San Fernando Valley State College

OLLANTAY;

Two Styles of Scene Design

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

Drama

by

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ABSTRACT

OLLANTAY

Two Styles of Scene Design

by

Emilie Mae Diehl

Master of Arts in Drama

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The following thesis has been prepared in the form of a design project which illustrates two possible solutions to the problem of presenting the visual aspects of the Inca play Ollantay in today's theaters. To demonstrate the possibilities of using almost antithetical kinds of staging techniques, (such as, realistic-representational, or non-illusionistic-presentational) the physical theater plans were selected to best serve these two styles of production. A series of eleven settings were designed in a "selective realism" style for the proscenium stage; a permanent platform stage in a constructivist style was created for a theater-in-the-round. The proscenium stage design is illustrated with colored photographs of the painted perspectives, the floor plans, and front elevations. The theater-in-the-round plans include a black and white perspective, the floor plan, and a cross-section in elevation to show sight lines. Preceding the illustrations is a written discussion of the play, its history, and the special problems involved in designing the sets.
The Pre-Columbian play Ollantay, first conceived by the Incas and then translated into other languages, is one of the most beautiful poetic dramas in all of Latin America. It has been compared to the heroic tragedies of the Restoration (e.g., *The Indian Queen*) in both theme and subject matter, yet it is unique in its depiction of the "Sun Children of Peru." Although based on universal themes of love, pride, and social class barriers, the play has an exotic flavor with thoroughly enchanting poetic rhythms and images of the Sun-God, the Andes, and the Inca culture. There are five original manuscripts of Ollantay, in addition to versions of the work in Spanish, English, Italian, German, and other languages. This discussion concerns the translation by Nuria Halty and Howard Richardson, based on Pedro Mossi's Spanish version.

Today in the Andes a few isolated Indian tribes, uninfluenced by the Spanish culture, exist who can tell of the legend of the warrior Ollantay as it has lived in their folklore. Some individuals are capable of reciting whole passages from the play in Quechua, a feat that underlies the argument in support of the authenticity of the play. Whether the play was truly invented by the Incas or merely written by the Spanish is a subject of much debate among certain scholars, but the structure and form of the play, written before 1500, is far advanced beyond the Spanish drama of that period. The Spanish did not arrive at their Golden Age in the theater until the 17th century, at least one hundred
years after the emergence of Ollantay.

In anthropological or historical studies of the Incas, the 13 great rulers are listed, with approximate dates of their lifespans, and detailed descriptions of their conquests, and cultural accomplishments, but a great deal of information is missing, as the Incas had no written history. The earliest complete account of the Incas was written by Garcilaso de la Vega, born in 1539, the son of a noble Inca woman and a Spanish father. From his book, we can estimate the date of the events of this drama.

The central male figure in the play, other than Ollantay, is the Inca ruler Pachacutic, the ninth royal Inca. His son Thupac Yupanki, who appears later in the play, is the tenth great Inca. Since Pachacutic is listed as dying in 1471, that would place the actual events in the play from about 1470 to 1480. The action of the drama occurs in cities that actually existed--Cuzco and Ollantaytambo--and in real structures, such as: the Temple of the Sun, the palace of the Inca, the palace of his coya (wife), the palace of the Chosen Virgins of the Sun, and Ollantay's palace.

The drama opens with a colloquy between Ollantay and his servant, Piki-Chaki, who are walking in the narrow streets of Cuzco, near the Temple of the Sun. Ollantay asks Piki-Chaki if he has seen Casiquillur, the daughter of the Inca ruler, and his reply immediately reveals the basic conflict:

P.C. Oh, my master, can you ask that? You know as well as I that the sun--both god and Inca--would not wish for me to go there. Can it be by any chance you have no reverence for the one who is daughter of the sun?
Although her father had intended Cusiquillur to become one of the Chosen Women, a group of celibates devoted to religious duties, she has already consummated her love with Ollantay. The Inca might even have permitted her marriage, but Ollantay is not of the requisite royal blood, despite being the greatest Inca warrior. Pachacutic reacts angrily to Ollantay's request of marriage:

Inca. Ollantay, you are a common, low-born countryman. Thus were you born, and nothing you have done or can ever do will change that fact. Your goal is far beyond your reach.

He banishes his general from Cuzco, and places his daughter in the House of the Virgins. When she gives birth to a beautiful baby girl, Yma Sumac, she is punished by imprisonment in a dank cave, and the daughter is nurtured in the House of the Virgins. Meanwhile, Ollantay has retired to his fortress, after defeating Pachacutic's forces in an ambush, and he makes plans to take over the government of the empire. Suddenly, Pachacutic dies, leaving the throne to his son, Thupac-Yupanki. There is more fighting, and in the end, Thupac-Yupanki captures Ollantay and his men, only to display his mercy by freeing them. Cusiquillur and Yma Sumac are united with Ollantay, as the drama closes with the Inca ruler facing the audience and saying:

T.Y. This is a day to long remember, Ollantay. You have escaped an ignoble death. Your wife is back in your arms. In this new happiness sadness has been banished, and joy shall be reborn!

After exploring the various visual possibilities for this play, I decided to design two sets in entirely different styles: selective
realism for a proscenium stage; and constructivism, for a theater-in-the-round. Theoretically, the platform stage is the style closest to the Inca way of production, but since our popular theater is of the picture-frame type, I have tried to adapt their highly symbolical drama into a more literal, realistic version. I shall discuss this design first.

The problems in designing the visual background for this style are: authenticity of buildings and locale, and the handling of 15 rapid scene changes. The first is partly solved with research on Inca architecture, but not entirely, for most of the buildings are mere foundations, and written descriptions of how they once appeared are conflicting. Certain basic motifs, however, can be found over and over again, such as, the trapezoidal doorway, and niche, and the intricate way of placing stones together which is the basis of their architecture. The excessive decorative use of gold found throughout the empire is a matter that has captured the dreams of men everywhere for centuries, but even these descriptions vary from author to author. By combining the commonly established information with the text of the play, the actual scene locations may be visualized.

The first scene opens at the Temple of the Sun, which has been described as a building as tall as a two or three story building, completely covered with gold inside, and possibly outside. Another version is that it had a two-foot wide strip of gold along the top, or a thatched roof of golden straws. In my design, the Sun Temple has a gold strip along the top edge, and around the trapezoid door, while the rest of the building is constructed of a pure white stone, whiter than the other walls and buildings of Cuzco, which are a grayer color. The temple is a large
flat (20' x 40'), to be flown in and out, which only appears in the opening scene.

The problem of quick scene changes is solved by having the side elements on wagons, and simply turning them to their proper position when necessary. They consist of: two walls, the queen's palace, the Inca's palace, the House of the Chosen Virgins of the Sun, and Ollantay's palace. The Inca's palace is also of a fairly white stone, decorated with gold strips, and hanging plumes in the two doorways. The basic trapezoid shape of the doors is repeated in the outline of the wall and the floor. Since the queen's palace scene is actually only a hall, it is smaller and plainer, the central features being a narrow platform with steps descending to the floor. Ollantay's room is, again, small, for it is only used once, and it has the characteristic doorway and niches, but the stones are a different color. Since many of the buildings in Ollantaytambo are made of red granite, I designed his room in a reddish-gray color. For the Virgins' scene, the main feature is a fountain based on the design of a Bath of the Chosen Virgins existing in Peru today. They have a corridor instead of a doorway, as befits the description, and the color of the marble stones is a bluish-white, to symbolize a heavenlike, cold purity.

For the scenes that take place high in the Andes Mountains, there are two rather large rock formations that are turned at different angles depending on the scene, and smaller rocks in the background. Behind all of this is a cyclorama with distant gray-blue mountains painted on it, and a white sky which is always illuminated in various shades of gold, orange, or red. These colors not only contrast strikingly with the gray
tones of the rocks and buildings, but they comply with the verbal imagery throughout the text:

O. Last evening at sunset I believe I saw her.
She was walking on the hillside
with the flaming sky behind her.
She was like the sun-burst of our Inca—
the moon and sun combined,
blazing in a burning vapor.

Other phrases expressing the colors of the sky are: "the clouds, which but a while ago, were aflame in glowing orange, are now but chunks of broken slate," and "the flaming sun," and "the smoke from the burning llamas rose, blending with the golden heavens."

The sky is to become a flaming red for the battle scene, in which through ritual and symbolic movement, the army of Ollantay crushes that of Runinawi, the leader of Pachacutic's forces. Of the entire invading army only Runinawi escapes. During his soliloquy the fighting is vividly retold:

R. Then suddenly a voice cried out,
"Men of Cuzco, prepare to die!"
A blast of many war horns rent the air,
and without warning the lowering crags above you
seemed to break apart, and huge and jagged boulders
rained down in a cruel and fatal tempest from which there was no shelter.
From all sides the rocks crushed in upon your men,
as the hills resounded with the agony of death.
The ravine was filled with blood
which even now extends to overflowing all through the gorge. You've searched this sea of carmine for a foe to fight in single combat but not once has an adversary shown himself.
Two scenes call for a cave: one, the interior of the cave, and the other, the exterior. For both of these I have designed but one unit, of a rocky formation, that is entered through a carved trapezoid door, about four feet wide and six feet high. The design is a replica of a real cave near Cuzco, the Cave of the Golden Moon, the motif of which is similar to that of the Bath of the Virgins. (The meaning of the motif remains a mystery to anthropologists.) The difference between the exterior and the interior of the cave will be expressed through the lighting. For the meeting of Cusiquillur and Yma Sumac inside the cave, only the entrance and interior will be illuminated, while the surrounding stage area is to be dark. For the final scene of the play, the entire stage, cave and rock formations, are brightly illuminated as all the characters are united at last in happiness.

Designing for the theater-in-the-round created problems of simplification, or, reduction of elements to a few symbols. Using a small, intimate theater for this design, I created the main platform area as a square shape, retaining the symmetrical geometric character of Incan architecture. By the use of a series of steps, also typical of their architecture, the general shape of the platform rises to a central square, symbolic of many things in their culture: altars, temples, the Cuzco main square, and the slope of mountains. The basic step motif of the Virgins' Bath and the cave is created on each side of the square platform, as a side effect of the lines of the steps. The intricate stone work may be produced on walls that surround the stage, by building up a heavy texture out of paper mache, or canvas over wire structures. As it is not possible to place vertical elements on the stage, due to sight lines, the trapezoidal
doorway is repeated over each of the actors' entrance aisles located at the four corners of the stage. All entrances and exits will be executed through these doors, from tunnel-like passages with steps which meet the level of the main floor of the theater. These steps at each of the four corners further add to the effect of the rising tiers of a temple, an altar, or, simply, a mountainous region.

This type of staging permits a fluidity of action not possible in the proscenium stage which requires many scene changes. Since the original Inca drama had neither acts nor scenes, the basic rhythmic structure of their theater moved at a rapid pace. The advantage of the constructivist set is that dramatic action is allowed to move uninterrupted, without separate scenes punctuated by black-outs or long pauses.

The first design best fulfills the demands and expectations of our popular theater—one of illusion, with a picture-frame setting. The advantage of the first design is its inclusion of authentic anthropological and historical details needed by an American audience unfamiliar with Inca culture. This design also fills in realistic visual details that otherwise might not be fully realized in the imaginations of the viewers. Although the sets are designed for quick changes, the delays that result from any type of necessary set changes interrupt the flow of the play as it was intended to be performed. For this reason, the second design is more authentic according to production style, and can create a rhythmic, ritualistic drama representative of the original, primitive form.
Scene 1: Cuzco; main square before the Temple of the Sun.
Scene 1: Cusco; main square before the Temple of the Sun.
Scene 2: a hall in the palace of the queen.
Scene 2: a hall in the palace of the queen.
Scene 3, 6, 10, 14: interior of the Inca's palace.
Scene 3, 6, 10, 14: interior of the Inca's palace.
Scene 4: lonely spot outside the city of Cuzco.
Scene 4: lonely spot outside the city of Cuzco.
Scene 5: interior of the palace in Ollantaytambo.
Scene 7: a war dance in the Andes.
Scene 8, 12: palace interior of the Chosen Virgins of the Sun.
Scene 9: a street in Cuzco.
Scene 11: outside Ollantay's castle in the Andes.
Scene 13: interior of the cave.
Scene 15: outside the cave, in the garden.
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