

would be semi-back-lit and this is perfect for heavy drama. Later, for the comedies, the sun is more overhead so that shadows are shorter and more direct light reaches the acting area. In late afternoon the sun is descending behind the audience's right shoulder and its weakened rays, intercepted by the uppermost tier of seating cast a mellow soft glow over the stage and at this time is most suitable for revealing and concealing what passed, until fairly recently, as "adult entertainment".

The stone background at Pompeii no longer exists in its original form so that a study of light and shade must use imagination, but at the ancient site of Hierapolis in Turkey the reconstruction of that theatre is advanced to the stage where the ornamented background is at full height, that is level with the uppermost tier of seats. It is very satisfying to sit there and watch people moving around the acting area, for you, the audience, sit in direct light and they, the actors move in subdued light and by this means the required theatrical separation between the two is achieved and of course, a reversal of our methods. Furthermore, I found that from where I was seated my line of sight was depressed sufficiently to shade my eyes against the sun. Whilst here, it is a good place to study the huge stone background behind the stage. It is a double walled affair with several levels of interior corridors opening onto the stage side through openings between the ornamental pillars. It increases the potential enormously, for here one can use the orchestra level, say some sixty feet in diameter, then the raised

stage and continue the action vertically up several levels, but how do you overcome the vastness of all this space when you don't want it? How do you overcome this sameness of a set scene of pillars and stone ornamentation? We seem to have gone as far as we can with lighting so there remains only the spell of the spoken word, costumes and scenery.

We know that both solid scenery and painted flats were used because contemporary writers describe them, but the evidence supplied is insufficient to reconstruct a set. There are vague references to three-sided elongated prisms painted with three different scenes, rotating to present one face at a time, and other clever devices, but the amount of coverage required is so huge, requiring great imaginative co-operation from the audience and I never assume that. Nor do I see one vast painted cloth, apart from the problem of getting the thing up and hanging straight, it would never look anything but what it is, even assuming only semi-direct sunlight on it.

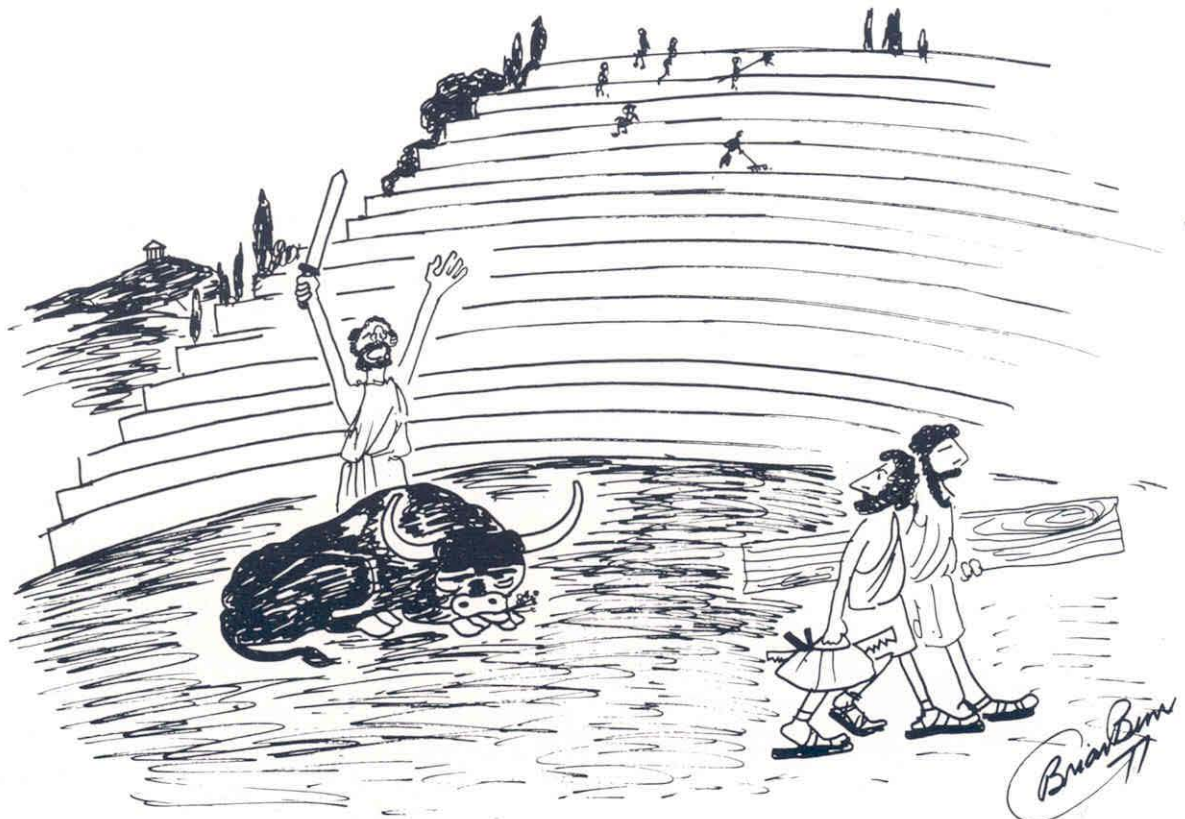
At Pompeii there are preserved wall paintings, some still in the villas, some removed to museums and many of these reflect an art influenced by the theatre. There are characters and incidents from known plays portrayed but I found more interest in the "semi-abstracts" which depict sheer architectural fantasies of gravity defying columns and arches, dressed with cloth festoons and theatre masks. The perspective treatment is exaggerated and unreal, similar to the treatment we give to flats and set pieces. It could be argued that this type of

perspective was unintentional, that the artist knew no better, but one of the very few directions on painting stage scenery which have survived says this: "It behoved that a certain spot should be determined as the centre in respect of the line of sight and the convergence, and we should follow these lines in accordance with a natural law, so that the scenery and what is figured as simple plain surfaces may seem to be in some cases receding, in others projecting." Written in Athens in the 5th century B.C.

I think I've been given enough clues to help solve my problem. I'm starting to think in terms of dozens of set pieces of various sizes and thicknesses made from wood and cloth and painted in exaggerated perspective on any chosen subject. These to be hauled up and fixed all over the façade, the final effect to strive for is not reality but to capture the essence of the plot. This is now a problem for the scenic artist and out of my department.

I should mention that later Roman theatres do not appear to be aligned in any geographical direction but there is evidence that at least some of these had temporary material ceilings rigged over part or whole of the structure, also performances seem to have entered a period of coarseness where the finer details of lighting and scenery were relatively unimportant.

I have touched very briefly on two aspects, there are others like stage machinery, seating, drainage, latrines etc., and it all adds up to the fact that professional theatre is a very complicated business and always was.



"He's ordering the special effects for the opening night"