

Though inanimate stage objects are everywhere, they are a challenge to reconstruct. Should be considered to have a “double life” as both stuff (things) and as performers (things that move on and off stage and are exchanged). Sofer argues “stage dynamics” can be reconstructed from property bills.

Types of evidence already out there:

- Most valuable asset. Andrew Gurr estimates annual expenditure at Rose (Henslowe’s diary) between 1597 and 1599 to be £96 (as opposed to £150 each on plays and clothing. Accumulated stock of costumes and props might have cost more to acquire than theater to build.
- Theatrical records are scarce.
 - Peele’s Tragical Battel of Alcazar in Barbarie lists only spectacular props like “raw flesh” and “dead men’s heads and bones” and “3 viols of blood”; daily stuff omitted
 - Henslowe’s diary (1598) included specialty items that would have been expensive to replace (cauldron from Jew of Malta and “Kent’s wooden leg”) but leaves out coins and mugs
 - Stage directions are main source (Dessen and Thomson 1999 crated Dictionary of Stage Directions in English Drama 1580-1642) and lists 183 items under properties—small/hand-held; Lear’s crown left out.
 - We must check all texts (Q1 of Hamlet has Ophelia accompanying (him)self on lute and ghost wearing a nightgown)
 - Eyewitness accounts are rare:
 - Samuel Rowlands tells us of Burbage’s “signature stroking of his dagger as Richard III” which was imitated by “swaggering gallants”
 - Simon Foreman saw Cymbeline and Macbeth at Globe in 1611;
 - John Manningham saw Twelfth Night at Middle Temple (law school) in 1602
 - New scholarly focus on objects: Props are textual signifiers: They convey information about the play world in a “visual shorthand.” “What one scholar calls ‘the cultural project of things’ now rivals the body as the crucial site of inquiry in Renaissance studies.” Because of “object studies,” we now more know about
 - hand-props (Bruster 2002)
 - the relationship between Henslowe’s pawnbroking and theatrical business (Korda 1996)
 - Women’s role in world of stage properties (Korda 2002)
 - Frances Teague reconstructed property lists for every Shakespeare play and suggests and average use of 34 props per play
 - Douglas Bruster surveys property use in plays between 1587 and 1636 and shows a decline in the number of props used by all playwrights that corresponds to fewer actors and smaller numbers of characters in plays
 - No “propmaster” mentioned (“tiremen” were mentioned). Did players come up with their own? Practices weren’t universal (Admiral’s men rented Henslowe’s props and theaters; King’s Men built and owned theirs.)

- Playhouse wills indicate some handed down to friends or apprentices (rings, swords, etc).

Sofer looks at two plays (Tempest and Alchemist) performed at the same time by the King's Men (Alchemist taken on tour in August 1610, along with Othello, because plague had closed theaters; assumption is it opened earlier in London. Tempest first recorded performance at Whitehall (Banqueting Hall) on 1 November 1611—written while Alchemist was in rehearsal?). Idea is to give a sense of property use at height of King's Men's popularity.

- Both plays about the “charm of objects”. Both play scripts give unusually detailed description of object use in stage directions.
- Props had to be portable and adaptable. King's Men performed in 1611 at Globe, at court, in private houses, and on tour.
- Large props could be thrust out on stage or revealed in “discovery space before the tiring house façade”
- Tempest contains a “formalized masque, relatively large cast, and descending goddess” which makes some think it was created for court. Also well-suited for Blackfriars (“off-stage music, songs, its two spectacles...its lack of fights or fireworks, the large proportion of scenes that call for few players on stage” became standard features of indoor venues (Gurr and Ichikawa 2000).
- Sofer lists in appendix (attached) only those properties necessary for stage action. Return appearances of props are boldfaced; costumes listed only when they function as properties (as when they are exchanged or handed off).
- Several are optional—for example, Alchemist, act V has discussion of swag (treasure). At home these items might have been shown for their spectacle value; however, on tour the trunk lid could have been turned so props could be mimed or ghosted). Jonson carefully itemizes each item in trunk, so Sofer thinks they might have been used.
- What does property-bill for Alchemist reveal about King's Men's handling of props?
 - Large number of props to keep track of (43). So they had to not only keep track of props but memorize stage business involving their use. “Players were responsible for a bewildering number of prop entrances, exchanges, and departures from the stage.”
 - Verbal stage directions could cue players; patter created to fill dead spots created by onstage costume changes “Feste in Twelfth Night dons a curate gown and says “I would I were the first that had ever dissembled in such a gown”.
 - Costume often incorporated as “nonce prop.” Face and Doll help Subtle remove Alchemist gown; Doll fetches Face's Lungs costume; Face passes a cloak and hat for Druggier to subtle; Subtle exits and re-enters in order to hand Face the Spanish cloak, hate, and ruff, etc.
 - Onstage exchanges add to many, many offstage costume changes; rough correlation between off-stage costume activity and scenes with few or no props.
 - However, scene with most elaborate “prop business”—fleecing, binding, and gagging o Dapper the Clerk—has an onstage costume change while using 8 of the plays' 43 props. Most change hands. That suggests most props must have belonged to the company, not individual players.

- Money accounts for 10 of the 43 props; in small theaters, this money would have been visible, which may explain why Jonson itemizes the currency; in that case, it couldn't have been recycled. However, lots of props could have been recycled.
- Face tells Druggier to borrow "Hieronimo's costume" from the players (metatheatrical joke); Druggier is actor Robert Armin, who played Feste and Touchstones.
- What does property bill for *Tempest* add to the picture?
 - 48 or so props, few of which are duplicated in *Alchemist*.
 - Most are either swords or weaponry (20 out of 47). They reinforce plays' central themes of "violence, usurpation, and political assassination" just as *Alchemist* coin-exchange motif reinforces theme of greed.
 - Most are "live"—45 are drawn into action, as opposed to 13 of Jonson's
 - Most are handled by individual actors, not exchanged—except gabardine, bottle, and apparel used to distract clowns in act 4.
 - Suggests clowns might have had to "improvise physical comedy" with objects at hand. (Hamlet complains about this practice in play within a play, which is essentially the King's Men's actors crashing their own play disguised as a touring company).
 - Most are straight-forward and easy to come by.
 - Two larger mobile stage devices, the "vanishing banquet" which vanishes with a "quaint device" or turning table, and "peacock driven car" that Juno descends in (placement of this stage direction suggests she was suspended over the action for some time on a "windlass.")
 - In *Tempest*, props are "emblems rather than tools"—ducal hat, crown, rapier, magical cloak, staff are identity tokens. Caliban's woodpile contrasts his unwilling slavery with Ferdinand's woodpile (willing slavery). Chess game between Ferdinand and Miranda shows game in which "kingships are at stake."
 - Inter-textual props are metatheatrical jokes, but little other overlap, which suggests purchase of props was necessary outlay for each play.
 - *Alchemist* and *Othello* taken on tour to Oxford 1610; 28 of *Alchemist*'s props couldn't be recycled in *Othello*.
 - Overlap is weapons, money, and paper documents, which would have been stock stuff.
 - They would have had to travel with a cittern, a vial of acid, a Spanish cloak, hat, and ruff, and a spotted handkerchief.
- How is prop use different in each play?
 - Jonson's plays demystify "theatrical trade in objects" while characters "shamelessly fetishize them". Most exchange gets illusion in return, much like theater itself.
 - *Tempest* more ambivalent about "glamour of props" used to tame or destroy. Caliban thinks books are source of Prospero's power. Much of sensational side of *Tempest* comes from objects (wet mariners, fantastical masque); when he gives up his magic robe, he exchanges it for ducal robes which also "exert coercive power."
 - However, Shakespeare's cautions us about the "illusory nature" of the props themselves.
 - *Othello* presents handkerchief as both originating in pagan mystery, Egyptian magic, 200 year old sibyls, but also just "an antique token"—not clear which is correct.

Property-bill A: *The Alchemist*

Prop	Appears	Passes from/Used by	To	Use in action
vial of acid	I. i	Subtle	Doll	D smashes
sword	I. i	Face	Doll	D snatches
coins (4 angels)	I. ii	Dapper	Subtle	exchange
coin (angel)	I. ii	Dapper	Subtle	exchange
diagram	I. iii	Drugger	Subtle	S examines
coin (portague)	I. iii	Drugger	Subtle	exchange
coins (ten pounds)	II. iii	Mammon	Face	exchange
coin	II. iii	Mammon	Face	exchange
coin	II. iii	Mammon	Face	exchange
gown	II. iv	Subtle	Face/Doll	costume change
coin	II. vi	Drugger	Face	exchange
tobacco pipe	II. vi	Drugger	Subtle	S smokes
purse	III. ii	Anabaptists		display
paper	III. ii	Subtle	Anabaptists	exchange
tobacco pipe	III. iv	Drugger	Face	exchange
coins (specified)	III. iv	Dapper	Face	exchange
fairy robe	III. v	Subtle	Dapper	S straitjackets D
fairy smock	III. v	Subtle	Dapper	S blindfolds D
contents of pockets	III. v	Dapper	Subtle/Face	exchange
citern	III. v	Doll		D plays
paper (with coin)	III. v	Dapper	Subtle/Face	exchange
coin bracelet	III. v	Dapper	Face	exchange
Lungs' costume	III. v	Doll	Face	costume change
gingerbread	III. v	Face	Dapper	F gags D
diamond ring	IV. i	Mammon	Doll	exchange
coin	IV. i	Mammon	Face	exchange
paper horoscope	IV. iv	Subtle	Pliant?	exchange?
piece of damask	IV. vii	Drugger	Face	exchange
keys	V. ii	Face		display
tools	V. ii	Neighbor 3		display
purse on a chain	V. iv	Doll	Dapper	exchange
Drugger's suit	V. iv	Face	Subtle	exchange
Spanish cloak, hat, ruff	V. iv	Subtle	Face	exchange
trunk(s)	V. iv	Subtle	Doll/Face	display
purse	V. iv	Subtle	Face	F counts coins
paper	V. iv	in trunk		display?
box	V. iv	in trunk		display?

(continued)

cloth	V. iv	in trunk		display?
damask	V. iv	in trunk		display?
tobacco pipe	V. iv	in trunk		display?
Spanish cloak, hat, ruff	V. v	Lovewit	Face	costume change
staff	V. v	Officer		display
Lovewit's sword?	V. v	Lovewit		drawn?

Property-bill B: *The Tempest*

Prop	Appears	Passes from/Used by	To	Use in action
whistle	I. i	Master		blown offstage
cloak	I. ii	Prospero	Miranda	costume change
lute?	I. ii	Ariel		A plays
sword	I. ii	Ferdinand		F draws on P
magic staff	I. ii	Prospero		P disarms F
lute?	II. i	Ariel		A plays
dagger	II. i	Antonio		A draws
sword	II. i	Sebastian		S draws
sword	II. i	Alonso		A draws
sword	II. i	Gonzalo		G draws
sword	II. i	Adrian		A draws
sword	II. i	Francisco		F draws
sword	II. i	Courtier 1		draws
sword	II. i	Courtier 2		draws
log	II. ii	Caliban		C carries
gaberdine	II. ii	Caliban	Trinculo	tent
bottle	II. ii	Stephano	Cal., Trinc.	drink
log	III. i	Ferdinand		F carries
bottle	III. ii	Stephano	Cal., Trinc.	drink
tabor	III. ii	Ariel		A plays
pipe	III. ii	Ariel		A plays
banquet table	III. iii	strange shapes		display
harpy wings	III. iii	Ariel		A claps on tabl
sword	III. iii	Alonso		A draws
sword	III. iii	Sebastian		S draws
sword	III. iii	Antonio		A draws
sword	III. iii	Gonzalo		G draws
sword	III. iii	Adrian		A draws
sword	III. iii	Francisco		F draws
sword	III. iii	Courtier 1		draws
sword	III. iii	Courtier 2		draws

(continue)

Prop	Appears	Passes from/Used by	To	Use in action
seat	iv. i	Miranda		M sits
seat	iv. i	Ferdinand		F sits
peacock car	iv. i	Juno		J descends
clothes line	iv. i	Ariel		A hangs clothes
gown	iv. i	Trinculo	Stephano	S dons
jerkin	iv. i	Stephano		S dons
garment	iv. i	Stephano	Trinculo	T dons
garment	iv. i	Stephano	Trinculo	T dons
garment	iv. i	Stephano	Caliban	S burdens C
garment	iv. i	Trinculo	Caliban	T burdens C
garment	iv. i	Stephano	Caliban	S burdens C
staff	v. i	Prospero		magic
cloak	v. i	Prospero		P discards
hat	v. i	Ariel	Prospero	P dons
rapier	v. i	Ariel	Prospero	P dons
chess	v. i	Miranda/Ferdinand		M/F play

EYEWITNESSES TO HISTORY: VISUAL EVIDENCE FOR THEATER IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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I

All historians, including theater historians, struggle with a basic question in research and analysis. How can visual sources—such as drawings, etchings, woodcuts, wall paintings, colors, paintings, photographs, maps, terracotta figurines, sculptures, mosaics, frescoes, and tapestries—be used as historical evidence? What are the challenges and problems? What are the methods? If, as Peter Burke argues, images ‘record actual events’ (2001: 14), should historians give visual evidence the same kind of consideration that they give to eyewitness statements in the primary records? Most historians would agree with Burke that images, ‘like texts and oral testimonies, are an important form of historical evidence’ (2001: 14). But the key challenge, he acknowledges, is to determine ‘To what extent, and in what ways . . . images offer reliable evidence of the past’ (2001: 16). When we attempt to measure the reliability of vi-