilities in addition to their evocative power. It may also have been necessary to increase the height of the house in order to balance the set in relation to the proportions of the stage of l'Athénée which, as Paul Louis Mignon pointed out, has a high ceiling.¹¹¹

This increase presented another advantage which was important to both Jouvét and Bérard. The house tended to disappear in the flies, and was much less present visually than a conventional house, which would have occupied the width of the stage and distracted the viewers' attention from the actors.¹¹² A conventional stage designer would have drawn a house with a regular width (as Jouvét had done). Bérard, in a typical move, took the opposite stand. Instead of the house dominating the acting space and the actors moving within its radius, it was the acting space that encompassed the house, and the house that was located within the radius of the actors' movements (figs. 14-16). The main focus could now be on the actors.

The evocation of the town square was then taken even further in fig. 14, as arcades were added on the prompt side and at the back of the house whose width was now considerably trimmed.

It seems the house was initially located on the prompt side (fig. 14), so as to leave a large area of uninterrupted floor space to the actors, but this was later changed to give the house a central position (figs. 15-16). The actors had the same amount of space available on both sides of the walls and could therefore use the opposite prompt side to

¹¹⁰ The prompt side of the stage is the side to the right of the audience, the opposite prompt side is the side to the left of the audience.

¹¹¹ Mignon, *Louis Jouvét*, 74.

a greater extent.¹¹³ Additional acting space within the walls was secured by replacing Jouvot's large hexagonal flowerbed in the middle of the garden by rectangular borders along each of the walls (figs. 18-19).

This made way for a central walk, in which the characters could come and go unhindered (fig. 20).

Once the final outline was established, chandeliers were added, helping to rebalance the décor with respect to the height of the ceiling (fig. 21). Jouvot had explained to Bérard that he wanted the sky to feature five motives to reflect the five acts of the play, the five parts of the day and the passing of time. He wanted a dramatic sky with the hours of the almanac or the cycles of the moon and had difficulties expressing his thoughts. It was then that Bérard came up with the idea of hanging five chandeliers from the flies (fig. 21).¹¹⁴

The main purpose of these pencil drawings was to research several alternatives in terms of composition and proportions, and determine what Bérard called the "scaffolding" of the set. The main lines are highlighted with a firm hand, there appears to be little hesitation as the artist appears to be fully confident in his approach. The drawings resemble more those of an architect than those of a painter, and the elements are visibly three-dimensional. There are no pictorial effects, the focus is solely on the lines of the set and on its "bearing" elements: this is compositional exploration.

5.4 Stylistic, abstraction, and theatrical illusion

In addition to scenic space problems, the set also raised stylistic problems. It was

¹¹² The flies are the area above the stage from which set elements can be lowered and where spotlights can be placed.

¹¹³ It seemed however that they did not make full use of it and often tended to stand at the tip of the triangle which Jacques Copeau felt was uncomfortable both for them and for the audience. Copeau, "L'École des femmes" à l'Athénée", 55.

¹¹⁴ "Pour le décor de 'L'École des femmes', je souhaitais que le ciel du théâtre fut ponctué par cinq motifs qui auraient fait allusion aux cinq actes de la pièce, aux cinq parties de cette journée, et aux heures auxquelles se passe successivement l'action. Astrologie ou cosmogonie dramatique, je tentais vainement de m'exprimer. Bébé me regardait, un peu excédé. "Enfin, me dit-il, qu'est ce que tu veux ? Donne moi un exemple réel de ton idée." "Je ne sais pas, lui dis-je, c'est quelque chose que je sens, mais que je ne peux pas traduire. Mais je voudrais –horaire d'almanach ou phases de la lune. avoir un ciel dramatique ..." "Tu as raison, me dit Bébé, il faut suspendre cinq lustres dans le décor." Louis Jouvot, "Christian Bérard au théâtre" in *1925-1950 Vingt cinq ans d'élégance à Paris*, ed. Geneviève Perreau, (Paris: Editions Pierre Tisne, 1951), 64.

necessary to determine to which extent it should reflect seventeenth century architecture. Opposed to naturalism as he was, Jouvet obviously did not feel that he could depart totally from the play's historical context, and had Bérard make period costumes.

When it came to the set, the application of Jouvet's theories on classical theatre had two main consequences. First of all, it was necessary to design a setting in which the timeless characters of Molière could thrive. Logically, this implied that the setting could not be too period dependent. Furthermore, the artificiality of the décor, which was one of the grounds of the covenant between the audience, the actors and the author, excluded realistic historical simulations. Reconstructing the architecture of a seventeenth century town square would not have been relevant. Bérard chose instead to use the architecture of seventeenth century sets. As a result, his architecture included historical elements which were directly taken from theatre history and were a part of the covenant of the period. This enabled him to accommodate the requirements of stylisation and of theatrical illusion simultaneously. Finally, the set was to be minimalist as it had been in Molière's staging. This requirement was incidentally in line with those of the Reformers which Jouvet and Bérard also admired. The questions of stylisation, abstraction, and theatrical illusion appear to have been closely linked: Bérard handled them in one process as demonstrated below.

5.4.1 The house

Bérard gradually stylised Jouvet's drawings. Jouvet's version of the set was rather rustic looking, with overhanging trees and a plain façade (fig. 22). He gave Jouvet's solution a definite classical and urban turn. When narrowing the width of the house to make space for the square, he turned it into a tower, such as the ones which were often added to the main facades of castles in the seventeenth century, or the Pavillon du Roi on the Place des Vosges (figs. 23-25).

Here it is the seventeenth century roofline and attic window which in effect stand for most of the stylisation (figs. 23-24). The tower structure may also have been suggested to Bérard by the tower above the house at the back of the stage, as shown on the frontispiece of the first edition of the play (fig. 10). Further simplification was achieved

by cutting the number of openings in Jouvet's drawing from six to three (figs. 22-24).¹¹⁵

Thus reduced to rectangular lines, a roof and three openings, the house became both the epitome of seventeenth century architecture and the epitome of a house. Bérard's restyling therefore satisfied the mutual needs of stylisation, abstraction and theatrical illusion, while staying faithful to the general starkness of Molière's décors:

- ◆ The audience could recognise immediately the period the set referred to.
- ◆ The house acquired a general, abstract character, in the same ways as Molière's characters embodied general human features.
- ◆ The house was highly theatrical: as Jouvet pointed out, on the stage, marble will look like paper, and if one want something that looks like marble, one will maybe need to use paper.¹¹⁶ Bérard's restyling illustrated the need to use truly artificial sets to match the artifices of the theatre. For Jouvet, an unrealistic décor was critical to accessing the superior reality of the theatre. In this respect, the highly unrealistic elevation of the house up to the flies created a vertical dynamic, drawing the whole set upwards into another dimension. It could act as the necessary leverage to take the viewer out of ordinary every day life.
- ◆ The house came to look like the tower of the fairy tales in which princesses are kept imprisoned.¹¹⁷ This suggested the fairy tale with its archetypes. Thus, another "layer", that of the fairy tale, was added onto the other "layers" included in the play such as Molière's sociological satire and his psychological analysis of the characters.¹¹⁸ The reference to the fairy tale further increased the poetry of the décor.

5.4.2 *The square*

In addition to reshaping the house, Bérard stylised the arcades he had added to Jouvet's

¹¹⁵ The text of the play mentions "the window", "the balcony", "the door" on numerous occasions, and Christian Bérard therefore adapted the décor literally to the text.

¹¹⁶ "Lorsqu'on veut faire du marbre pour le décor, si on prend du vrai marbre, il aura l'air de papier mâché; il faut peut-être prendre du papier pour avoir du marbre." Jouvet, *Molière et la comédie classique*, 264.

¹¹⁷ Copeau, "'L'Ecole des femmes' à l'Athénée", 55.

¹¹⁸ Copeau, "'L'Ecole des femmes' à l'Athénée", 55.

drawing.¹¹⁹ The arched opening is one of the main features of classical architecture, its mere presence suffices to establish a reference to the period. It is likely that the combination of a seventeenth century house and a square with arcades was a loose reinterpretation of the Place des Vosges (fig. 25).

What is most important however, is that the arcade was also a regular feature of Renaissance sets. The most common set of the Commedia dell'arte was precisely the town square. Structures were not differentiated and could be used as relevant for a house or a shop. Shop signs or other details added at the last minute suggested the nature of the building. Bérard remained true to the spirit of this tradition. The blackened openings of the arcades are kept neutral, a sign in the form of a woman's boot was added to suggest the shop of the shoemaker and the solicitor's one to suggest his office, which are both mentioned in the play (figs. 23, 50). The commedia dell'arte is not the only theatrical reference : the town square is the main element of Serlio's scenes for the tragedy and the comedy and both sets feature rows of arcades (figs. 26-27).

It was not the first time that Bérard used the arcade motif. It already featured in the backdrop of the second movement of Massine's ballet *La Symphonie Fantastique* for which Bérard had made sets in 1936. The background of is a façade full of arcades, similar to those in Serlio and Palladio's architectural treatises (fig. 28). It is also reminiscent of theatre architecture, such as the outside walls of the Colosseum or the Teatro Marcello in Rome. The motif of the façade encompassing the entire width of the stage may have been taken from the frons scenae of the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza (fig. 29). The arcades are therefore used for their theatrical value even more than for their purely historical value.

Bérard combined classical references and their modern versions. The influence of Giorgio di Chirico is highly likely. He had used this architectural feature numerous times in a very barren and surrealistic, and also very theatrical style in his paintings of the middle of the 1920s (fig. 30). The model of the décor of *L'Ecole des femmes* on display at the Théâtre de l'Athénée had "perspectival" side arcades which were higher

¹¹⁹ Louis Jouvet had several seventeenth century editions of Molière's plays, and Christian Bérard would have easily had access to them. Bibliore.com, "Christian Bérard (2)", Résultats Vendredi 11 avril 2005 Bibliothèque Louis Jouvet, http://www.bibliore.com/cat-vent_drouot1-4-5-berard2.pdf, (accessed May 12, 2007), 5.

at the front of the stage than at the back, much as in the Giorgio di Chirico painting shown below. The arcades become a link between a historical context, a theatrical context and a modern context. Bérard uses the same oblique placing in his drawing and gives the arcade the same proportions and austere treatment.

The arched façade in Bérard's work, used from *La Symphonie Fantastique* in 1934 up to *Dom Juan* in 1947, became a Bérard version of the multi-purpose theatrical décor, a concept typical of the Renaissance (*commedia dell'arte*) and of the seventeenth century ("palais à volonté").

5.4.3 *The garden*

When it comes to the garden, the reference to the geometrical compositions of the seventeenth century "jardin à la française" is clear. But here again, the flowerbeds and rosebushes are kept to a minimum so as to achieve a certain degree of abstraction.

5.4.4 *The candelabra*

The style of the five candelabra of *L'Ecole des femmes* is also an example of Bérard's efforts to "classicize" Jouvet's initial sketches. They are directly taken from seventeenth century engravings depicting performances. Candelabra were the only way of lighting the stage, but were usually placed in one horizontal row in front of the proscenium arch (fig. 31). Bérard alters the motive by cutting down the number of candelabra and by placing them on three rows instead of one, which accentuates their presence and the depth of the stage. The candelabra were not just a seventeenth century interior motif: they were so often seen on seventeenth century theater engravings that viewers would understand at once that they were attending a theatrical performance.

Bérard expressed the essence of the "classical" period without relating it too closely to a defined period. As described by one of the critics, nothing recalled precisely one historical period, but the most uneducated viewers would have recognized Paris and its Place Royale (now called Place des Vosges), the Marais, the candelabra of the old theatre and the ageless set of the *commedia dell'arte*.¹²⁰ What prevailed was a definite impression of classicism. Arcades were a recurrent motif in both sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century architecture, and they generated immediate associations to

classicism, regardless of the actual period involved. Similar associations were triggered by the symmetry of the décor and the sense of balance and order typical of classical architecture and theater sets.

By deliberately using elements borrowed from classical theatre tradition, Bérard came to express the essence of classical theatre. In addition to representing a town square with a house, the décor represented theatre itself, as in a *mise en abyme*. Stylisation went beyond architectural history. It was based on theatre history as well so that the set could become the very embodiment of classical theatre. Its architectural features stemmed from conventional motives which the playwright, the actors and the audience of the time had accepted as “fake” and as part of theatrical illusion. They were the visual translation of the covenant between the three parties. What Bérard and Jovet were presenting to their audience was an invitation to resume the covenant of the past.

Ultimately, the stylisation process resulted in abstraction. Bérard had trimmed down the lines of the house and the square so that they retained only the essence of classical style. At the same time, the shape of the house and the square had been simplified to the extent that they had become generic, just as Molière had made a human archetype out of Arnolphe. Having acquired the same abstract character, the set matched the main protagonist. This similarity is illustrated in visual terms by the drawings where Bérard pictures Arnolphe next to his house (figs. 23-24).

Bérard therefore dealt in one stroke with issues pertaining to stylisation, abstraction, and illusion. This is how the text was fully served : the set became much more than a set. It was a playing element in line with the text, as required by the text, and could then fulfil its role as an acting part of the performance. It did not function as a symbol, it was an instrument, directly involved in the plot, as influential as its characters. It is obvious that there is no *L'Ecole des femmes* without walls, openings, and a town square. The set was also the embodiment of the theatrical illusion. It was thus in a position to handle a double function; a plot related function and a theatrical function.

¹²⁰ Pierre Scize, *Comoedia*, May 10, 1936.

5.5 *Graphic exploration*

Representing these elements in one stroke required an “all-in-one” graphic technique. Bérard’s painting work was laboured and painstaking and involved many pettimenti. His set drawings, on the other hand, were executed rapidly, sketchily, and with a sure hand. This technique appears to be related to his work within the field of fashion illustration rather than to his work as a painter. He had started to work for *Harper’s Bazaar* and *Vogue* in 1933, which more or less coincided with the beginning of his career as stage designer. It is therefore natural that the two activities had points of intersection in his work.

5.5.1 *Main developments within fashion illustration*

The period between the late 1920s and the late 1950s was a golden age for fashion illustration. Around 1928, illustration production techniques changed significantly, making it no longer necessary to use stencils for drawings in magazines. Stencil figures had a very fixed appearance and very thin contours, but when technical means allowed for more flexibility, contours were transformed and the open serpentine line prevailed.

This change took place at the same time as the use of photography became more widespread. The more popular fashion magazines resorted mainly to photographs, but the up-market segment, such as *Vogue* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, as well as the advertising departments of the couture and perfume houses, could afford to hire in artists in addition to using photographs.

Far from signing the death warrant of the fashion drawing, photography triggered high creativity levels in this field. Fashion drawings moved from the realm of precision (which photography had taken over) to the realm of abstraction. They were freed from the obligation of rendering minute details as had been the case earlier, and could be much more stylised. They were to synthesise rapidly trends and styles, the spirit of a season’s fashion and its perception of elegance and beauty in an age where the pace of change was increasing. Models could strike more relaxed and human poses, they did not need to sit or stand rigidly to show off their clothes. Movement could be displayed, making the scenes depicted look more lifelike and spontaneous. Instead of promoting clothes, one was promoting the lifestyles clients were after when purchasing fashion items. Couture houses were emerging and a certain idea of elegance was in the making. Both needed forms of visual representation. Moreover, as the vehicle of representation of new fashion, fashion illustration came to be a vehicle for the representation of

modernity.

This required other talents than those of the traditional fashion illustrators. In the same way as Diaghilev had recruited leading painters for the stage, the fashion houses and fashion magazines also started to use them. *Vogue* and *Femina*, for example, were very concerned by the quality of their cover pages and often used painters such as Lepape, Benito, de Chirico in 1937, Dali in 1939, and the Neo-Romantics.¹²¹

One should not underestimate the quality of the work linked to fashion drawings: despite their spontaneous and “instantaneous” appearance, they were time consuming exercises conducted in a highly professional way, involving several stages of drafts before the finished product was delivered.¹²² French fashion drawing was also heir to a genuine artistic tradition which Hugo described as starting with Watteau’s sketches, and continuing, via Constantin Guys (1802-1892), Giovanni Boldini (1845-1931) and Adrien Drian (1885-1961) through to Marcel Vertès (1895-1961) and the illustrators of Bérard’s generation (figs 32-35).¹²³

In *Dessins de Mode*, William Packer also mentions the influence of Rococo, impressionism, postimpressionism, Toulouse-Lautrec posters, Japanese prints, Art Nouveau, the Ballets Russes, expressionism, surrealism, abstract art and collage on fashion illustration.¹²⁴ It was essential for magazines such as *Vogue* to renew their offering frequently in order to survive : this put pressure on contributors to change style and search for sources of inspiration.¹²⁵

As fashion drawing distanced itself from photographic realism, graphic techniques changed. One of its main media during the period is India ink, used to produce contours which functioned as a “concentrate” loaded with high evocative powers. This was due to the fact that the drawing had to sum up the spirit of a style in a few short and powerful strokes which, though minimal, had to contain all its characteristics. At the

¹²¹ Françoise Tétart-Vittu, “Presse de Mode et Dessin” in *Le Dessin sous toutes ses coutures*, (Paris: Paris Musées, 1995), 105.

¹²² Tétart-Vittu, “Presse de Mode et Dessin”, 111.

¹²³ Hugo, *Le regard de la mémoire*, 372-373.

¹²⁴ William Packer, *Dessins de Mode, Vogue 1923-1983* (Paris: Editions Herscher, 1983), 16-31.

¹²⁵ Packer, *Dessins de Mode*, 34.

same time, much was left to the viewer's imagination, as the contour was often left open-ended. Artists used a combination of thin lines (frequent in Toulouse-Lautrec's drawings) and thicker lines (inherited from the expressionists) to draw silhouettes, and their contrast created volume, rhythm and dynamics. The highly sketchy nature of the drawings gives the viewer an impression of both the fleetingness of fashion and the permanence of beauty and elegance. The drawings were an attempt to define Elegance through its temporal expressions (figs 36-38).

5.5.2 *Christian Bérard's use of fashion illustration techniques in the set drawings for L'Ecole des femmes*

Bérard applied the same technique (India ink contours) and summarizing approach (figs. 39-40).

Both the sets and the characters were drawn as dark silhouettes against a white background (figs. 41-46). The lines were reduced to a minimum and were highly simplifying. They could not accommodate any details and therefore resulted in drastic simplification and abstraction.

This technique supported the stylisation work that Bérard had to perform in an effective manner: the contours had to sum up the style of the period without any room for non-essentials. It also demanded that only a limited amount of historical features be selected, so that maximum expressiveness could be achieved with a minimum amount of effects.

As only the main lines were left, they acquired a dynamic force of their own, and gave the impression that the décor was alive and moved (which was actually the case thanks to machinery), in the same way as the models of the fashion illustration appeared to be mobile.

The floorlines and shadows accentuated this feeling of movement (figs. 41-46). The verticality of the house mirrored the verticality of Arnolphe as they both stood firmly on the stage. The house took on the features of its owner and also struck a pose (figs. 41-44).

This depiction of the character by the side of his house is similar to the way models were shown with fragments of interiors or of architecture drawn in an extremely sketchy

way and which reflected their lifestyles. When portrayed next to his house, Arnolphe was almost treated as a society belle, and could even take on a rather stylish appearance (fig. 42). The character and his environment were thus harmonised. This ensured consistency between the actors and the set on the stage and their stylistic match.

Drawn with this essentially “modern” technique, the set and the character became a part of contemporary reality, looking to the future, not to the past. Classical elements were recognisable, but modernity was probably the main feature perceived by the viewer. It helped the audience endorse the staging of the play to an extent which would not have been possible with a genuine period décor. Thus the use of a decidedly modern drawing technique, aimed at expressing future trends before they appeared on the street, helped create a modern atmosphere and update the décor to appeal to contemporary taste. It was actually by being modern (i.e. stripped from the clichés accumulated over several centuries) that the characters and the set could be authentic (i.e. faithful to Molière’s initial mindset and to the very modernity of his approach). Bérard applied to the set the same abrasive treatment Jouvét had applied to the text.

Clearly, the technique Bérard used, along with a number of his peers, within fashion illustration supported his exploratory work within stage design. It helped him achieve stylisation, abstraction and theatrical illusion through minimalism, whilst modernizing the set.

The India ink contours also trigger associations with caricature and it seems this was not lost on Bérard. There was a thin line between fashion illustration and caricature in some of the drawings representing the jet set in fashion magazines. Caricatures often involve ink outlines, simplifying lines and deliberately unrealistic proportions. Although the composition in Bérard’s India ink drawings is largely similar to the ones in the pencil drawings mentioned above, the tone in the India ink drawings is completely different. The sets and their main character become comical, thus reflecting Jouvét’s wish, in true Moliéresque spirit, to highlight the comical dimension of a play considered as serious, if not somewhat tedious. Arnolphe looked like a buffoon with his gait and his period

costume.¹²⁶ The house, intended by Arnolphe to be the fortress separating Agnès from the outside world, was also a joke. It was not even a house, just a few walls with oversized openings. Arnolphe's grotesque appearance rubbed off on the rest of the décor. The caricature like effect was reinforced by the fact that the character was oversized in relation to the architecture. There could be no doubt that this was a farce. Even the chandeliers with their tassels appeared to be caricatures of the Grand Siècle. Bérard had used a genre in line with a key aspect of Molière's text, thus ensuring loyalty to its initial purpose.

Reviews of plays often included caricatures of the main actors, so that Bérard's drawings look like drawings which could have been published in the reviews of Jouvot's production. The drawings became caricatures of themselves...

5.5.3 *Bérard's use of painterly techniques*

India ink became a highly expressive medium in Bérard's hands, but it could not fully express atmosphere. This is where colour came in and it was added in three of the set drawings for this very purpose (figs. 47-49).

Atmosphere, as explained by Bérard in the interview in Exhibit 1, was dictated by the text. Atmosphere in turn suggested colours, which in turn suggested lighting effects. It seems *L'Ecole des femmes* led him to consider three alternatives:

- ◆ The blue variant with cobalt blue clouds (fig. 48). The dominant atmosphere was one of relative serenity. This variant became a part of the final lighting scheme. A critic described the lighting during the performance as blue and icy, and the model of the décor at l'Athénée has buttons for sky blue and yellow lighting.¹²⁷
- ◆ The purple sky version, with highlights of black and of the brown used to draw the house and the contours, was more dramatic (fig. 49).
- ◆ The third alternative was of a deep pink mingled with black. The girlishness innocence of the pink contrasted with the black cloud hovering right above the house. Wet in wet technique was used to combine heavily watered pink ink and black brushstrokes and made the whole sky look as if it were on fire (fig. 47).

¹²⁶ "Dansant, toussant, ridicule et naturel, plein de tics, solennel, donnant à rire, c'est bien Arnolphe,..."
Pierre Scize, *Comoedia*, May 10, 1936.

¹²⁷ Pierre Scize, *Comoedia*, May 10, 1936.

Shadow effects created on the stage by the spotlights can be problematic and were tested here, as was already the case with wash shading in the India ink drawings shown earlier (figs. 41-46). The cast shadows act as a measurer of space and indication of the light source (figs. 48-49).

The configuration of the house is different in all three drawings. This is often the case in Bérard's expressions of atmosphere: each is different and calls not only for different colours, but also for variations in composition. He has a holistic approach to atmosphere and his drawings are then drawn for their own sake. Here the painter is at work more than the architect, although the architecture of the set remains resolutely three-dimensional. Each drawing is the paper equivalent of a small painting.

5.6 *The final set*

Due to their simplicity, the lines of the drawings could be directly transferred to the finished sets (figs. 50-51). Being a faithful plastic transcription of the drawings, the set retained all their characteristics. This minimised the risk of distortion. The final set could then appear in the radiant whiteness of its walls, enhancing the impression of modernity and rejuvenation.

Bérard had provided Jouvet with a décor which fulfilled his requirements regarding the set as theatrical feeling, and obeyed the rules of theatrical illusion. This was no mean feat in a play where the décor was defined in purely realistic terms (a house and a town square). The difficulties raised by the set directions had forced them to take a new approach and became an asset instead of a problem. The set remained faithful to the text, inasmuch as its walls and openings, which were directly instrumental to the plot were highlighted and even animated through the movement of the walls. It was sufficiently abstract to qualify for lodging the timeless characters depicted by Molière. Its caricatural aspect fully reflected the comical dimension of the play. Furthermore, it was essentially modern, thanks to its starkness, its dynamics and the use of architected elements favoured by the Reformers.

With his sets for *L'Ecole des femmes*, Bérard had provided a comprehensive example of the contribution a painter could make to stage design. With his artistic culture, the painter knew how to identify relevant iconographic motives in theatre history and use

them as required. With his sense for visual appearance, he could harmonise the set and the characters as well as the colours of the lighting effects.

What Bérard had in addition to this was a definite sense of proportions, reflected in the ability to use unusual proportions and yet produce perfect balance. His summarizing and abstracting graphic technique, developed through his work for fashion illustration, enabled him to translate Jouvét's concepts in visual equivalents. Minimalism ensured that the set could send the same message to the audience as Jouvét's handling of the text: the play had now been stripped of centuries of tradition and was at last able to come forth in the purity of its initial state. It was new, exactly as it had been in Molière's time.

6 *L'Illusion*

From the modernised classicism of the set of *L'Ecole des Femmes*, Bérard moved on to the more baroque aspects of the Golden Age of French theater and to the further exploration of theatrical illusion. Theatrical illusion was the very theme of Corneille's *L'Illusion* staged by Jouvet at the Comédie-Française in 1937.¹²⁸ It had been a success in Corneille's time, but due to its complex structure and the rather mediocre quality of its text, it had hardly been played since his death with the exception of productions in 1861 and 1906. These long years of neglect prompted Bourdet, then director of the Comédie-Française, to have it restaged it for the celebrations of Corneille's 330th anniversary. The direction of the play was entrusted to Jouvet as part of the agreement between the Comédie-Française and the Cartel. Dullin had made his contribution with Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* in 1934, Baty with Musset's *Le Chandelier* in 1936. It was now Jouvet's turn before Copeau staged Racine's *Bajazet* later that year, and expectations were high.

6.1 *L'Illusion : a play within a play*

L'Illusion belonged to a typical seventeenth century genre, that of the play within a play. In practice, several plots were intertwined within the same play so as to confuse the audience. As the structure of the play became more intricate and the playwright blurred the boundaries between the different plots, the viewer gradually lost his bearings. This type of bafflement was held to be highly enjoyable, and the genre was well established by the time Corneille started working on *L'Illusion*.

The genre did not strictly codify the number of plots nor the ways of combining them. This left the playwrights a certain amount of freedom. Corneille combined a main plot, a secondary plot, and a subplot of the secondary plot. In the main plot, a magician conjured up a vision for one of his visitors. In the secondary plot, part of the vision was shown to them. In the sub plot of the secondary plot, they were shown another episode from this vision which was in fact a theatrical performance. The main plot was then

¹²⁸ The edition of the play referred to hereafter is the 1660 edition (the title "L'Illusion" replaced the previous title of "L'Illusion Comique", "comique" meaning here theatrical). Pierre Corneille, *L'Illusion comique*, ed. Jean Serroy (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2000). Serroy kept the title "L'Illusion Comique", even if the edition is the 1660 one. References are to act, scene and line.

resumed as its two men commented what they had seen and the play came to an end.

In Act I, the main plot starts as a grief-stricken father (Pridamant), regretting that he banished his son (Clindor), is taken by a friend (Dorante) to the grotto of a magician (Alcandre) to find out what became of him. Thanks to his divinatory powers, Alcandre can set his mind at rest and inform him that Clindor's enterprises have been successful. To prove his point, he waves his wand and a curtain is opened, showing Clindor's wardrobe with its magnificent costumes. Alcandre explains that he will conjure a vision of some of the episodes from Clindor's time away from home. These form the secondary plot.

The secondary plot starts in Act II: here we see Clindor with his master (the braggart Matamore). Matamore attempts to seduce a young woman (Isabelle) who is also courted by a rival (Adraste). But it is Clindor she is in love with. Adraste teams up with Isabelle's servant (Lyse). Lyse has been spurned by Clindor and seeks revenge. In Act III, Isabelle's father summons her to marry Adraste, Matamore makes one last attempt at winning over Isabelle, Clindor flirts with Lyse and finally confronts Adraste and kills him. Clindor is then imprisoned and Pridamant fears the worst. In Act IV, Isabelle laments the imminent death of her lover, but is relieved when Lyse tells her that she has taken pity on Clindor and Isabelle, and seduced the jailer so as to get Clindor freed. Clindor is seen in turn lamenting his fate in his prison cell, but the two women and the jailer come to his rescue and the four of them elope. Pridamant expresses his joy, and Alcandre tells him that he will now show him his son in his full glory two years after the elopement.

Then comes the subplot of the secondary plot. Isabelle appears with Lyse in the opening scene of Act V and Pridamant finds her more beautiful than ever. Isabelle and Lyse start by discussing Clindor's infidelity (he betrays Isabelle with the wife of the prince who helped them after they eloped). Clindor appears and argues in favour of infidelity, Isabelle succeeds in winning him back. He then tells the princess that their affair is over but is killed by the prince's men. This is the end of the subplot. Pridamant feels he no longer has any reason to live, but Alcandre reassures him: the episodes of the beginning of Act V were only a performance: Clindor and Isabelle have become actors. A curtain is pulled open, and the actors can be seen counting their takings. The secondary plot is

now over. Alcandre proceeds to make a eulogy of the theatre and the acting profession. Pridamant expresses full support of his views and prepares to leave for Paris to meet his son as the primary plot ends.

The play within a play as a genre originated in the Middle Ages and had its heyday in baroque times. It was typical of the baroque taste for mirroring effects and shifts between illusion and reality. Georges Forestier identified some forty plays belonging to this genre between 1628 and 1694.¹²⁹ Its popularity was due to the spectacular development of theatre itself: any art or technique which becomes the mode of expression of a period ends up having itself as object. Theatricality was also typical of baroque thinking and aesthetics, as theatre overlapped with life and art and ended up overlapping with theatre itself.¹³⁰

This overlap was expressed in *L'Illusion* by the fact that the two characters of the main plot, Alcandre and Pridamant, took on the respective roles of the playwright and the viewer. Alcandre had the wisdom and the knowledge to conjure visions, in the same way as a playwright could create a play. As he said at the end of Act V, his main aim was to please (V.VI, 1820), which is a typical comment of seventeenth century playwrights. Pridamant acted as the ideal viewer, and his emotional reactions during the intervals showed that he had been totally taken in by what he had seen. This device was intended to induce the audience to do the same. To see was to believe in the power of the theatre, and it was theatrical illusion which triggered this faith. Pridamant was in fact being initiated to the alchemy of the theatrical process.

Corneille described the play as a strange monster, stating that the first act was a prologue, the three next ones an imperfect comedy, the last one a tragedy, the whole thing put together being a comedy.¹³¹ The play offered similarities to the pastoral and the tragi-comedy, with the theme of the young lovers threatened by parental authority and jealous rivals. Comedy was represented by the braggart Matamore, a direct descendant of Plautus' Miles Gloriosus. The plot had all the characteristics of the tragi-comedy with suspense and exoticism, but the sequence of the scenes was based on a

¹²⁹ Georges Forestier, *Le théâtre dans le théâtre*, (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1996), 9.

¹³⁰ Forestier, *Le théâtre dans le théâtre*, 36-37.

juxtaposition of different registers. It was the switch to comic or tragic rhetoric of the characters which dictated the style of a particular scene, more than the situation itself. This reinforced the reference to theatrical illusion, this time on a verbal level.

Due to this mix of registers, *L'Illusion* came to be considered as an intermediary stage between Corneille's comedies and his main tragedy, *Le Cid*, and an opportunity for him to experiment with the tragic style. In more modern times, the play has been reread in relation to Luigi Pirandello's (1867-1936) *Sei Personaggi in Cerca d'Autore* (1921) in which the *modus operandi* of theatrical illusion had been made even more explicit.

6.2 *Louis Juvet and Christian Bérard's approach*

It seems however that Juvet did not follow in Pirandello's footsteps and actually disliked him for revealing too openly the functioning of theatrical illusion.¹³² He chose instead to interpret the play as a celebration of illusion and of the magic of the theatre.¹³³ He ran the gamut of special effects that machinery could provide and added a musical score, hiring the composer Victor Rieti. When it came to marketing the play, Juvet had to deal with the fact that the characters and the plot of *L'Illusion* did not have the same qualities as those of Molière's works. When presenting the upcoming production in interviews, he did not discuss the play *per se* at any great length, but made three main points:

- ◆ He had found the answer to the enigma of *L'Illusion*: the brief description of the décor and the drawing for the play in Mahelot's *Mémoire*.¹³⁴ This was a "stunt" to root his scenography in tradition and give the audience the feeling that it would at last have access to long-forgotten secrets.

¹³¹ Corneille, *L'Illusion comique*, 45

¹³² Juvet, *Réflexions du comédien*, 35

¹³³ "C'est Corneille qui, le premier, ... nous explique par paraphrase la magie du théâtre. ... on me permettra... d'aimer particulièrement une pièce qui se termine par un panégyrique de cette souveraine illusion, de cette magie surnaturelle qu'est le théâtre, de la poésie dramatique et de l'art du comédien. Louis Juvet, "L'énigme de L'Illusion Comique", *L'Ordre*, February 11, 1937, Recueil factice *L'Illusion*.

¹³⁴ The *Mémoire de Mahelot* contained drawings and descriptions from the 1630s used by the Troupe Royale at the Hotel de Bourgogne. Louis Juvet's statement was in fact complete bluff. The drawing and the description he described as the answer to the enigma of *L'Illusion* were placed by Mahelot under the heading *La Méliite* by Pierre Corneille. The set was later identified by H. C. Lancaster in his 1920 edition as being related to Rampalle's *Bélinde* and thus having nothing to do with Corneille. As the description contained a reference to a magician, it was however easy for Louis Juvet to use it in order to show that his approach was based on historical sources. Some of the critics were not fooled...

- ◆ The play was a “chrysalis” waiting to be discovered after centuries of neglect.¹³⁵
- ◆ He praised Bérard for the quality of his drawings which had helped him understand the poetry of the play.¹³⁶ He likened Bérard’s role to that of Alcandre.¹³⁷ This is reflected in the predominance of visual effects and Bérard’s leading role. Indeed, judging by the reviews of the play, it seems that Jouvot and Bérard were on equal footing as regards the production.¹³⁸

They both felt that it would be difficult for the play, with its unrealistic plot, to be credible for their contemporaries and chose to focus instead on the potential it offered for staging illusion and celebrating drama. This justified making substantial alterations to the plot as relevant. Fearing that the audience would not catch the point of the display of costumes in Act I and of the performance of Act V, they chose to stage them in a much more explicit way, at the risk of foregoing theatrical illusion. Seventeenth century audiences would have understood immediately that the display of costumes of Act I was a reference to the theatre, as the wardrobes of successful actors of the period were full with magnificent costumes donated by their patrons. Jouvot replaced this display by three live actors in luxurious costumes with blackened faces giving them the appearance of dummies. This was a reference to the theatre that a twentieth century audience could understand. As regards the performance of Act V, Bérard designed a small theatre which was rolled onto the stage and on which the performance played by Clindor and Isabelle took place. There could be no doubt in the mind of twentieth century audiences as to what was actually taking place, i.e. a theatrical performance. Furthermore, an additional scene was included at the end of Act V. As the play was staged on the occasion of Corneille’s anniversary, Jouvot introduced a grand finale, with actors crowding around the herm of Corneille at the center of the stage.

Some critics felt that the adjustments of Acts I and V were downright misinterpretations. Others understood that Jouvot and Bérard were trying, beyond the

¹³⁵ Jouvot, “L’énigme de l’Illusion Comique”.

¹³⁶ “Le thème de la pièce est le thème du magicien, de l’enchanteur.” Jouvot, “L’énigme de L’Illusion Comique”.

¹³⁷ “La distribution des rôles de la pièce indique d’abord un magicien. C’est aussi le rôle de Christian Bérard.” Jouvot, “L’énigme de L’Illusion Comique”.

¹³⁸ One critic even wrote the following headline for his review of the play: “Au théâtre Français ‘L’Illusion’ Pièce en quatre actes de Louis Jouvot et Christian Bérard et même un peu de Pierre Corneille”. *Petit Parisien*, February 5, 1937, Recueil factice *L’Illusion*.

apparent weaknesses of the plot, to reveal the true spirit of the play.

For Jouvét and Bérard, loyalty to this spirit also justified the use of special effects even though there was no indication that such effects were used for Corneille's staging of *L'Illusion*. The Comédie-Française was fully equipped in terms of Italianate style machinery and Jouvét was known for being a devout admirer of Sabbatini's *Manual* and its descriptions of special effects. The preface he wrote for the first translation into French of the *Manual* in 1942 reflects his approach to special effects in *L'Illusion*. He explicated the link between the stage, the machinery, the sets and the performance and described machinery as the "lungs" of the theatre, and its noblest servant due to its humble submission to the poets. Thanks to machinery, sets could be changed in front of the audience's eyes, settings could be transformed into other settings. The theatre required surreal effects because it belonged to one of the mysterious regions of the mind where the cult of illusion also gave access to the divine.¹³⁹ Jouvét claimed that Sabbatini's theorems equalled Kabbala signs and magic incantations. Reading Sabbatini's "recipes" had made him understand the art of the machinery : it was the magic of the décor.¹⁴⁰ The special effects designed by Bérard for *L'Illusion* were an illustration of how this could be achieved with both baroque and modern references.

Effects in *L'Illusion* were therefore much more than anecdotal. Bérard designed a number of them, such as Isabelle's entry on a cart in the third scene of Act II, Alcandre and Pridamant's crossing the stage on a cart or hovering above the stage in a gondola at various points during the play. These were not dictated by any of the stage directions, but were in line with regular practice during the Renaissance and the seventeenth century, and even Corneille's practice in earlier plays. Bérard was not content with merely copying period practice, he modernised the effects on the basis of contemporary forms of entertainment. Being a devout admirer of the fairground and the music hall, he saw similarities between them and the festivities of the Renaissance.¹⁴¹ A critic compared Alcandre and Pridamant's gondola to the cable car in Montmartre or the

¹³⁹ Louis Jouvét (1942), preface to *Pratique pour fabriquer scènes et machines* by Nicola Sabbatini, trans. Maria Canavaggia, Renée Canavaggia and Louis Jouvét, (Neuchâtel: Ides et Calendes, 1942), X-XX.

¹⁴⁰ Jouvét, preface to *Pratique pour fabriquer scènes et machines*, XX.

¹⁴¹ "La Grotte du magicien, le spectacle de la fin, conçu comme un spectacle forain étonneront peut-être. Je prétends que cela reste dans la tradition du seizième, dont l'époque de l'illusion était encore imprégnée." Christian Bérard, "Maquettes et décors de L'Illusion", n.d., Recueil factice *L'Illusion*.

swings of the Trône playground in Paris.¹⁴² Another critic concluded that this was just like music hall fantasy.¹⁴³ Here again, Bérard had modernised old devices and shown the link between previous forms of entertainment and contemporary ones. This amounted to interpreting magic and illusion in the broader sense of “entertainment”, and giving a demonstration of illusion based entertainment as source of pleasure throughout the ages.

The audience could see the supernatural forces of magic at work, as sets changed before its very eyes, apparently without human intervention. Set items came up from the cellar, slid in from the sides, were dropped down from the flies or rolled on to the stage. Colours and lighting were an important part of the magic. A considerable amount of work was put into harmonising the sets and the costumes, and the whole performance was perceived as a colour symphony.¹⁴⁴ In the finished sets, pink, green and mauve lights were used. The light of the first set was of a “vibrant blue”.¹⁴⁵ Mercury vapour lamps were hidden on the stage and contributed to giving a phantasmagorical appearance to the stage.¹⁴⁶

Special effects and lighting complemented Bérard’s sets which strove to play their role in the production of illusion.

6.3 Illusion in L’Illusion

When translating into visual terms the way theatrical illusion operated in *L’Illusion*, Bérard had two main techniques:

- ◆ He demonstrated how the different plots fitted into each other by using a principle similar to that of Chinese boxes. Embedments were expressed by adding new

¹⁴² “...on revoit ensuite [Alcandre et Pridamant] suspendus dans l’espace dans une sorte de nacelle, rappelant le téléférique ou les balançoires de la fête du Trône”. Emile Mas, *Petit Bleu*, February 17, 1937, Recueil factice *L’Illusion*.

¹⁴³ “On se trouve en plein fantastique de music hall.” Pierre Brisson, “L’Illusion de Corneille, mise en scène nouvelle de Monsieur Louis Jouvet”, *Le Figaro*, February 21, 1937, Recueil factice *L’Illusion*.

¹⁴⁴ “Sur le fond noir de la grotte tous les tons prennent un accent vif : les projecteurs qui partagent la scène en trois tranches, groseille, vert bouteille et mauve, les exaltent ou les neutralisent tour à tour, faisant rougeoyer les pourpres ou couvrant de gris les visages.” Tristan Klingsor, “L’Illusion Comique et l’Illusionniste”, *Beaux Arts*, February 26, 1937, Recueil factice *L’Illusion*.

¹⁴⁵ *Le Temps*, February 22, 1937, Recueil factice *L’Illusion*.

framing structures on the stage with each change of plot.¹⁴⁷ The framing structures came in different forms (grotto opening of Act I, proscenium arch of the theatre in Act V, etc.), but the principle remained the same. A framing structure presented an additional advantage: it was a reference to the proscenium arch of all the Italianate style theatres which marked the separation between the audience's everyday reality and the performance. It gave an instant signal to the audience that what was taking place behind the frames was theatrical illusion.

- ◆ He conferred to the set the spectral quality of the characters of the secondary plot which was referred to in the text.¹⁴⁸ This was achieved by removing any kind of depth from the set elements which appeared as mere facades or walls devoid of substance.

Sets were designed so as to give a clear indication of the fact that they were illusions and separate from reality. This amounted to entrusting the set with the role of showing its true nature and becoming an “acting” element in the performance.

6.3.1 Act I, scene I: the magician's grotto

The grotto was a permanent fixture of Bérard's sets for *L'Illusion*. In line with the requirements of the text, the entire performance took place first in front of (Act I) then inside (Acts II to V) the magician's grotto. The grotto was also the first of the framing structures used by Bérard.

6.3.1.1 Iconography

Bérard began using the grotto opening motif in the ballet *La Symphonie Fantastique* produced by Massine (fig. 52). The ballet premiered in London on July 24, 1936, whereas *L'Illusion* premiered in Paris on February 15, 1937. It is difficult to say for which of the two the motif was initially chosen. In a letter dated October 10, 1936, Jouvot informed Bérard that he would come to pick him up to do some research work at

¹⁴⁶ “... on peut affirmer que [Bérard] a peint également à coups de projecteurs. *Jouvot n'a pas réglé un seul éclairage sans Bérard*. ... Ce sont [les lampes à mercure] qui créent cette atmosphère irréelle, fantasmagorique dans laquelle baigne la pièce.” Richard Borel, “Décors et musique de *L'Illusion* à la Comédie-Française”, Recueil factice *L'Illusion*.

¹⁴⁷ In literary theory, embedding involves inserting one unit into a larger unit, as in placing a story into another story. When this is done at multiple levels, it is known as staircasing. Jeremy Hawthorn, *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*, 4th ed. (London: Arnold Publishers, 2003), 101-102, 128.

the Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal and that they were to visit the facilities of the Comédie-Française on October 12. This tends to indicate that work on the play did not start before the autumn and that the motif may have been inherited from *La Symphonie Fantastique*. As it had been presented in London where few Parisians would have had the chance to see it, and using it half year later in Paris would not have been seen as a problem.

In any case, this motif was frequently repeated in seventeenth century sets. Torelli’s well known set for *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis* in 1654 provides a typical example of how the motif was laid out (fig. 53).

As explained by Per Bjurström, the presence of caves in Torelli’s works was inspired by rock caves typical of landscape gardening in Italy at the end of the sixteenth century (Boboli gardens in Florence) as well as by the cave in the Sala dei Giganti in the Palazzo del Te in Mantua.¹⁴⁹ This comment could equally apply to other examples in the works of Bérain and Vigarani. Caves were also much used by French landscape gardeners. In the Renaissance, grottoes were considered as being a sort of theatre where metamorphosis, alchemy, death and birth, as well as divine inspiration could take place. They carried associations to heaven and hell.

The arched structure framing the stage was therefore a typical baroque motif. Bérard instantly “theatralised” the grotto opening by stylizing it in the manner of baroque décor. The stylistical reference was also present in the way the blocks of stone were outlined both in the drawings and the finished sets (fig. 55, 56, 89, 90, 153). They presented similar contours to the ones in the baroque drawings (fig. 53). Bérard may also have had in mind the grotto opening with heavy rustication made by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux for one of the buildings at La Saline.

6.3.1.2 Composition

Bérard started with a pencil sketch outlining the main volumes, in the bottom left hand

¹⁴⁸ At the end of Act I, Alcandre warns Pridamant that he will see Clindor’s life as an illusion whose events are carried out by “spectres” similar to animated bodies (I.II, 150-154). The word ghost (“fantômes”) is used twice (II.I, 218 and IV.X, 1340).

¹⁴⁹ Per Bjurström, *Giacomo Torelli and Baroque Stage Design*, (Stockholm: Nationalmuseet, 1962), 63 and 166-167.

side of fig. 54. The text described the grotto as a “large mouth” (I.I, 9). Accordingly, the width of the grotto was superior to its height in Bérard’s sketch. The grotto opening lay low, and he kept the same proportions in the gouache drawing placed above it. The grotto was located in a typical French countryside landscape, with a church and some houses in the background, as the dialogue referred to the countryside (I.I, 70). The characters of Pridamant and Dorante can be seen on the left hand side of the gouache drawing (fig. 54).

The opening was then significantly heightened (fig. 55). The church spire and the houses traded places from left to right as they would have been hidden by the grotto opening if they had remained in their original place. It was no doubt necessary to increase the proportions of the opening as the magician was to come out of it and return inside it with Pridamant. Pridamant appeared alone in fig.55 (Alcandre had asked Dorante to leave prior to telling Pridamant about Clindor’s trials and tribulations).

Colour was applied to express atmosphere, in line with the dismal vision given by the text (I.I, 2-12). It was also applied to test lighting, in stripes imitating the shape of the light beams coming from the flies. It seems the blue of fig. 54 was kept in the set.¹⁵⁰ The combination of white and bluish gray of fig. 55 is similar to that of the drawing for *La Symphonie Fantastique* above (fig. 52).

6.3.1.3 *The set*

The finished set turned out to be much more barren than the two drawings above (fig. 56). It showed that Bérard returned to the initial proportions of fig. 54. The set featured only the upper part of the grotto opening, signalling that, in Act I, the vision conjured by Alcandre had not yet begun, and the secondary plot had not yet been embedded. Subsequently, the actors played in front of the opening. At this point, it was only the proscenium arch of the Comédie-Francaise that marked the separation between illusion and ordinary reality. With the grotto, another framing structure was gradually being positioned on the stage in Act I. Its height was then increased as the secondary plot started in the beginning of Act II. The proportions of the set were therefore in line with

¹⁵⁰ .”Au premier plan, une lèvre de rocs, violâtre, bâille, à demi sur l’obscurité originelle, le noir absolu. Au-dessus de la grotte règne un ciel pâle et doux, qu’avive quelque lueur magique pourprée.” “L’Illusion au Théâtre Français”, *Journal*, February 21, 1937, Recueil factice *L’Illusion*.

the plot and its starkness matched Dorante's awesome description of the site. The grotto opening appeared to be coming out of the middle of nowhere as it was not attached to a mountain or a hill, and a critic even commented that it looked like a fairground stall.¹⁵¹

Bérard's preliminary graphic exploration resulted in an understanding of the central role of the grotto opening which could no longer be reduced to a mere geological accident, and of the limited relevance of the landscape related information given in the dialogues. The grotto opening was as artificial as any proscenium opening and Bérard logically removed all traces of the landscape in the final set. The grotto motif is to magic what the proscenium arch is to theatre. It is beyond these framing structures that the magic of illusion can take place. In *L'Illusion*, the grotto embodies the transition between the "real" world and the magical world, equating theatre and magic.

6.3.2 Act I, scene II: Clindor's wardrobe

In Act I, scene II, Alcandre promised Pridamant that he would see Clindor again and, to demonstrate Clindor's good fortunes, drew a curtain showing what appeared to be rich gentleman's wardrobe. It was in fact a wardrobe containing theatre costumes and this was a hint that Clindor was a member of the acting profession, as shown in Act V. Jouvett and Bérard chose to show costumed actors with black masks and gloves who looked like dummies in Act I instead of the wardrobe, in order to make this sequence easier to understand.

6.3.2.1 Iconography

Bérard drew two actors in golden costumes on a small stage (figs. 57-58). The iconography of the set stresses the reference to the theatre (stage, chandeliers, mannequins with postures similar to those of actors on the stage). This reference is therefore made much more obvious than in the stage directions which only mention costumes.

The festoons are typical elements in sixteenth and seventeenth century proscenium arches, such as those of Inigo Jones (fig. 57). The actor's costume is equally typical of seventeenth century costumes used for court entertainment both as regards style and

¹⁵¹ "On [a] laissé béante sur la scène une espèce d'entrée de cave qui ne tient à rien. Evidemment une caverne est à l'ordinaire creusée dans quelque chose, et celle-ci, construite comme une baraque de foire,

colour (fig. 57). The two candelabra on the back wall of the cave are copied from seventeenth century theatre engravings (fig. 58).

6.3.2.2 *The final set*

The stage manager's handbook and a critic reveal that there was a third actor in addition to the two actors of the drawings, and that all three moved around the main stage.¹⁵² The actors took on a ghost like appearance with their blackened faces and arms and looked like dummies in fairy tale costumes.¹⁵³ The platform and the festoons of the drawings were removed as they were no longer necessary. Live actors sufficed and Corneille's costumes had been turned into dancing costumes.¹⁵⁴

The set of Act I established the first level of embedment (the main plot took place between the proscenium arch of the Comédie-Francaise and the grotto where the secondary plot was to take place). A visual hint to the dénouement of Act V had been devised, in a much more explicit way than indicated by the stage directions. The visual element was actually ahead of the text. It provided an analysis of its structure by pointing systematically at the way its mechanisms were linked up. In *L'Illusion*, Corneille had blurred the boundaries between the plot. What Bérard added was a blurring of the boundaries between the visual and the textual element. The visual element could take precedence over the text and develop its own plot. This was to become even clearer in Jouvot and Bérard's staging of Act V.

6.3.3 *Acts II to Act IV, scene VI: the house of Isabelle*

Acts II and III covered the episodes of the secondary plot up to Clindor's imprisonment. The first six scenes of Act IV consisted of Isabelle's lamento and Isabelle and Lyse's discussions on how to save Clindor. There were no stage directions, but the text referred twice to a door which was obviously the entrance door of Isabelle's house (II.VI, 553 and III.IV, 762).

surprend un peu ". Henri Bidou, "L'Illusion", *Marianne*, June 29, 1938, Recueil factice *L'Illusion*.

¹⁵² "M. Jouvot exhibe trois personnages vêtus richement ..." Emile Mas, "L'Illusion".

¹⁵³ "Ce sont des fantômes qui n'ont ni visages ni mains, mais le féérique esprit de Bérard les dote de ce qui est l'essentiel d'une féerie : robes d'or, braies de clinquant et de nacre, chapeaux et panaches". "L'Illusion au Théâtre Français", *Journal*.

¹⁵⁴ "Les costumes des comédiens, ..., deviennent des costumes dansants portés par des mannequins noirs." Pierre Brisson, "L'Illusion de Corneille, mise en scène par M. Louis Jouvot", *Le Figaro*.

6.3.3.1 Composition

Bérard's starting point was the portico and the trees of the *Mémoire de Mahelot's* drawing for Corneille's *La Mélipe* (fig. 59-60). In an interview given to a newspaper, he had included a drawing with the same portico and trees, in a slightly altered form, an arch and a curtain (fig. 61).¹⁵⁵ He called this construction "Décor de L'illusion au dix-septième siècle, d'après le Mémoire de Mahelot". "D'après" is putting it mildly: the portico and building on the side were designed for entirely different plays (see footnote 137) and the curtain and the arch were Bérard's addition.

In other words, he chose a starting point which had nothing to do with the play, though it had been a frequent motif of seventeenth century sets judging by Mahelot's drawings. In any case, his loyalty to Mahelot was relatively short lived. What had started as a Renaissance portico (fully sketched in pencil in the middle of fig. 62 and to some extent in fig. 63) was to end up as the ghost of a seventeenth century house.

Bérard first proceeded to bend the portico at a number of angles, making it three-dimensional and turning it into a piece of working scenery better suited to stage movements than a mere backdrop. The niches in Mahelot's portico were replaced by openings for the same reasons. The number of sides varied from three to two in a series of seemingly endless variations.

It seems Bérard started with three sides, derived from the portico's three niches. The structure was first linear, as in conventional architecture (figs.64-68). The left and right hand sides were bended inwards (figs. 69-74). The structure was laid out as a folding screen with two right angles (figs. 75-77). Some attempts were made to give more volume to the structure (figs. 77-78), but constitute an exception. Then one of the sides was dropped and only two remained (figs. 79-80). Fig. 80 features also actors and appears to be somewhat more "finished" than the others. This seems to confirm that Bérard started off with three walls and cut them down to two in his usual search for simplicity.

¹⁵⁵ Christian Bérard, "Maquettes et Décors de 'L'illusion'", *Le Figaro*, February 9, 1937, Recueil factice *L'illusion*.

The final composition is painted in gouache on black paper in fig. 81. The solution chosen by Bérard in this drawing reflects exactly fig. 79. The task of representing classical architecture is left to the rubble stone and to the alternation between triangular cornices and arched cornices typical of Palladio and Serlio's facades and of seventeenth century French buildings.¹⁵⁶ The unusual angle of the façade was reminiscent of the diagonal lines of Bibiena's sets (*scena per angolo*).

Figs. 79 and 81 also feature the statue of a stag. The statue is reminiscent of a well-known statue of Diana at the Château d'Anet, and was later removed (fig. 82). Its presence in figs. 79 and 81, as well as the presence of the statue of the reclining woman in fig. 70 provide a clue as regards one of Bérard's possible sources for the drawings of *L'Illusion*. The Château d'Anet at Anet in the Ile de France area around Paris was ten kilometers away from the holiday home of the Bérard family at Marcilly sur Eure.

The Château d'Anet was built between 1547 and 1552 for Henri II's mistress, Diane de Poitiers. Its main façade is characterised by a marked difference between the roof windows with a combination of windows with arched cornices and smaller rectangular windows (fig. 83). The façade and the side walls present openings with both triangular and arched cornices as do the roof windows in fig. 81. The rustication of the ground floor of the main façade is similar to the lines drawn by Bérard in figs. 69-70, 72, 78 and 79. Other facades have bricks and a heavier rustication as in figs. 67 and 76. The western façade has a semicircular portico with three openings which is slightly bent inwards. It also has short wings at an angle to the façade, in the same way as in drawings (fig. 84). This may explain how Mahelot's portico was associated with the portico at Anet and then turned into a stylised version of the wings of the western façade at Anet (figs. 60 and 81).

Similarities with a number of other architectural elements of the Château d'Anet will appear in the rest of the analysis hereunder, further confirming Bérard's use of the site for the design of his sets.

¹⁵⁶ The motives are placed on façade windows. This pattern can also be found on numerous facades in Paris. Sebastiano Serlio, *The Five Books of Architecture*, Chap. 4, 70, and Andrea Palladio, *The Four*

The facade of fig. 81 was reused in the drawings for the beginning of Act IV with two variations (figs. 85-87). The windows were made up of variegated glass divided in diagonal squares (such squares are also featured in Serlio's tragic scene and painted windows of this kind are not uncommon in castles of the period). A balustrade was placed on both sides of the house and topped by four amphorae containing plants, these were then reduced to two (figs. 85-86).

In another drawing, the balustrade was expanded and featured five amphorae (fig. 87). Bérard had used similar amphorae in one of the sets for *Margot* in 1935, and it should be mentioned that Derain had designed a set with one amphora for *Gigue*, one of the ballets at the Soirées de Paris in 1924. They were representative of classical garden ornaments. Incidentally, Bérard used the same window effects in one of the Vogue cover pages of the same period...(figs. 87-88).

The differences between the set of fig. 82 for Act II and the set of fig. 87 for Act IV is probably due to the fact that night has fallen, as indicated by the text. The house is now lit, hence the light streaming through the windows (fig. 87). Furthermore, events are no longer taking place in the street in front of the house, but in the private sphere of the house and its immediate surroundings. This would explain the introduction of the balustrades and the amphorae (figs. 85-87). It is unlikely that Isabelle and Lyse would have stayed on the street to discuss their plans. Furthermore, when Isabelle meets Matamore who has gone into hiding in her house and is attempting to make a discreet exit, she expresses her surprise at seeing him in her home at night (IV.IV, 1159).

6.3.3.2 *The final sets*

The stage manager's book shows that the "house", or rather the façade, acted as a working set and was used by the actors for entries and exits. In the final set for Acts II and III, a gate was placed in front of the house, no doubt to indicate that the scene was taking place in the street (fig. 89). The fact that the gate was removed for Act IV tends to prove that the set now represented the house and its entrance, not the street in front of the house, as mentioned above (fig. 90).

Books of Architecture, 90-91.

Testimonials confirmed the spectral and ruinlike aspect of the set.¹⁵⁷ The lighting was blue, whereas the architecture was white and black in sharp contrast with the dark interior of the grotto.¹⁵⁸ The house was deliberately angled to show that it had no volume (figs. 89-90).¹⁵⁹ If it had been shown frontally, one could still have believed that there were volumes behind it and some realism would have been maintained. The house was designed to look immaterial, in the same way as the magician described the characters as being “spectres”. The viewer was shown what the true nature of the flat: a mere plate without substance. This highlighted the artificiality of stage scenery as illusion. The theatrical illusion is the illusion that can never be realistic. Bérard showed explicitly how illusion worked on stage: we accept that something completely unreal as compared to every day reality is in fact another reality. By revealing the empty space behind the façade of the house, he incorporated the illusion directly into the set. The set *was* illusion.

The spectral quality of the set was reinforced by the fact that, thanks to machinery, set components seemed to appear and disappear again out of thin air.¹⁶⁰ At the beginning of Act II, Alcandre waved his wand and the two parts of the house moved gradually to the centre and the gate came up from the cellar. At the end of Act III, the two sides of the house slid away from each other back into the wings, the gate came up from the cellar and the curtain came down for the interval.

6.3.4 Act IV, scenes VII to X : *The prison and the wall*

Clindor’s prison in Act IV and the ruined wall through which the two couples were to elope were subject to the same “spectralising” treatment.

According to the stage directions Clindor must be seen in his cell. In *Le Mémoire de Mahelot*, prisons were similar to ordinary buildings but characterised by large openings

¹⁵⁷“Des piliers blancs, une noire grille déliée protège le vestige, neuf et brutalement ruiné, d’un édifice seigneurial, debout, comme un songe au centre de la nuit totale, venu du fond du sommeil et pour un seul instant.” *L’Illusion au Théâtre Français*”, *Journal*.

¹⁵⁸ “Clair-obscur, un pan de maison fantôme qui surgit des profondeurs de la scène, personnages noyés dans du bleu qui prennent du lointain, apparaissent et disparaissent comme des ombres.” Brisson, “L’Illusion de Corneille, nouvelle mise en scène par M. Louis Jouvet”.

¹⁵⁹ “Son mystérieux palais blanc et noir, dont les portes, les fenêtres semblent s’ouvrir sur le vide, le néant, l’au delà peut-être”. Edmond Sée, “L’Illusion” de Corneille à la Comédie-Française”, *Oeuvre*, February 26, 1937, *Recueil factice L’Illusion*.

¹⁶⁰ Stage manager’s handbook for *L’Illusion*, 1936, Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française, Paris.

with bars (fig. 92). Bars were also the dominant feature of Inigo Jones' prison in one of his sets (fig. 91). Bérard kept the bars and reduced the prison to a cage (fig. 94). He had already used this type of wall with bars in *La Symphonie Fantastique* (fig. 93).

This made the change of setting between the two parts of the act easy, as it involved only lowering the cage from the ceiling while the two sides of the house slid back into the wings. Fig. 95 is an attempt to figure the cage and the two women discussing their plans. The cage is then set in the context of the grotto (figs 96-97).

Bérard may have originally planned that the two women would conduct their discussions of scenes I to VI of Act IV on one side of the stage and that the cage would be lowered in due time. As shown in the set pictures above, the conversations took place in Isabelle's garden instead (fig. 90).

The composition of the four drawings above was now more or less finalised and it was time to set it on black paper, first zooming out to include the frame of the grotto opening (fig. 98), then zooming in to present the scene more in detail (fig. 99). The structures were harmonised as the bars of the cage and the rustication on the walls offered similar geometrical shapes.

Again, Lyse and Isabelle can be seen next to the ruins of wall (fig. 98), or under a vault (fig. 99). The structure is then turned into a wall with an arch in the final set (fig. 100). The ruins of the wall are mentioned in the text of Act IV (IV.VI, 1232-33) as the opening through which would be possible to leave the city at night.

Incidentally, there was a similar small wall with an arched opening in the third tableau of *La Symphonie Fantastique* and a vault in Giorgio di Chirico's sets for the ballet *Le Bal* (figs 101-102).

The cage and the wall lacked substance in the same way as the house. The cage consisted of air and light between bars, and the wall was free standing.

In Acts II to IV, architectural structures had all their depth removed and were deliberately shown as being immaterial. The effects of *L'Illusion* demonstrated the

belief that a high degree of artificiality was necessary for the viewer to be fully absorbed in the vision and provided this artificiality in a manner which was consistent with the text.

6.3.5 Act V: *the theatre and the garden scene*

In the play, Pridamant is unaware of the fact that the events in Act V are a performance. This is a key component of illusion, and Jouvet and Bérard were heavily criticised for having a small theatre rolled onto the stage complete with stalls and viewers who were to watch the performance in which Clindor and Isabelle took part as actors. Critics said that Alcandre's laments after the "death" of his son at the end of the "performance" became inconsistent if he knew from the start that he was attending a performance.

Nonetheless, Jouvet and Bérard chose to highlight the reference to the theatrical illusion, complete with proscenium arch, curtain, flats, chandeliers, etc. It should also be mentioned that introducing theatres on the stage was not uncommon in plays in baroque play with embedments, and that the device was in keeping with the practice of the genre.

6.3.5.1 *The theatre*

The main element of the small theatre is its proscenium arch. The proscenium arch was devised by Nicola Sabbatini who replaced by a separate structure the facades of the houses on the foreground of the stage which previously served to frame it. The proscenium arch in *L'illusion* is a direct reference to the prestigious proscenium arches of the baroque theatre, as they are depicted the engravings of the period (fig. 31 and 103).

In addition to the proscenium arch, the small theatre had loggias on both sides. Some of the "viewers" in the loggia wore masks, stressing even more the theatrical reference. The two armchairs referred to the Renaissance and seventeenth century practice of seating noblemen at the front of the stage so they could have better visibility (fig. 103). In the final set, live actors filled the loggias and proceeded to communicate with the audience through gestures, making it more obvious than ever that a performance was about to take place (fig. 104). Bérard may have used one of Picasso's initial ideas for the set of *Pulcinella*, one of the Ballets Russes, in 1920. Picasso had put the theater house onto the stage and painted trompe l'oeil loggias with imaginary viewers viewing

the viewers and baroque mirroring effects (fig. 105). Bérard took this concept one step further and used live actors instead.

Proscenium arches of Italianate style theatres were usually heavily adorned. Bérard simplified his ornaments, and placed female heads at the top, on both sides and in the middle of the arch. His proscenium resembles closely the proscenium of the Théâtre de l'Athénée: two caryatids are placed on each side, their heads coming up to the middle of each side of the arch (fig. 106). Two angels are placed at the top of the arch, their faces clearly visible and numerous cherub heads adorn the woodwork of the house.

Bérard's ensemble had a rather naïve appearance similar to that of children's theatres, or to paper theatres (Jouvet had several of Martin Engelbrecht's paper theatres for children made around 1780-1785 in his library).¹⁶¹

6.3.5.2 *The garden scene*

The first lines of the performance's opening scene indicate that the action is taking place in a garden. For this garden scene, Bérard juggled with a number of motives imported directly from the *Mémoire de Mahelot* and from seventeenth century stage set engravings.

This compositional exercise combined rows of wing flats (typical of baroque décors and as such highly representative of the theatre) together with Mahelot-inspired elements such as the balustrades, the tree, the leafy arcade, and the fountain (figs. 107, 109, 116, 1119). In addition to visual effects, Bérard may also have been testing out the best solution with regard to the actors' movements on the stage.

The balustrades are borrowed from numerous drawings in *Le Mémoire de Mahelot* (for example figs. 109, 116, 119). Bérard laid them out so as to emphasize perspective (figs. 110-115, 120, 122). His drawings include laurel bushes forming a single, double or triple arcade as in several of Mahelot's sets (figs 109 and 116). Other drawings feature a fountain and a single tree which are also Mahelot inspired (figs. 108, 119-123).

In his “probability game”, Bérard tries out no less than twelve combinations to test out the best lay out in terms of numbers of balustrades and decorative elements. These combinations represent a considerably trimmed down version of the Mahelot sets since three elements (wing flats, balustrade, and foliage) suffice to represent their spirit.

There are few differences in style between the drawings, and the same motif can be repeated several times with marginal variations as regards composition. It seems Bérard’s usual creativity failed to express itself and that he was, on the whole, unconvinced. The set was gradually simplified until only the wing flats and the tree in the background remained (fig. 128):

On the same sheet of paper Bérard made two other versions for the scene with completely different motives: one with a rotunda and three arcades and one with curtains (figs. 125-126). The ornaments of the proscenium arch confirm that this was indeed an alternative for the performance in the small theatre. The structure of fig. 125 has the shape of a chapel, and the floor patterns of figs. 125 and 126 are somewhat unusual. This may be a reference to the chapel at Anet which is round with arched openings and intricate black and white floor patterns (fig. 127).

Curtains may have been a reference to the theatre and could have been used in combination with the wing flats to reinforce the visual clues regarding the real nature of the events taking place on the stage (fig. 126). The scene was then drawn with two characters (fig. 128). The actors were to have the same costumes as in Act I. This visual reference would create a mirroring effect between the two acts, and viewers would then understand in retrospect the meaning of the vision of Clindor’s good fortunes unveiled by Alcandre in Act I (figs. 57-28).¹⁶² The scene was placed inside a proscenium arch, without any character inside (fig. 129). The character was drawn on the outside instead. The tree, the actors and the theatre were then merged (fig. 130).

¹⁶¹ Bibliore.com, “Christian Bérard (2)”, Résultats Vendredi 11 avril 2005 Bibliothèque Louis Juvet, http://www.bibliore.com/cat-vent_drouot1-4-5-berard2.pdf, (accessed May 12, 2007), 5.

Once the performance was over, the actors could be shown on the stage of the small theatre counting their earnings (hence the figure seated by the table, and the others figures taking down curtains, putting away wing flats, etc.) (fig. 131).

For the sake of being comprehensive, it should be mentioned that Bérard had devised two alternatives for the theatre and the garden scene (figs. 132-134). Nothing in the text indicated the presence of a harbour and a boat. Bérard's reasons for choosing such an environment are unclear (fig. 132-134). The layout of the wing flats is typical of the Commedia dell'Arte (fig. 133).

In the final set, the "garden" was totally removed and replaced by a painted backdrop representing a view of the countryside and framed by a curtain (fig. 135). This type of backdrop is uncommon in Bérard's oeuvre for the theatre, given his marked preference for the architected décor.

But it is easy to understand why this choice was made in *L'Illusion*: the painted landscape in the background can be seen as another reference to illusion, this time the perspective based illusion used in painting. There is a progression from the proscenium arch, the grotto opening, the wing flats and the curtain framing the painted landscape which are theatrical features, to the landscape which is a pictorial one. Rectangular and arched openings alternate (proscenium, grotto, theatre, curtain of the backdrop), thus creating a dynamic visual rhythm which draws the eye from the foreground to the background (fig. 137).

The theatrical illusion represented by the embedments and the pictorial one created by perspective were merged. Theatrical embedment and visual perspective were aligned by placing the framing elements in perspective to translate the embedding system in visual terms. The similarities in their functioning made visually explicit.

The link established between perspective and embedment, and the visualisation of the

¹⁶² " Que les personnages quittent le plan du réel pour monter sur les tréteaux, et les voici tout d'or vêtus, le clinquant faisant place au rare, comme le débit ampoulé si justement voulu par Jovet fait place au naturel. Et nous comprenons alors, et seulement alors, le sens de l'apparition première et si mystérieuse

mirroring effects ensured that the sets for the five acts were consistent with the text and the baroque origin of the play. The set re-enacted *Illusion* in both theatrical and visual terms. Bérard's ability to visualise the written text through a comprehensive graphic exploration process had made this possible.

6.4 *Drawing in L'Illusion*

L'Illusion is one of the plays for which Bérard's work is best documented. This is probably due to the terms of the contracts entered by the Comédie-Française.¹⁶³ The sheer volume of drawings confirms Kochno's statements regarding Bérard's graphic exploration.¹⁶⁴ Highly spontaneous, Bérard made immediately clear through drawing what he saw or what he wanted to say. He spoke to his friends while drawing and felt that his drawings would be far more explicit than his words. His letters were also contained more drawings than text. Kochno's comments tend to prove that, when Bérard worked on set designs, his drawings were the graphic counterpart of literary analysis.

Bérard's work on *L'Illusion* is thus a direct illustration of Craig's definition of the ideal process: "The director reads the play and at first reading, the colour, the tonality, the movement and the rhythm which will be the hallmarks of the play come to his mind. Then... leaving the text, ...he visualises all the colours that the play conjured: he designs his palette.... Thus, when he goes back to the text a second time, he feels taken up in an atmosphere and can check whether it is suitable."¹⁶⁵ These impressions will be confirmed or negated. "He will then maybe start, from this moment on, to sketch some of the sets and the ideas which come to his mind, but it is more likely, that before initiating anything, he will read the play a dozen times."¹⁶⁶

In this sense, many of Bérard's drawings were more like dreams triggered by the play than technical documents to be used for model and set productions. Other set designers had more mechanical drawings with strong focus on proportions and technical aspects.

de ces figures éclatantes montrées au début de la comédie dans l'antre noir du magicien". Tristan Klingsor, "L'Illusion et L'Illusioniste".

¹⁶³ Michel Bourdet Preville to Christian Bérard, March 16, 1937, Correspondance Christian Bérard.

¹⁶⁴ Boris Kochno, "Christian Bérard", *Graphis*, no. 32 (1950): 298.

¹⁶⁵ Craig, *De l'art du théâtre*, 134. My translation.

¹⁶⁶ Craig, *De l'art du théâtre*, 137. My translation.

Even Picasso's long "trial and error" progression in the design of the sets for *Oedipus Rex* did not involve any changes in style, format or atmosphere: only the composition varied.¹⁶⁷

In Bérard's case, drawings were not studies, but a complete idea, a complete sensation of a given scene, and aimed at achieving maximum suggestiveness. This is why each drawing tends to differ, and sometimes significantly, from others. It is a perception at a given time, which is in its essence fleeting and difficult to reproduce. The drawings for the house of Isabelle in Acts II and III are a case in point. The text could conjure up numerous visions, and, although Bérard the painter produced few paintings, Bérard the set designer was highly prolific. The drawing board was obviously an area where he felt free to experiment without the technical constraints of oil painting.

As a result, the drawing has its own existence independently of the set. There is an intermediary stage between the text and the performance, in which Bérard handles the graphical treatment of the images inspired by the text. This stage is actually much richer than the final stage when the set is produced: the artist has not committed himself to anything and he is still free to dream. Typically enough, Bérard's lines were open-ended and washes produced hazy effects, as in the drawings for the house of Isabelle. The non finito of the drawing was rich with potentiality. This non finito was often expressed in terms of loose brushwork, fragmented contours and the irregular application of colour. This painterly aspect may have seemed out of place in the context of stage design, but was actually very appropriate, as the drawings of the grand finale of *L'Illusion* will demonstrate.

This grand finale was not part of the original play, but was added by Juvet and Bérard as part of the commemoration of the 330th anniversary of Corneille's birth. Bérard made some eleven preliminary drawings to test both composition and mood. He started with an elaborate portico, first with a single arcade with a herm, then with two arcades, and a medallion with a bust (figs. 136-137). The portico is topped by cone shaped ornaments. These structures are reminiscent of triumph arches or castle gates (the

¹⁶⁷ Marie-Noëlle Delorme, "L'histoire des dessins d'Oedipe-Roi" in *Picasso et le Théâtre, les décors d'Oedipe-Roi de Sophocle*, (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux; Antibes: Musée Picasso, 1999), 8-16.

Château d'Anet offers some interesting examples), or again city gates designed for ceremonies of entry.

The structures appear to be rather heavy and cumbersome, which may be the reason for which they were dropped, and Bérard moved on to a lighter version of the portico with only two columns, a sculpture and a balustrade on each side (fig. 138). This structure was in turn trimmed down and replaced by even lighter structures featuring a variety of classical ornaments:

- ◆ A staircase or a balustrade (figs. 139-140),
- ◆ A Renaissance candelabrum base (figs 141-142), vases with bushes and cypress trees (fig. 142) or obelisks (fig. 143). The obelisks topped by stars were reminiscent of the triangular roofs of the turrets of the chapel at Anet (figs. 144-145).

All these attempts aim to find the composition best suited to securing maximum attention for Corneille's bust, and to ensure easy access to the comedians, as well as to suggest the style of the period through use of relevant ornaments. The dominant colour is light blue, a colour that Bérard related to happiness (see Interview in Exhibit 1). Alternative lighting effects, and even the use of smoke, were tested directly on green and red paper (figs. 146-147). The black curtains referred to in these last two drawings are the black curtains which were placed behind the grotto opening and were used for some of the set shifts. Bérard then goes over to a simpler motive with a simple herm (figs 148-149):

What these drawings have in common is that they are not drawings of sets designed for set productions in conventional terms. Such drawings are usually drawn in an orderly manner and with a high degree of accuracy. **Instead, Bérard draws the set as the viewer will perceive it on the stage.**

Gouache is applied in dabs or streaks that appear to have little to do with the contours. The contours themselves are vague, and their haziness almost appears to have been created by the very movement of the bodies they define. The fact that the paint only partly overlaps the shapes as in fig. 148 suggests that the legs of the character have already started to move to another position whilst the eye still sees the orange of his tights in the position he held previously. This is also the case in figs. 139 and 141 and is

typical of Bérard. This is “impressionism” applied to stage design. Bérard was a devout admirer of Claude Degas and may have learned from his drawings of dancers impressionistic techniques applied to movement and from his stage paintings similar techniques applied to lighting effects.

The technique also involves expressionistic elements, with its strong black contours and bold colours. The contours gave the eye fixed points to focus on amongst the whirlwind of colours and movement. They differentiated the set elements which were fixed on the stage from the movements of the actor as the viewers would perceive them.

Furthermore, the drawings included another parameter, i.e. the fact that the stage would be seen by the audience from afar. As a painter, Bérard knew how to produce graphic works which were to be seen from a distance. The drawings give a comprehensive reflection of the audience’s perception of colour, set structure and movement from the very house seats. He also knew how to simulate lighting effects by applying gouache in vertical stripes (fig. 55) and by using the white of the paper to create contrasts with gouache and India ink (drawings of the house of Isabelle). In *L’Illusion*, he often placed the final composition on black paper to test how the colours would contrast with the darkness of the interior of the grotto. Using black paper was not very common practice and Bérard may have taken his cue from Hugo. Hugo and Cocteau had agreed to stage Cocteau’s *Roméo et Juliette* for the Soirées de Paris in 1924 against a black backdrop, and Hugo had painted all his set drawings on black paper.¹⁶⁸

The drawings could thus provide a holistic picture of what the viewer would see on the stage: changing lights, moving silhouettes, colour contrasts, in short an animated and constantly shifting tableau. This explains the difference in mood between the drawings, similar to the differences in mood of impressionist landscapes at different times of day. Not only did Bérard alter expressions of moods, he also altered style and composition. Each impression was unique, and producing it called for thorough changes. The figures in fig. 148 suggested an antique setting, whereas the figures in fig. 147 went back to seventeenth century costumes. In the drawings for the house of Isabelle, changes of mood also went hand in hand with changes of composition and motive. The work

¹⁶⁸ Hugo, *Le regard de la mémoire*, 230-231.

related to these three areas was merged, they were intricately linked by some kind of internal necessity. This is the necessity of internal consistency between all three areas, although it may be difficult to say which comes first. It may be atmosphere in one case, or an historical period in a second case, or again concerns related to composition in a third.

But this painterly creativity ended in theatrical rigour. In the final drawings, only the motive was kept from figs. 148 and 149. All the details from the other drawings were ignored. The herm was the only remnant of these graphic fireworks, and Bérard added the rocks in front of the magician's cave (fig 150).

The height of the herm was increased, making it resemble the Roman Trajan or Marcus Aurelius columns (fig. 150). The two female figures waved the palms of victory, whereas the banderoles of fig. 146 were replaced by an inscription ("Gloria") hanging above the bust and its crown of laurels.

With its standing and reclining figures, the composition offered striking similarities to Molière's statue of 1897 in Pézenas where the playwright stayed with his troupe several times between 1650 and 1655 (fig. 151).¹⁶⁹

The herm of Corneille was a direct copy of the classical herms of famous playwrights on display inside the Comédie-Française (figs. 152-153). The grand finale doubled up as a celebration of both Corneille and the theatre where his plays had so often been performed.

The numerous drawings made for *L'Illusion* illustrate one of the key characteristics of Bérard's contribution to the stage: the ability to use pictorial exploration techniques to not only develop a theme, but also to present it as the audience will perceive it. This means the text, the designer's vision and the audience's perception become intricately linked. As producer and actor, Jovet was concerned with bringing the audience into the

theatrical process and convincing it to endorse the play. As set designer, Bérard included the audience in the design process by drawing the set on the audience's terms and not on the terms of the technicians who were to produce the set.

In 1947, the journalist Louis Chéronnet wrote that contemporary theatre was a dream whose transpositions and transfers were obvious for the audience.¹⁷⁰ Producers were now free to do as they chose and they had taken over the literary work, stylised its illustrative effects and had become visual orchestra conductors.¹⁷¹ This could well apply to what Jouvét and Bérard had done with *L'Illusion* ten years earlier. But they had not acted in an unwarranted way: the sets and effects of *L'Illusion* were anchored in the tradition and the spirit of the seventeenth century, which Bérard had modernised with contemporary references. He had been faithful to the structure of the literary work and translated it into visual terms, in line with the approach of the baroque period. Critics were sometimes afraid that visual elements could supersede the text. The production of *L'Illusion* proved that, quite to the contrary, visual elements could enhance a text and even be critical in putting a long forgotten play back in the répertoire where it has remained ever since. Bérard had detected and stressed the fundamentally visual nature of theatrical illusion and added new meaning to the play.

What the production of *L'Illusion* also showed was the length of the temporal distance between the Golden Age of French classical theater and the first half of the twentieth century. The ironical treatment of its architectural symbols, such as the house of Isabelle, or of its ornaments, such as the festoons, signals that this Golden Age is definitely a thing of the past. The theatre on the stage is a toy-like version of a seventeenth century theatre, set elements are often parodies of their originals. The Golden Age has become the realm of nostalgia and childhood memories, at least in visual terms. From the Renaissance to the end of the nineteenth century, antiquity and classicism were models which one copied with the greatest respect. After World War I, these models are bygone and one looks back to them with the same fondness as to

¹⁶⁹ The town is near the Montpellier area where Christian Bérard often stayed with his friend, the painter and stage designer Jean Hugo. Moreover, Louis Jouvét had a leaflet in his library published for the national call for funds for the production of the monument. Bibliorare.com, "Livres (2)", *Résultats Vendredi 11 avril 2005 Bibliothèque Louis Jouvét*, http://www.bibliorare.com/cat-vent_drouot1-4-5-livres2.pdf, (accessed May 12, 2007), 18.

¹⁷⁰ Louis Chéronnet, "Décors et Costumes de Théâtre", *Art et Décoration* 11 (1947): 50.

childhood memories and fairy tales.

¹⁷¹ Chéronnet, “Décors et Costumes de Théâtre”, 58.

7 *Dom Juan*

After *L'Illusion*, it took some ten years before Bérard and Jouvet made a new venture within classical theatre, this time with Molière's *Dom Juan* at the Théâtre de l'Athénée in 1947. This interruption was largely due to the war years during which Bérard had remained in France, while Jouvet was touring in South America. By the end of 1945, they had come back to the top of the Parisian scene and were also actively promoting France's cultural image abroad.

But the war had left its mark. Jouvet's tour in South America, fraught with success and difficulties, had left him some time for meditation. As described by one of the actors of his troupe, he had started to develop a strong religious feeling and Molière's *Dom Juan* was haunting him more than ever.¹⁷² As had been the case with Arnolphe in *L'Ecole des femmes*, he had been maturing the role since the beginning of his theatrical career. Just like *L'Illusion*, the play had been very little staged since Molière's death, and in a significantly altered version. *L'Illusion* had been virgin territory and audiences relatively easy to convince. *Dom Juan* however, presented a paradox: few had actually seen it, but everyone had an opinion on its main character. Dom Juan's image had developed in time: Mozart, the Romantics and others had dramatically changed it to that of a Casanova or a tormented soul. As Jouvet put it, the play had already been performed in the mind of the audience even before the curtain went up.¹⁷³ He felt that the key issue to be addressed was understanding why the play had been so seldom performed and how he, together with the audience, could give it a new lease of life.

7.1 *The play*

The opening scene takes place in front of a palace, with Sganarelle, Dom Juan's valet, explaining to Dona Elvira's valet, that his master is not to be trusted, and that there are slim chances that he will return to Dona Elvira whom he has just married and abandoned. Dom Juan enters the stage and speaks in praise of seduction, but is interrupted by Dona Elvira's arrival. She understands she has lost him forever but warns him that divine punishment awaits him and urges him to repent. As she leaves, Dom

¹⁷² Léo Lapara, *Dix ans avec Jouvet*. (Paris: Editions France-Empire, 1975), 74-77. Léo Lapara even spoke of "acute Don Juanitis" ("Dom Juanite aigüe"), 204.

¹⁷³ Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 55.

Juan tells Sganarelle that he has just seen a young couple and fallen for the future bride. Her betrothed plans to take her on a boat trip and Dom Juan intends to abduct her at sea. In Act II, the boat trip ends in failure, and Dom Juan and Sganarelle escape drowning thanks to two peasants. One of them describes the incident to his betrothed. He leaves the stage and Dom Juan attempts to seduce her in the same way as he seduced another peasant woman he had met just after the boat incident. She arrives on the stage and Dom Juan tries to pacify the two women who ask him to make a clear choice. He flees after being informed that Dona Elvira's family is after him.

In Act III, he seeks refuge in a forest with Sganarelle. They meet a pauper and Dom Juan tries to bribe him into blasphemy which he latter refuses. Dom Juan then sees a man attacked by thieves and proceeds to rescue him. This man was no other than Dona Elvira's brother, Dom Carlos, from bandits. Dom Carlos did not know Dom Juan, but, as the rest of Dona Elvira's family arrives, Dom Juan is recognised. Dom Carlos beseeches his father to spare him and succeeds in convincing him. As Dom Juan and Sganarelle leave the forest, they come to the tomb of the Commendatore, a man killed by Dom Juan in a duel. Dom Juan invites the statue to dinner.

Act IV takes place in Dom Juan's home. He first has to get rid of the merchant to whom he owes money and who has come to claim his debt. He is then confronted by his father, Don Luis, who criticises his behaviour and warns him that he will see to it that he is punished. Dona Elvira returns with a new warning of impending doom. She is followed by the statue of the Commendatore, who has answered Dom Juan's invitation and invites him the next day.

In Act V, Dom Juan and Sganarelle are in a town. Dom Juan meets his father and pretends to have mended his ways. He then explains to the baffled Sganarelle that this was only a decoy. Dom Carlos arrives and gives him a last chance to repent and honour his marriage vows. Dom Juan explains to Dom Carlos that he cannot go back to Dona Elvira as he had seduced her just as she was about to enter a convent and their union was contrary to the will of God. After these ultimate provocations, the spectre of death makes an appearance, followed by the statue of the Commendatore who now drags Dom Juan into the fires of hell. Sganarelle is left alone to mourn his fate: Dom Juan's enemies have had their revenge, but he, Sganarelle has lost his wages.

It was said that Molière wrote *Dom Juan* in the five weeks of 1665 following the ban on *Tartuffe*, in order to rebalance the financial situation of the troupe with a popular theme.

Tartuffe had been stopped by the censors who felt that Molière's criticism of the hypocrisy of apparently religious people had gone one step too far. The theme of Dom Juan seemed to be a safe bet. Dom Juan was a well-known theatrical figure in Spanish and Italian theatre and this choice was sure to attract the crowds. The first Dom Juan play had been written in Spain by Tirso de Molina (*El Burlador de Sevilla*). Two French variants had also been written in 1659 by Dorimond and Villiers. Up until then, the theme was well established and had not hereto raised any particular criticism. What Molière managed to produce was a success with his audience but also a major scandal which led him to stop performing the play after 15 performances. Censors strongly reacted to the pauper scene, to the fact that it was Sganarelle the valet who spoke up in favour of traditional religious values, and to his final comments on his wages after the divine punishment. Molière's widow sold to Thomas Corneille the rights to versify the play. This version was used for the 564 performances which took place between 1677 and 1841, after the most shocking parts had been removed.¹⁷⁴ The original version of the text was then reintroduced, but the play failed to make a breakthrough: it was to be considered as heterogeneous, lacking in action and difficult to perform up to Jovet's time. Dom Juan had acquired the reputation of being an inveterate seducer and this Casanova image was difficult to change.

The play was indeed complex: eighteen actors (plus Dom Juan and Dom Carlos' suites), a change of set in each act, and supernatural creatures. It involved recurrent changes in register from the burlesque to the tragic and the religious. It mixed metaphysical issues, sociological description and virtuoso rhetoric. As all masterworks, the play was rich but it was precisely this richness which had turned against it, as the work was impossible to classify.

In many ways, the production of the play raised issues similar to those of *L'Illusion* with its numerous registers, set changes and a fragmented structure. Both plays were baroque in spirit and Jovet felt that modern audiences required ordering and unification. With Bérard he had mastered the heterogeneity of *L'Illusion* by recentering the play on the theme of theatrical illusion mirrored in the many embedments of the set. *Dom Juan* also called for some form of unification if modern audiences were to make

¹⁷⁴ Descotes, *Les grands rôles du théâtre de Molière*, 58.

any sense out of it.

7.2 *Louis Jouvet and Dom Juan*

What obviously fascinated Jouvet in Molière's *Dom Juan* was the playwright's ability to transform a popular figure into a universal figure, a quality which he saw as essentially French.¹⁷⁵ This echoed Copeau's praise of how Molière had transformed and developed the characters borrowed from the Italians.¹⁷⁶

In addition to this, Jouvet developed a quasi-mystical approach to the play over the years. During World War I, he had discovered the works of the seventeenth century theologian Saint Francis of Sales. He considered in particular his *Introduction à la vie dévote* as Molière's model for Dona Elvira's speeches.¹⁷⁷ Approaching *Dom Juan* in this way was somewhat unorthodox and shows that Jouvet had a novel approach to the play from the very beginning. The link between the play and religious fervour may have been suggested to him by Copeau who claimed to see the influence of the prayers of Saint Teresa of Avila in Dona Elvira's speeches. World War II brought about a new round of thoughts. For Jouvet, *Dom Juan* was clearly about religious feeling and faith.¹⁷⁸ It was definitely not about seduction, despite Dom Juan's image at the time. He called it "the only metaphysical play of French theatre".¹⁷⁹ He saw the first three acts as a mere introduction to the character of Dom Juan: the play really started with the encounter with the statue of the Commendatore.¹⁸⁰ The play was built on the fact that Dom Juan, at one point, started to doubt, but nonetheless continued to provoke God. He wanted to believe in Him, but could not. Faced by the problem of life after death, he refused to deal with it.¹⁸¹ Jouvet saw the play as a deliberate headlong flight towards damnation. He identified a common thread in the many different sequences and

¹⁷⁵ "Dom Juan Tenorio serait probablement resté enfermé dans les limites de notre patrie, écrit un critique espagnol Dom Manuel de Revilla, si Molière ne l'avait porté au Théâtre Français. Tout le monde sait que les Français ont le privilège de rendre tout universel. Louis Jouvet, draft programme for *Dom Juan*, file LJ MS-87 (5), Fonds Louis Jouvet.

¹⁷⁶ Jacques Copeau, *Registres II: Molière*, comp. André Cabanis, (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 199.

¹⁷⁷ Published in 1619, the *Introduction* provided on advice on religious practice based on mortification and love to Christians who wanted to obtain grace but did not intend to take their vows. Jouvet, *Molière et la comédie classique*, 84.

¹⁷⁸ "L'idée principale, dans le Dom Juan de Molière, est celle de la survie, de l'au-delà". Louis Jouvet, notes on *Dom Juan*, file LJ MS-88 (1), Fonds Louis Jouvet.

¹⁷⁹ Lapara, *Dix ans avec Jouvet*, 185.

¹⁸⁰ Louis Jouvet, notes on *Dom Juan*, n.d., file LJ MS-88 (1), Fonds Louis Jouvet.

¹⁸¹ Louis Jouvet, notes on *Dom Juan*, n.d., file LJ MS-88 (1), Fonds Louis Jouvet.

confrontations: all were warning signs from Heaven of impending punishment (Dona Elvira and Don Luis' speeches, the boat accident, the spectre of death, etc).¹⁸²

This was a radically new vision of the play. Jovet signalled the break with tradition by altering the spelling of *Dom* Juan: he preferred the "m" of the first editions of Molière to the "n" which had been used thereafter.¹⁸³ Though Jovet was heavily criticised for some of his points including his spelling, most of the critics agreed with him that faith, life after death and divine punishment were the key issues of the play. No one seemed to regret the focus on the seducer which had been the distinctive feature of past productions. As Descotes pointed out, modern audiences, inspired by a generation of playwrights with philosophical concerns, were better prepared to hear *Dom Juan* deliver them a religious message than eighteenth century viewers.¹⁸⁴

Jovet had produced a new interpretation of the character, but he had not stopped there. His greatest achievement with *Dom Juan* was that he showed the play to audiences in a new light, and allowed each viewer to form his own opinion.¹⁸⁵ He had solved the riddle of *Dom Juan* by trying to find what it could mean for his contemporaries, not for Molière and the audience of his time.¹⁸⁶ It is symptomatic that his writings on the play include many comments from viewers.¹⁸⁷ He mentioned those of a twelve-year-old who asked her mother after the pauper scene: "I would like to understand. This Dom Juan, does he believe in God or doesn't he?" Jovet felt that the whole question remained open and that this was precisely what made the success of a classical play.¹⁸⁸

He did however make one conclusion, which was that Dom Juan's punishment had to

¹⁸² Jovet, *Molière et la comédie classique*, 84-85.

¹⁸³ "Ne croyez pas que c'est par goût de l'étrangeté ou de défi que l'Athénée a adopté "Dom". Nous nous en sommes simplement tenu à Molière." Louis Jovet to Jacques Dery, January 4, 1948, file LJ MS-88 (4), Fonds Louis Jovet.

¹⁸⁴ Descotes, *Les grands rôles du théâtre de Molière*, 79.

¹⁸⁵ "Je n'ai rien voulu dégager... Vouloir dégager, prendre un parti, attendre une signification nécessaire, c'est restreindre." Louis Jovet to Simone Michel, March 23, 1949, file LJ MS-88 (5), Fonds Louis Jovet.

¹⁸⁶ Thierry Maulnier, "Le Don Juan de Molière et le nôtre", *Le Figaro Littéraire*, February 21/02/1948, Recueil factice *Dom Juan*.

¹⁸⁷ Jovet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 65-68.

¹⁸⁸ Jovet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 67-68.

be made truly obvious.¹⁸⁹ He did not believe that it would be possible to make Dom Juan disappear amid the flames of hell as in the initial performances. This would have been acceptable on the dimly lit stage of Molière's time but would seem unconvincing on the modern stage.¹⁹⁰ He therefore implemented a radical change: Sganarelle's words were no longer to be pronounced immediately after Dom Juan's death. A change of set took place: the tomb of Dom Juan appeared with his skeleton, surrounded by four other skeletons, and Sganarelle placed a large funereal wreath at the foot of the tomb before uttering his final speech.¹⁹¹ It seems Jouvot felt that these last words could be all but comical as had been put forward in some of the earlier interpretations.¹⁹² Jouvot was concerned about the credibility of Dom Juan's final hour. This revised finale was either heavily criticised (mainly by the critics), or highly praised (mainly by the viewers who took the point and saw this finale as the logical conclusion of the play). As one viewer wrote to Jouvot, the revised finale was the keystone of the play and what gave it its tragic meaning.¹⁹³

Jouvot's interpretation of the play as a series of divine warnings now provided a unity of plot. He created a unity of tempo by tuning the rhythm of the play so the viewer would feel the crescendo as Dom Juan's final hour approached.¹⁹⁴ A unity of style was also created: Bérard and Jouvot chose to stress the Hispanic origin of the play and took it out of the context of seventeenth century France. This may have been related to Copeau's analysis. He felt that Molière, although he had probably not been familiar with Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador*, had kept some Spanish elements in a few of the characters and

¹⁸⁹ "Il est nécessaire, écrit Jouvot à René Thomas-Coèle, d'ensevelir Dom Juan, de le remettre dans l'état où était le Commandeur ... La dissolution de Dom Juan n'est pas suffisante théâtralement pour que le public comprenne, ..., la question posée". Mignon, *Athénée Théâtre Louis Jouvot*, 118.

¹⁹⁰ "...Cela pour vous confier enfin que je n'ai pas transformé le dernier tableau de 'Dom Juan', que la différence du théâtre du XVIIe siècle et du nôtre ... et la différence du public, ..., rendent inexécutable et incroyable le vol de la Mort remontant dans les cintres, le tonnerre, le lycopode et les feux de bengale, l'engloutissement enfin dans les dessous." Louis Jouvot to Simone Michel.

¹⁹¹ Numerous critics felt the wreath was both over the top and out of place, and it was later removed.

¹⁹² Descotes, *Les grands rôles du théâtre de Molière*, 75. He quotes Louis Jouvot "J'en parlais avec Bérard. Et je lui disais : je ne vois pas comment on peut arriver à faire disparaître Dom Juan ni comment Sganarelle peut prendre un ton comique pour réclamer ses gages". Christian Bérard came up with a totally different explanation in an interview, stating that Louis Jouvot had wanted to conclude in an ironic way, thus opposing the atmosphere of the last scene to the tragic and tender atmosphere of the other scenes. A. F. *L'Aurore*, January 23, 1948, Recueil factice *Dom Juan*.

¹⁹³ "Le dernier tableau est très discuté.... Moi je le trouve beau. Il donne à la pièce son sens terrible. Charlotte to Louis Jouvot, January 8, 1948, (Jouvot's underlining), file LJ MS-88 (4), Fonds Louis Jouvot.

¹⁹⁴ "...[Jouvot] a réussi à nous donner le sentiment, tout au long de la pièce, d'une montée continue de l'angoisse. Thierry Maulnier, *Revue de la pensée française*, no 4 (1948), reproduced in typed notes,

Dona Elvira's speeches as mentioned earlier.¹⁹⁵ Jouvet very much admired Tirso de Molina and personally preferred to believe that *El Burlador* had been Molière's main source of inspiration.¹⁹⁶ Bérard and Jouvet's choice was also justified from a historical point of view. As in most Molière plays, there were few stage directions, the main one being the opening direction which comes after the list of protagonists and specifies that the play takes place in Sicily. The island had been under Spanish rule from the beginning of the fifteenth to the middle of the nineteenth century. The Hispanic influence was noticeable in the costumes, Jouvet's in particular. This may not have been to everyone's liking, but as Bérard explained, the memories of Jouvet as Arnolphe were still fresh (he had played the role repeatedly after his first performance in 1936). Dressing him up in French seventeenth century clothes would have been far too redolent of *L'Ecole des femmes*.¹⁹⁷ In any case, this reference to Spain in the staging of Dom Juan was novel and contributed to the rejuvenation of the play: viewers would be forced to see the play with new eyes instead of being presented with the seventeenth century environment which everyone expected. Special effects could also have been expected: they were part of the text and had been emphasised by Jouvet and Bérard in the production of *L'Illusion*. They were however toned down for the sake of unity.¹⁹⁸

A similar unifying treatment was applied to the sets. Initially conceived as individual tableaux, they were then harmonised so as to produce a "unity of place".

7.3 *The preliminary tableaux*

There are only seventeen set drawings to be found in the archives of the BnF. Jouvet and Bérard first started to work during the summer of 1947 while on holiday in Marseilles, although Jouvet complained that he did not manage to get very much out of Bérard there and then.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, as stated earlier, Bérard tended to work more and more directly on the stage towards the end of his career. These two factors, in addition to fact that preliminary sketches were often produced during working sessions or in

(Jouvet's underlining), file LJ MS-88 (2), Fonds Louis Jouvet.

¹⁹⁵ Copeau. *Registres II Molière*, 199.

¹⁹⁶ Jouvet, *Témoignages sur le théâtre*, 52.

¹⁹⁷ A. F., "Christian Bérard répond aux critiques de 'Dom Juan'".

¹⁹⁸ "[Jouvet] pense éviter les pièges de mise en scène en évitant les truquages et les machineries prévues par Molière pour sacrifier au goût de son temps". H. T., *Lettres francaises*, December 20, 1947, Recueil factice de presse.

¹⁹⁹ Lapara, *Dix ans avec Jouvet*, 189.

restaurants and not necessarily kept, probably explain why so little remains.²⁰⁰ The creative process is thus documented to a much lesser extent than was the case for *L'Illusion*. This makes it necessary to make a number of reservations when commenting the creative process.

As mentioned earlier, the play was to take place in Sicily. References contained in the speeches of the various protagonists indicated that the set changed in each act. The initial staging, as reflected in *Le Registre de Mahelot*'s description of the sets, involved the following: a palace for Act I, a room and a sea for Act II, a wood and a grave for Act III, a room and a feast for Act IV, a grave, a trap door, two armchairs, a stool for Act VI.²⁰¹

The BnF drawings show that Bérard initially envisaged a series of different sets for each act. Drawings for the seaside scene in Act II, the wood and the tomb of Act III, the dining room for Act IV and the revised finale of Act V demonstrate that each set was conceived independently of the others. Ultimately however, they were harmonised through the use of a common structure repeated in all the acts.

7.3.1 *The seascapes*

Jouvet's vision was that the play should open on a set suggestive of the seaside and the feeling of immensity attached to it.²⁰² This was consistent with the Sicilian setting of the play, and both Jouvet and Bérard may still have had in mind the memories of their summer spent in Marseilles. This would tend to prove that the palace referred to in the text of Act I was not their first concern, and that the seascape was to be used both for Act I and for Act II.

Bérard started by drawing the main volumes: columns on each side of the stage and

²⁰⁰ In addition to the BnF, Louis Jouvet's daughter, Lisa Jouvet, had a number of *Dom Juan* drawings in her collection which was auctioned in 2005, but these were costume drawings. One cannot exclude that some drawings had found their way into private collections, but it seems that both the BnF and Lisa Jouvet collections contained most of the drawings available to date.

²⁰¹ Mahelot, *Mémoire*, 335.

²⁰² "Le rideau se lève sur un décor qui, synchroniquement, nous donne, par les yeux et par l'oreille un sentiment de bord de mer. Nous ne donnerons pas matériellement l'impression de cette immensité. Mais on aura le sentiment de cet infini par le clapotis des vagues, le bruit des bateaux qui s'entrechoquent, je ne sais quoi qui traduit la paresse, le loisir, la vacance et les libres propos qu'on tient sur les sujets les plus futiles." Louis Jouvet, notes on *Dom Juan*, file LJ MS-88 (1), Fonds Louis Jouvet.

characters in the middle (fig. 154). He then added sails and a mast (figs. 155-156), as well as a typical element of Sicilian architecture: antique ruins overlooking the sea. In this case, the ruins were represented by columns. The columns were adorned with bosses typical of Serlio, Ledoux and Bibiéna (figs. 157-159.). It also seems that Bérard considered reusing architectural features from other performances, such as a “portico” which had been used in the ballet *La septième symphonie* in 1938 (figs.160-162). An “aqueduct” repeated the motif of the third movement of another ballet, *La symphonie fantastique*, and was positioned along the same diagonal line (figs. 162-164).

Fragments of classical architecture in landscapes were often used in surrealist paintings such as those of Salvador Dali and Giorgio di Chirico. Echoes could also be found in Neo-Romantic paintings such as those of Eugène Berman. These elements were often expressions of nostalgia after the destruction of war, but could be easily transposed in this Sicilian context. Ruined fragments presented the additional advantage, as far as scenic space was concerned, of taking up a minimal amount of space while retaining a high evocative power.

These seascape drawings are light and airy, in keeping with the comical tone of the scenes in Act II. This feeling of lightness is largely conveyed by the use of sky blue, which Bérard described as the only truly happy colour (see Interview in Exhibit 1) and which gives the seascapes a definite Mediterranean feel. The whiteness of the paper and the white highlights were combined to create contrasts with the vivid blues of the sea and the sky and give the impression of intense sunlight.

The drawings demonstrate how chalk could be used in an effective way to simulate lighting effects. It seems Bérard started to use chalk around 1943, for the sets of *Renaud et Armide*, and continued to use the medium, at least for *La Belle et La Bête*, *Les Bonnes* and *Dom Juan*. This timing may be due to the difficulties of securing gouache and ink during the war, or to the wish to experiment with a new medium. The medium offers very interesting possibilities in terms of making use of the grain of the paper, in a way comparable to the effects one can achieve with oil painting and the grain of the canvas. In purely practical terms, chalk is also more convenient than gouache, which was important given the conditions in which Bérard was operating.

In figs. 155, 161, and 163, chalk and gouache are combined, chalk being the medium used to simulate blue light. It is applied in an uneven and patchy way, often in vertical stripes showing the beams of light coming from the projectors in the flies. The architectural elements are devoid of colour, the only other colours apart from the lighting are those of the costumes. This gives an accurate reflection of what the viewer would see at a distance on the stage. The gouache drawings of *L'illusion* in 1937 already exemplified Bérard's impressionistic technique, but he perfected it further with the use of chalk.

Thanks to its transparency and the ease with which its intensity could be adjusted, chalk could simulate lighting effects on a stage in a much more realistic way than gouache. In fig. 156, the blue light permeates the entire scene and is applied directly on the surface of the wharf, showing precisely how the ray of light would influence its appearance. Jouvét was famous for his blue lighting effects at the Théâtre de l'Athénée, which probably explains the focus on this particular type of lighting in the drawings.²⁰³

The seascape drawings are extremely sketchy. E. H. Gombrich mentions that Leonardo “goes so far as to advise the artist to avoid the traditional method of meticulous drawing because a rapid and untidy sketch may in its turn suggest new possibilities to the artist... he uses his own unfinished work as a screen on which he projects his ideas”.²⁰⁴ This open-endedness was certainly one of the main characteristics of Bérard's work and is particularly noticeable here.

Moreover, as E. H. Gombrich demonstrates, sketchiness is also deliberately chosen by some painters when their works are to be seen from a distance. He quotes Vasari : “Artists should pay much attention to this, for experience shows that all things which are far removed, be they paintings, sculptures, or whatever, have more beauty and greater force when they are a beautiful sketch than when they are finished.”²⁰⁵ This sketchiness would thus have been natural for a painter depicting things which were to be seen from a distance, as the viewer sees the stage from afar. When painting oil

²⁰³ Claude Cézan, *Louis Jouvét et le théâtre d'aujourd'hui*, (Paris: Editions Emile-Paul Frères, 1948), 141.

²⁰⁴ E. H. Gombrich, *Art & Illusion: A study in the psychology of pictorial representation*, 6th edition (New York: Phaidon Press Inc., 2002), 159.

paintings, Bérard's brushstroke was fragmented and required that the viewer stand back to appreciate the work. It appears that he transposed this technique to his stage work.

7.3.2 *The forest and the Commendatore's tomb*

The column motive was developed further in the drawings of the forest and the Commendatore's tomb in Act III. The position of the columns suggested the lines of columns which could often be seen in ruins of antique sites (figs. 165-166).

This forest was not of trees but of stone, thus signalling that one had left the world of the living to enter a more metaphysical one. The title of one of the earlier Italian versions of *Don Juan* was *Il convitato di pietra* (the guest of stone). Bérard may have had this in mind. The style of the columns changed somewhat. The column nearest to the character was designed like a baroque cabled column with trompe l'oeil marbling, reminiscent of the columns of baroque churches (fig. 166). The column leitmotiv was then repeated in the design of the tomb (figs. 167-168). In the text, Sganarelle praises the beauty of the statues, of the stone, and of the columns of the mausoleum (III.V).

True to the description contained in the text, the statue of the Commendatore was dressed as a Roman emperor (fig. 170). Powerful men were often represented in this type of garb on their tombs (e.g. Lorenzo de Medici in the Medici Chapel at San Lorenzo in Florence). The tomb was given a round shape, similar to that of an antique tempietto, and was thus in keeping with the Commendatore's Roman attire (figs. 169-170).

Tempietti are not normally associated to death, but the motif may have been chosen due to the fact that the tomb was in a forest (figs. 16-170). Tempietti were frequent in garden architecture of the eighteenth century and Bérard may have felt that the motif was one of the few suitable alternatives for a tomb situated in such an unconventional environment. One well-known example of such a tempietto was the Temple of Cupid located just outside Marie Antoinette's Petit Trianon in Versailles (fig. 171). Bérard would no doubt have been familiar with it.

²⁰⁵ E. H. Gombrich, *Art & Illusion*, 163.

Two other drawings show that a second alternative had been studied: the tomb was to be surrounded by herms and topped by festoons (figs. 172-173). Here again, vertical lines prevailed. The herm motif would also have offered a suitable solution with respect to Sganarelle's description of the stone, columns and statues adorning the tomb, as it combined columns and statues into one.

7.3.3 *Dom Juan's dining room*

In Act IV, the set was to accommodate the entrances and exits of no less than four characters in one act (the merchant, Dona Elvira, Dom Juans' father, and the statue of the Commendatore), not to mention the movements of various servants. Bérard first drew the openings and curtains which were to evoke Dom Juan's dining room (fig. 174). Finally, the room was designed with a niche to accommodate the dining room table and two openings for the entrances and exits (fig. 175).

In this act, Dom Juan receives numerous warnings of what is to come if he does not repent. Bérard made the set suitably dramatic : he introduced a blood like red for the curtains as he had done in *La Folle de Chaillot* and *Les Bonnes*, and projected dark billowing shadows on the set. This involved returning to a gouache-based technique, chalk being more suitable for the airy drawings of the cityscape or the eerie tomb and forest ones.

7.3.4 *Dom Juan's tomb*

According to Jouvét, Dom Juan's tomb in the revised finale at the end of Act V was to evoke the graveyards of Rome and Palermo, with skeletons forming columns, hanging lamps and other mortuary ornaments.²⁰⁶ The column theme is once more present: here the columns are adorned with bones, skeletal shapes and skulls. The chalk columns alternate with vertical strips of pale violet "light" (figs. 176-177). Bérard placed Dom Juan's body in sarcophagus similar to the ones used by Desiderio da Settignano, the Rossellino brothers and Mino da Fiesole in sixteenth century Italian tombs.

Paradoxically enough, as in the drawings for the Commandatore's tomb, the main colours of death were white or light grey. Instead of the dark colours which one would have expected, Bérard chose spectral hues with the paleness of bones.

The drawings thus presented a variety of tableaux where the world of the living (seascapes and Dom Juan's dining room) was colourful and contrasted strongly with the bleakness of the world of the dead (the forest, the Commendatore's tomb and Dom Juan's tomb). The column was the dominant element in the drawings, apart from the ones related to Dom Juan's dining room. In addition to its architectural interest, the column offered vertical lines which appropriately suggested a link between heaven and earth. It was also flexible and lent itself to a variety of different ornamental treatments.

Bérard was familiar with the work of Craig, where a strong focus was set on verticality by means of high screens reaching up to the flies which could be moved as desired. They could form columns, pillars, panels and partitions, giving both an impression of harmony and of variety, reminiscent of the unity of the Greek theatre and of the diversity of the Shakespearian one. The screen was both flexible and monumental, as well as ideal in terms of catching lighting effects.²⁰⁷ Craig had used such devices to rejuvenate the staging of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* in particular. Bérard's choice of the column motif in *Dom Juan* may have been influenced by this.

But the motif did not survive beyond the drawing board stage. It may not have been fully compatible with scenic space requirements in terms of movements, entrances, exits, and set changes. It was also difficult to use for Dom Juan's dining room. In any case, a quest for an alternative solution to achieve unity began.

7.3.5 *Achieving unity*

Jouvet wished that, even before the curtain was raised, the audience could be prepared for the décor of the revised finale by decorative elements located in the proscenium. He compared this approach to the way the overture in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* informed the audience that the high point of the play would be the arrival of the Commendatore.²⁰⁸ It

²⁰⁶ Louis Jouvet, notes for *Dom Juan*, file LJ MS-88 (1), Fonds Louis Jouvet.

²⁰⁷ Danièle Pauly, *Théâtre années 20: La rénovation scénique en France*, (Paris: Norma Editions, 1995), 71-73.

²⁰⁸ "Il faut, dans la présentation scénique, et dès le début, préparer le public au dernier décor ... Dès que la salle s'obscuricira, avant le lever de rideau, le spectateur verra apparaître, se dessinant peu à peu dans l'ombre, toutes sortes de traits et de signes, éléments de décoration logés dans les avant-scènes de chaque côté de la scène... Dans le *Dom Juan* de Mozart, dès l'Ouverture, on indique au spectateur que l'important dans la pièce sera l'arrivée du Commandeur." Louis Jouvet, notes on *Dom Juan*, file LJ MS-88 (1), Fonds Louis Jouvet.

is probably this search for unity from the very beginning of the play which led Bérard to drop the individual sets described above to a large extent. Instead, a central structure was to overtake the stage: the facade with arched openings. The text of the first act mentioned a palace. The third act involved the tomb of the Commendatore described as a magnificent mausoleum. The text of the fourth act mentioned a dinner which could be considered as taking place inside a palace. The text of the last act mentioned a street in a city: it would have been natural for it to be lined with palaces in the context of the play.

Bérard therefore kept the palace structure as the main one. He altered its shape and changed its accessories as required by each act, reusing some of the ones he had placed in his drawings. The white lines of the columns of the drawings were then merged into one façade. The reference to the columns of the drawings is made explicit by the use of a similar graphic treatment: thick lines of white chalk (fig. 178). If Bérard and Jouvett kept to the logic they had applied to the chandeliers of *L'Ecole des femmes*, it is likely that the five “columns” of openings represented the five acts of *Dom Juan* (see p. 45).

The same visual scheme could be seen from the beginning to the end of the play. It could be used both as an indoor wall and as an outdoor façade. For outdoor scenes, the back of the façade was lit up and elements placed behind it. For indoor scenes, the lighting was removed and the openings were black. The arched opening is a staple of classical architecture, ubiquitous in the treatises of Serlio and Palladio amongst others, and highly typical of the sets of the *Commedia dell'Arte* (figs. 179-180).

The influence of the *commedia dell'arte* on Western theatre has been such that it can be considered as being the main source of the façade motif in *Dom Juan*. But a number of other iconographical sources should be mentioned. Facades with arched openings were also the hallmark of antique theatres such as the Colosseum or the Teatro Marcello in Rome. In a theatrical context, such facades were used on the outside walls, and their motifs were also apparent inside the theatre on the walls of the cavea, as shown in Claude Nicolas Ledoux's drawing of the interior of the theatre in Besancon (fig. 181).

In the Teatro Olimpico, Palladio designed a façade with openings to be placed on the stage with streets in perspective going towards the back of the stage as a compromise between the antique *frons scenae* and perspective (fig. 29). The success of this solution

was short lived as the central opening was enlarged and the frons scenae was quickly replaced by the proscenium arch.²⁰⁹ The idea of a façade opening towards the back of the stage was hardly a common occurrence in theatre history, but it was reused by Bérard in parts of *Dom Juan*.

It is also worth mentioning that two ballet sets designed by Juan Gris and André Derain earlier had arched openings through which various set elements could be seen (figs. 182-183). The first had been made for one of Diaghilev's Ballets Russes and the second for Massine for a ballet in commedia dell'arte style at the Soirées de Paris (fig. 185). As described by Leslie Norton, "For *Salade*, Braque found a brilliant way to cope with the shallowness of the Cigale's stage. He devised a line of arches which spread across the full length of the stage, dividing it into two zone which were independently lit from one another and where simultaneous actions of the interpreters took place."²¹⁰ For critic Raymond Cogniat, these zones created "the illusion of space that would have been impossible to render by the use of perspective". Bérard faced the same challenges with the narrow stage of the Théâtre de l'Athénée, and working as he did with both Kochno and Massine, he could well have had access to drawings and information regarding the two performances. It is even likely that he had seen *Salade*. In any case, he operated with a similar principle and used the façade with openings as a bearing element for the entire performance.

As part of the architecture of the exterior, interior and acting space of the theatre, the façade was a key component of the architectural vocabulary of the theatre. In *Dom Juan*, it proved to be a highly flexible solution, capable of accommodating many accessories. The arched openings of the "ground floor" lent themselves well to the actors' entrances and exits. The architecture of the façade triggered immediate associations with the classical period. The idea of verticality could be kept as the elevation was extended all the way up to the flies, almost resembling the interior elevation of a cathedral. The façade was therefore a highly effective device, both in terms of suggestive power and stage space.

²⁰⁹ Anne Surgers, *Scénographies du théâtre occidental*, (Paris: Armand Colin, 1995), 80-86.

²¹⁰ Norton, Léonide Massine and the 20th Century Ballet, 93.

For Act I, Bérard added the folded sails and the hull of a small fishing boat of his previous drawings in addition to mooring posts to express the sea. The columns were removed and only a thin proscenium arch framing the stage remained, resembling the frame in the drawing for *La septième symphonie* shown above (fig. 162). It was probably deemed sufficient to suggest antique Sicilian temples. It was also by nature a reference to the theatre. The façade formed a straight wall (fig. 184).

The same structure was kept for act II, the only difference being that the sails were removed and that one clothesline with a white sheet was hung at the back of the first arch on the opposite prompt side and another across the front of the two arches on the prompt side.²¹¹ There was also a linen basket for the scenes with the peasants.

In Act III however, the shape of the structure was slightly altered so that the façade also covered the sides. This was achieved by bending the arches at the prompt and opposites prompt sides forward and was probably meant to give the impression that the actors were surrounded by the forest (fig. 185). It could also have meant that fate was now starting to ensnare Dom Juan from this point on, as this is the act of his first encounter with the statue of the Commendatore.

As regards the trees at the center of the stage, real branches were used.²¹² Cloths were hung from the flies, presumably to simulate the foliage of overhanging trees. Rocks were placed on the floor in the middle of the stage, providing seating possibilities for the actors.

The round tempietto structure for the Commendatore's tomb was dropped. The photograph touched up by Bérard showed that he now worked directly on set photographs as the set was being produced, adding a structure to the façade (fig. 186).

The final set was simplified and the tomb was incorporated into the façade. It was

²¹¹ René Besson, Stage manager's handbook for *Dom Juan* part one, 1947, file LJ MS-87 (1), Fonds Louis Jouvet.

²¹² Louis Jouvet's stage manager had written to the manager of the Hopital de la Salpêtrière, to inform him that a stagehand would come to collect tree branches (the hospital grounds contained a number of trees). René Besson to Directeur de la Salpêtrière, November 22, 1946, LJ MS-88 (5), Fonds Louis Jouvet, BnF.

marked by two herms in the arched openings on each side of the central one. This central arch was rusticated and framed by two marbled columns. It opened, and the statue of the Commendatore appeared (fig. 189). Blue lighting was used at this stage.²¹³

The shape of the structure remained unchanged in Act IV (fig. 188). Canopies with luxurious drapes were added. One covered a niche which housed the dining table: in this way, the center of the stage was left empty without the table taking up the space needed by the actors. The other covered a second niche on the opposite side, and third one a door between the two niches. The niches were used for scenic movements.²¹⁴ Candelabra were placed within the openings of the two upper rows (a veiled reference to the famous chandeliers of *L'Ecole des femmes*?), and crests on each of the four angles of the sides of the niches facing the center of the stage. Such crests were frequently used both in Serlio's architectural treatise and in the sets of *Le Registre de Mahelot*.

In the last act, all accessories were removed and two parallel facades with arched openings appeared, thus suggesting an urban location as indicated by the text (fig. 189).

For the revised finale, the lights went out and the curtain came down.²¹⁵ The second façade was removed and railings were added in each of the ground openings, conveying the impression that the scene was taking place in the funeral chapel of a church (fig. 193). As Bérard mentioned in an interview, the final result was inspired by Richier Ligier's skeleton from the middle of the sixteenth century in Bar-le-Duc (fig. 180).²¹⁶

The façade with arched openings was thus a visual translation of the unity which Jouvett had aimed to achieve in his interpretation of the play. The façade acted as a common denominator for sets which could otherwise have offered a somewhat confused visual

²¹³ René Besson, Livre de régie Dom Juan première partie, LJ MS-87 (1), Fonds Louis Jouvett, BnF.

²¹⁴ "...les pasades des gens de Dom Juan entre les tentures dans la scène du souper, les entrées et les sorties par le fond...". Charlotte to Louis Jouvett, January 8, 1948.

²¹⁵ Pierre Haquin to Louis Jouvett, Monday 23rd, file LJ MS-88 (5), Fonds Louis Jouvett.

²¹⁶ "J'ai simplement voulu évoquer une chapelle funéraire de l'époque du "trompeur de Séville", avec son tombeau à la Ligier Richier." A.F., "Christian Bérard répond aux critiques de 'Dom Juan'", *L'Aurore*, January 23, 1948, *Recueil factice Dom Juan*. The statue of the skeleton was listed in 1898 and became the subject of a number of historical writings. Francois Janvier, "Restauration du squelette de Ligier Richier à Bar-Le-Duc", *Le Journal du conservateur*, Conservation des antiquités et objets d'art de la Meuse, http://caoa55.free.fr/chap5/SqueletteBID/actualite_squeletteBID.htm, updated September 2, 2004, (accessed May 12, 2007).

experience, given the number of characters, locations and special effects involved.

7.3.6 *Achieving abstraction*

Devoid of any ornaments, the facade became a generic theatre set, a matrix out of which seven different sets could appear and which could accommodate all kinds of changes. Bérard felt the play was abstract. It was not located anywhere and the seven sets were in fact one.²¹⁷ He expressed this abstract side by giving the façade a totally neutral appearance.²¹⁸ It made it timeless and universal in the same way as the issues raised by *Dom Juan* were timeless and universal.²¹⁹

The façade had no depth. Bérard tended to trim down his architectural structures to a minimum, as had been the case for the house of *L'Illusion* or the façade of the first act of *La Folle de Chaillot* which was devoid of walls (fig. 198). Here the façade was a flat, a transparent flat at times. It had no individual existence, it could only live through the accessories that were added to it. All links to reality were removed, it was a purely theatrical structure.

This approach to the set is strikingly similar to the concept of the “palais à volonté” of seventeenth century theatre, the “all-purpose palace” which did not belong to any particular location and could be used ad libitum. It consisted of wing flats placed on both sides of the stage in perspective, and a painted backdrop (fig. 192). It was designed for the staging of classical tragedies which were subject to the three rules of unity of action, time and place. Changes of place were in theory proscribed, hence the need for a set which could accommodate most scenes in a plausible manner.

Anne Surgers' comments on the “palais à volonté” of the period could very well apply to Bérard's façade in *Dom Juan*. She defines it as the epitome of a fictive location, which resembles a palace but is not meant to be the replica of any particular palace. It is

²¹⁷ “J'ai voulu... exprimer le climat abstrait que je trouve dans la pièce. Elle ne se situe nulle part. Les sept décors, en réalité, n'en font qu'un.” André Warnod, “Louis Jouvet va présenter ‘Don Juan’”, *Le Figaro*, December 20, 1947, Recueil factice *Dom Juan*.

²¹⁸ Warnod, “Louis Jouvet va présenter Dom Juan”, *Le Figaro*.

²¹⁹ This abstraction was well perceived by some of the critics. “...les combinaisons savantes du décor à transformations de Christian Bérard nous transportent d'un lieu hors du monde en un autre lieu hors du monde.” Thierry Maulnier, “Le ‘Dom Juan’ de Molière chez Louis Jouvet”, n.d., *Recueil factice Dom Juan*.

a far remove from reality, has no rational geography and is the place where verbal exchanges, which are the only driving force of the tragic action, can take place. The visual element is set aside in favour of the text.

The “ad libitum” space is subject to the will of the author and the will of the viewer who endorses the fiction with the help of the actor. This makes it unnecessary to express visually what is being said on the stage. The all-purpose palace is a polysemic space which can represent all the locations where the action takes place precisely because it does not represent any particular place. One avoids using items which would link up the set to any specific reality. Only the majesty of the architecture and the references to the architectural vocabulary of antiquity remain. All the other visual elements which could give a particular connotation to the place are removed. Unity of place refers to the unity of the visible décor.²²⁰

Bérard made some adjustments from act to act, but used the logic of the “palais à volonté” to create a unified and abstract set for the play. He did not use wing flats which would have been too seventeenth century French in the Hispanic context he had chosen for the play. Another reason may have been that he was working at the same time on Molière’s *Amphitryon*, and had already chosen wing flats with cornices and columns as the basis of his décor. He opted instead for a stark façade in commedia dell’arte and Giorgio di Chirico style, ideal in terms of neutrality and abstraction.

Taken to the extreme, this approach to set design meant that the creative process ultimately resulted in the quasi elimination of the set. Abstract issues required abstract structures. The theatrical world had no materiality, hence the need to reduce the materiality of the set to the greatest extent possible.

Jouvet had modernised the play by refusing to endorse any of the previous clichés and providing the viewer with a performance which left him free to devise his own interpretation. This released the true modernity of the classical masterpiece. It could be reinterpreted ad libitum. The set supported this by assuming an appearance of neutrality which stimulated the viewer’s sense of fantasy. It offered a high level of indeterminacy

²²⁰ Surgers, *Scénographies du théâtre occidental*. 132-133.

so that he could give free rein to his imagination and participate in the theatrical process to a far greater extent than if he had been faced with a complete historical reconstruction of a seventeenth century environment. Taking the set out of such an environment also meant that the issues the play dealt with were also taken out of a dated historical context and could acquire a more universal dimension.

A neutral *palais à volonté* made of standard elements such as the façade with arched openings raises the question of the role of the drawing. As the touched up photograph of Fig. 186 demonstrates, this role can be questioned, as large parts of the creative process are transferred from the drawing board to the stage where the sets are produced. With time, Bérard had produced his own architectural vocabulary for the stage, with arched openings, proscenium arches, chandeliers, etc. These could be tracked down from one production to the other. They did not operate as symbols, they were the reality of the stage, of the world in which theatrical characters could thrive, and they could be reused *ad libitum*. Jouvét had defined the *décor* as theatrical feeling and Bérard had built up an inventory of structures and accessories which could generate *décors* meeting this definition. Drawings were however still used to communicate ideas, simulate lighting effects and give a complete overview of the scene on the stage, rather than to explore and form individual architectural structures.

8 *Conclusion*

Jouvet and Bérard's co-operation regarding the three plays described above had shed a new light on works whose previous popularity ratings had been low. Jouvet had considered the audience's response as decisive in terms of giving the plays a new lease of life. The abundance of feedback from both the critics and the viewers show that the plays had indeed started to live again in the minds of his audience. The attraction of the visual element on show in the performances had played its part in this success. Bérard had provided sets which had strong suggestive power and could operate as theatrical feeling in accordance with Jouvet's requirements.

8.1 *Suggestive power*

The suggestive power of the sets came from the fact that they left sufficient space for the viewer to project his own visions on them and could thus encourage him to enter into the theatrical process. In his book on the European Reformers, Rouché called for limiting the number of evocative details on a set to one central detail which would give the audience the illusion of the location one was trying to suggest. The designer was to use "the audience's imagination as a co-worker", and here Rouché referred to the dynamics of painting and sculpture and their suggestive abilities. He mentioned Titian portraits, where a ruby on the elegant line of a finger was sufficient to evoke a royal hand.²²¹ ...He then concluded that all art operated on the basis of suggestion and there was no reason that the theatre should differ from other arts in this respect.²²² Bérard's approach to the rejuvenation of the classical theatre was based on the same principles using stylisation as a tool to create this necessary space.

Regardless of the initial context of a play, stylisation was a necessary exercise. As described by Rouché, each play, as every artwork, had a style, inasmuch as it grouped, according to a rhythm and a harmony predefined by the playwright, elements borrowed from reality or imaginary ones. This meant that each décor had to be stylised: this was achieved through rhythm, motion, and harmonious ordering without which no style was possible, and which made all the difference between the most faithful sketch and the

²²¹ : "Tout art vit de suggestion, et on ne voit point pourquoi l'art dramatique lui demanderait moins que les autres." Jacques Rouché, *L'Art théâtral moderne*, (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1924), 9.

²²² Rouché, *L'Art Théâtral Moderne*, 10.

most fake of photographs.²²³

There were many stylistical options to choose from for a designer who started to work in the beginning of the 1930s after forty intensely creative years of stage design. Although they were intent on rejuvenating classical theatre, Jouvet and Bérard did not choose to go entirely in the footsteps of the European Reformers or Copeau or even of other cartel members such as Pitoëff with their stark sets. They totally rejected the archaeological approach of the realistic theatre of the late nineteenth century, but nonetheless wanted the set to present references to the period's architecture and theatre. This indicated a return to the origins of the play, in the same way as Jouvet focused on the text and distanced himself from the way the text may have been performed earlier. Thus, Bérard's graphic exploration of period motives was the visual equivalent of Jouvet's efforts to go back to Molière's state when writing his plays. The *Mémoire de Mahelot*-inspired drawings for *L'Illusion* illustrate this point.

Historical sources were nonetheless no more than a starting point. Bérard singled out a limited number of motives, such as the seventeenth century style roof of the house in *L'Ecole des femmes* or windows in the façade of *L'Illusion*, or again the chandeliers of *L'Ecole des femmes*. These were in turn simplified to the extreme through summarising brushwork which focused on the visual expression of the style of the period, rather than on accumulating ornamental details. Bérard had acquired this technique through his work for fashion illustration. It allowed him to give the set a general allure which would be easy for viewers to perceive, instead of concentrating on individual elements. This approach is exemplified by the symmetry of most of his décors for the classical theatre, which often sufficed to characterise classicism. Symmetry was a key characteristic of Renaissance and seventeenth century architecture, and the sets of *L'Ecole des femmes* showed how Bérard highlighted this feature. The sets may have been simplified to the extreme, but they retained the balanced spirit of the classical period in their strictly symmetrical layout.

Thus additional space was generated by extreme simplification at the drawing board stage. Other stage designers representing classical environments usually produced much

²²³Rouché, *L'Art Théâtral Moderne*, 10.

more detailed drawings (and sets) such as the two by Eugène Berman and Cassandre shown below (figs. 193 and 195).²²⁴

Cecil Beaton compared Eugène Berman and Bérard paintings as follows (the same could also be said of their designs for the theatre): “[Berman] made much more use of architectural draughtsmanship in his canvases than Bérard, who reserved his remarkable architectural acumen for his theatrical work; and even here Bérard did not let his admiration for the sixteenth and seventeenth century blind him to the world in which he lived. Bérard painted what is, while Berman painted what was.”²²⁵

Bérard’s way of designing “what is” for the stage involved a further step in the stylisation process: modernisation. This was achieved by keeping surfaces of architectural elements bare of any kind of ornamentation as Giorgio di Chirico had done for his city square paintings of the 1920s. It was also in line with the austere sets of the European Reformers and the stark facades of functional architecture which had started to emerge in the mid-1920s. The special effects of Renaissance and baroque machinery were reinterpreted in contemporary music hall style.

Pierre Scize describes how this combination of the old and the new operated when the curtain opened revealing the set for *L’Ecole des femmes*. He felt that one had gone as far as one could in the art of suggesting a style without copying it: the décor did not remind him precisely of any given historical period, yet there could be no doubt that this was the French seventeenth century and the eternal set of the *Commedia dell’Arte*.²²⁶ On the same sets, André Beucler wrote that the artist had grouped in the same picture the past and the present, chandeliers and electric equipment, the seventeenth century and the twentieth. He had succeeded in linking up things which had little to do with each other.²²⁷ **It was precisely this mix which constituted the so-called “Bérard style”, a combination of past and present to which each viewer could relate to in his own way, without being tied down by any particular element.**

²²⁴ Cassandre (1901-1968) was mainly known for his graphic work within advertising (Dubonnet wine, transatlantic lines, Yves Saint Laurent, logo, etc.) but also produced a number of theatre sets after 1940.

²²⁵ Hastings, *Christian Bérard Painter Decorator Designer*, 17.

²²⁶ Pierre Scize, *Comoedia*, May 10, 1936.

It was then up to the audience to project its own thoughts and feelings on the set. Bérard's stylisation left much to the imagination. As far as the drawings were concerned, the open-endedness of his pencil and brushstrokes invited further creativity, both on his part and also on the part of his environment. The drawings were his main communication tool in his discussions with Jouvét and his staff. The fact that they could trigger further development work instead of presenting finished and closed solutions upon which it would have been difficult to elaborate was beneficial. As regards the sets, their "emptiness" unleashed the viewer's imagination and gave him the necessary space to enter into the play.

This involvement of the viewer in the final set was ensured by a constant concern with his perception throughout the design process. Bérard resorted to an impressionistic technique, applying dabs of colours and shade to simulate the overall view which the audience would have of the set and the actors in movement from the distance where it was seated. This is why there are often significant variations from drawing to drawing: it is not just a question of adjusting a motif, but of showing what the general impression of the adjusted motif will be seen from the viewer's side.

Thus, as expressed by E. H. Gombrich, "the artist gives the beholder increasingly "more to do", he draws him into the magic circle of creation and allows him to experience something of the thrill of "making" which had once been the privilege of the artist."²²⁸

8.2 *Décor as theatrical feeling*

The audience's participation in the functioning of the set was a first step in its participation in the theatrical process. The theatrical process, as Jouvét understood it, was based on the covenant between the author, the actors and the audience that the theatrical illusion was illusion and that this illusion was in fact reality. Once all parties had distanced themselves from everyday life, the theatrical feeling could arise as the secrets of humanity gradually became clearer. Anxiety was sublimated and replaced by a feeling of communion and tenderness for mankind.

In this process, it appears that Jouvét rated décors nearly as highly as the text. The décor

²²⁷ André Beucler, *Arts et Métiers Graphiques*, no 58 (July 15, 1937), in Kochno, *Christian Bérard*, 146.

was a dramatic feeling inasmuch as it involved a distance from everyday reality and a reference to another dimension. After having worked with Bérard for *Dom Juan*, he wrote that he did not know of any playwright who equalled his talents and who was, by the spectacular secrets of theatrical creation, more intimately close to Molière.²²⁹ Bérard's sets could trigger this theatrical feeling as they established the illusion which was a critical part of the covenant between the parties, and made the issues raised by the play visually explicit.

8.2.1 *The covenant and theatrical convention*

As defined by Jouvett, the covenant between the author, the actors and the audience was based on an acceptance of theatrical illusion as reality. As far as the sets were concerned, this reality needed to be defined in concrete terms. How should a town square look like, how should a façade be designed? Seventeenth century designers had solved this by codifying the architecture of the stage and making repeated use of conventional scenic elements such as the town square or the all-purpose palace. The covenant had given birth to theatrical convention. Likewise, Bérard developed a specific architectural vocabulary for the twentieth stage, transferring motives from the theatre to the ballet and vice versa. Most of the motives were in fact chosen early on, in 1935 and 1936, with *Margot*, *L'Ecole des femmes* and *La Symphonie fantastique*:

- ◆ Arched openings: after the arcades of *L'Ecole des femmes*, the motif was reused in the backdrop of the ballroom scene in *La Symphonie Fantastique* and on the façade of all the *Dom Juan* sets. The countryside variant is the ruined aqueduct, present in *La Symphonie Fantastique* and two of the drawings for *Dom Juan*.
- ◆ Grotto: the grotto motif first appeared in *La Symphonie Fantastique* and can be found in *L'Illusion* the following year, as well as in a slightly altered version in *Renaud et Armide* (1943).
- ◆ Rocks: they were placed in front of the grotto of *L'Illusion* and in the forest scene in *Dom Juan*.
- ◆ Cage : the grid motif was designed for *La Symphonie Fantastique* and turned into a cage for the prison scene of the fourth act of *L'Illusion*. The same type of grid was used in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (1943).

²²⁸ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 169.

- ◆ Portico: a portico was drawn for *La Septième Symphonie* (1938) and *Dom Juan*. It subsequently became a proscenium arch in the latter.
- ◆ Herms: they can be seen as early as in the drawings for *Margot*. The herm motif was then repeated in the finale of *L'illusion* and in the Commander's tomb in *Dom Juan*.
- ◆ Lighting devices :
 - ◆ Candelabra were placed on tables in several of the *Margot* sets. They were drawn as sconces for the second act of *L'illusion* and decorated Dom Juan's dining room.
 - ◆ Chandeliers: appeared in *L'Ecole des femmes*, and in the vision of Clindor's good fortunes in *L'illusion*.

Most of these elements were stock items of Renaissance and seventeenth century stage design. By using theatrical convention as a source rather than classical architecture in general, Bérard included direct references to the theatrical covenant which linked up Molière, his troupe and seventeenth century audiences.

Motives were turned into generic set elements, particularly the arched opening which could be used for arcades and facades as well as aqueducts. It became the theatrical opening par excellence, it could be left open or closed by drapes, elements could be placed in front of it or behind it, it could be used to manage entrances and exits and all sorts of scenic movements. It no longer represented anything specific from everyday reality, it was the reality of the stage. The repetition of the motives throughout Bérard's career meant that they gradually became re-established as part of theatrical convention in the long run, just as the Commedia dell'Arte and seventeenth century motives had been established in their time.

8.2.2 *Humanism*

Using elements from theatrical convention was not enough to provide dramatic feeling. The sets had to be more than scenic architecture, they were also to reflect the essence of the play concerned. In keeping with the text, they needed to bring the key issues forth. They needed to act in the same way as the troupe acted to play their role to the full.

²²⁹“ Christian Bérard a fait les décors et les costumes. Je ne connais guère d'auteur dramatique qui l'égalé et qui soit, par les secrets spectaculaires de la création théâtrale, plus intimement proche de Molière.” Louis Jouvét, notes for *Dom Juan*, LJ MS-88 (1), Fonds Louis Jouvét.

For *L'Ecole des femmes*, it meant demonstrating in visual terms Arnolphe's folly and the futility of his endeavours. The set highlighted the importance of the walls which were to keep Agnès prisoner. It also ridiculed them as the width of the house was considerably reduced and the walls could slide open at the stagehands' command. The general lines of the set retained the humour of Bérard's caricatures of Arnolphe and his house. In *L'Illusion*, the main issue was theatrical illusion and the endless sequence of embeddings it could generate. Bérard introduced several framing structures and joined up theatrical illusion and graphic illusion created through perspective. In *Dom Juan*, the eternal relevance of the issues addressed in by Molière came through in a neutral décor à volonté which could be located anywhere at any point in time. The sides of the facade were moved inwards as the play progressed to ensnare Dom Juan and demonstrate the inevitability of his fate.

This approach required a thorough understanding of the meaning of the play and the ability to build this meaning in a very literal way directly into the physical elements on the stage. These were actually the first thing the audience saw when the curtain went up and before the text even started to be heard. The décor could thus be a theatrical feeling in its own right as it incarnated the reality which the playwright wanted to present to his audience in the same way as the text and the actor's play.

Well used to incorporating meaning in visual representation, a painter was highly suited for performing this kind of work. In *Picasso et son théâtre*, Pierre Daix analysed Picasso's approach to the staging of *Oedipe-Roi*, and concluded that Picasso saw similarities between painting and the theatre. Both were a way of setting up an illusory world with images which helped the audience develop a better knowledge of the world they were living in.²³⁰ One can conclude that painting and the stage were two sides of the same humanist endeavour. The painter's contribution to the stage was thus not limited to his talents in terms of architectural design and colour and lighting simulations. It was first and foremost his ability to represent man to himself that made him the ideal partner of the stage director.

²³⁰ Pierre Daix, "Picasso et son théâtre", in *Picasso et le Théâtre, les décors d'Oedipe-Roi de Sophocle*, 2.

When designing his sets, Bérard had succeeded in finding what Georges Pitoëff had called “the modern, eternal vibration of the play”.²³¹ This expression is the answer to the question of the modernisation of the classical theatre in the twentieth century. What is modern is what is eternal, and modernising a play is identifying its eternal parameters. In stage design terms, this could only be done by focusing on the essence of things through adequate stylisation. What is modern is what is eternal and what is eternal is what is essential. This is how Bérard and his minimalist brushstroke could make the new out of the old.

²³¹ Georges Pitoëff, “Mise en scène”, 59.

9 Sources

9.1 Primary data

Most of the primary information required for this thesis was sourced from a variety of collections found in the Département des Arts du Spectacle of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF):

- ◆ Correspondance Christian Bérard: the correspondence is sorted in alphabetical order per name of sender, with a separate file for correspondence from family members, and a file for various documents other than letters.
- ◆ Fonds Juvet: this groups Juvet's correspondence, working papers and other documents related to his plays, including set drawings. The drawings are listed in the BnF's catalogues according to slide number, and it is therefore this number which is shown as reference number. The rights to use the drawings for the purpose of this thesis were granted by the ADAGP, and the BnF supplied copies of all the Bérard drawings related to the sets of *L'Ecole des femmes*, *L'Illusion*, and *Dom Juan*. Photographs of the sets of *L'Illusion* were provided by the BnF, those of *L'Ecole des femmes* and *Dom Juan* were sourced from secondary sources. The archive box number has been listed each time material from this collection has been used.

Another important source of information, but this time only for *L'Illusion*, is the Bibliothèque-Musée de la Comédie-Française, the library of the theatre where *L'Illusion* was staged. The stage manager's book for the production is kept there, as well as a large number of photographs of the actual sets.

9.2 Christian Bérard's sources

Whenever possible, systematic efforts have been made to access the material used by Bérard described in section. Bérard made extensive use of iconographical material found in libraries and museums in Paris, and these have also been visited. One critical source is the Fonds Rondel, owned by Auguste Rondel, a banker and collector of theatre related art and writings. It was housed by the BnF's Arsenal branch in 1925 and Rondel

donated it to the BnF when he died in 1934²³². Although it took some time before it was indexed and made available by the public, personalities like Jouvet and Bérard would have had access to it when they started staging classical plays in 1936. The DAS confirms that they could easily have made appointments with the librarian, Madeleine Horn-Monval, and a letter found in Jouvet's correspondence shows that he agreed to pick up Bérard to take him to the Library. The Fonds Rondel contains 800 000 documents, including 175 000 books, amongst others numerous engravings of French seventeenth century court theatre. In addition to the Fonds Rondel, Jouvet and Bérard would also have found engravings at the Cabinet des Estampes of the BnF.

Visits of the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century collections of the Louvre Museum were also undertaken, as these were major sources of inspiration for Bérard's portrait work and were of some relevance regarding the analysis of colour and light in his set designs.

9.3 Secondary data

The Performance Arts department of the BnF holds a large number of press clippings related to Bérard, Jouvet and the plays they worked on, as well as other set designers²³³. These clippings are available in book ("recueil factice") or microfilm form (references have been given in the Bibliography as relevant). It contains a wide range of publications on and by Jouvet, as well as on the history of theatre, ballet and stage design. The main branch of the BnF on the Tolbiac site provided all the necessary literature on contemporary personalities, as well as a number of periodicals, both French and foreign, where relevant articles were found in addition to the ones available in the Performance Arts department.

In parallel, it has been necessary to acquire a better insight of drama as a discipline. This has been achieved by reading some of the works on the required reading list set up by the Theatre department of the Oslo University for its bachelor programme.

²³² It has now been transferred to the Département des Arts du Spectacle (DAS).

²³³ The names of the authors and the newspapers, and the dates of the articles were sometimes omitted by the librarian when the clipping was cut out, or written on the clipping in an illegible way. The source information given in this study may therefore be incomplete in some cases, but reference is made to the relevant Recueils to facilitate further research.

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11 Exhibit 1: Christian Bérard interview

“After I have read a piece, what interests me first of all is *the architecture of the situations*, that is to say where the characters make their entrances, the places where they will meet or separate.²³⁴ I can see from that whether the action has to be raised or whether it must be left on the flat. First of all, before even imagining a set, one has to think about its scaffolding. This architectural scaffolding is just as important as the apparatus for an acrobat : the acrobat can only make his jump when his trapeze is placed opposite another trapeze. It is the same with characters moving on the stage. That is the skeleton of the décor. It is only when you have this skeleton that you can begin adding the flesh – the objects. Even if you are given indications by the director or the author, saying : “A door to the right, a window to the left”, the door can still be raised or lowered relative to the stage, which quite alters the atmosphere of the piece. So much for the *ensemble*.

An example: in LA FOLLE DE CHAILLOT I was asked for a cellar in the second act. A cellar – that at once suggests a low ceiling, but I considered that if the ceiling were made very low, the realisms of it would be too oppressive, and in fact the novelty – and the success – of the set lies in my having taken exactly the opposite line: I made an enormous, very high cellar which took people by surprise, but which suits the dramatic atmosphere of this second act.

What comes next is more mysterious. It depends on your sense of the theatre. You can put an object ten metres long on the stage without it being seen, or you can put a tiny thing on a table and everybody will see it. For that you have to have a feeling and some experience of what *gets over* in the theatre.

The colour element is very important to me, although it comes in afterwards. But I think it is better not to trust colour; it may be a great help, but it may also do a terrible amount of harm, for in the theatre everything that is over-coloured acts to the detriment of the ear. You have to bring the same feeling to bear with colour as with architecture, which means that you have to be guided by the play. All the colours must be psychologically implied by the piece.

To create a dramatic atmosphere, it is advisable to use red. I knew that, for *La Machine Infernale*, a red décor would produce a very dramatic effect; for *La Folle De Chaillot* the red bed is sumptuously dramatic. If one wishes to express unease, the yellow greens, the sulphur colour are more adequate. To express happiness, there is only sky blue, the blue of the sky in the spring. All the colours must derive psychologically from the play.²³⁵

What I esteem above everything else is *empty space*. That is a general rule to be guided

²³⁴ This interview is published in Boris Kochno, *Christian Bérard*, 143 and many other publications. The version used here was an English translation published in C. J. Delbo, “Christian Bérard Décorateur de Théâtre”, *Graphis*, Zurich, (May-June 1946): 342-345. As the translation was incomplete, missing paragraphs or sentences were translated and inserted so as to provide a complete version. Relevant pictures of the drawings or the sets mentioned by Bérard have been inserted.

²³⁵ This paragraph is my translation.

by, and I would say as much to all young decorators : Don't clutter up your stage. There is always a tendency to do too much. When I did L'ECOLE DES FEMMES with Jouvett for instance, we used the very minimum. There was a little garden, two rose-trees, five candelabra; and the décor, which was a big success, gave birth to a number of décors which were similar, except for the addition of twenty flowers-pots and twenty chandeliers. "We'll go one richer than Bérard". But the action was at once lost in this luxuriance.

The finest mises en scène have been done by Meyerhold in Russia. They were so fine precisely because there was nothing there. It was an art of extraordinary allusive power. In Ostrovsky's FOREST everything was suggested by a plank and three steps, and it was marvellous. The décor for Anna Karenine in Stanislavski's production reached perfection, and there was nothing.²³⁶ But this *nothing* was everything. And *everything is there* because *everything has been taken away*. Obviously, you can't make *anything* with nothing. You have to start by putting everything there and then taking it away bit by bit. In the first act of LA FOLLE DE CHAILLOT again –the terrace of the café *Chez Francis* – I started with an absolutely complete décor in my head, with the chestnuts and the façade of the building; then I began to take away whatever was not essential. I removed the trees – keeping the bench because the bench was necessary for the action- I put a little bit of grey to indicate the Avenue Montaigne; when I had gone so far, the building I had left was too heavy, so I did away with the walls and kept only the windows to *suggest* the building.

Ballets are another thing. The décors have to answer different requirements : firstly, the stage has to be left free for the dancers; secondly, ballet troupes go on tour, transporting their material from town to town, and playing three pieces in one performance, which means three quick changes. You cannot have fixed structures. So you are always limited to the painted fundamentals. The scenery is not constructed so much as evoked by the imagination of the painter. It is more a job for a painter than for a set designer.

Lighting plays a leading role, but I think of the architecture first.²³⁷ Next comes the lighting, on the same system. Everything is built up at the same time. It is the action, the work itself which imposes its laws.

The lighting is dangerous. Good lighting will make a bad setting look good. It should be mistrusted, it puts everything right. The important thing is to leave the lighting to its own role, which is to give discreet emphasis to certain effects. For instance, for the red tent in SODOME ET GOMORRHE, or for the bed with the red canopy in LA FOLLE DE CHAILLOT, I had red projectors to accentuate the colour of the cloths, with the result that the public, that doesn't see the projectors, was asking: "How is it that Bérard has all these extraordinary reds ?" The reds are reinforced by the red light that nobody notices.

And all the rest is the work of the director..."

²³⁶ My translation.

²³⁷ My translation