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MANUAL TO SUMMER GUIDING AT THE  
MALTWOOD ART MUSEUM

EXHIBITION SUMMER 1974

The History of Toy Theatres

&

Sketches from Katherine Maltwood's  
Portfolio, "Treetops".

For the members of the I.O.D.E.  
Martlet Chapter.

## THE KATHERINE MALTWOOD SKETCHES

Surviving with the Maltwood papers was a portfolio of pastel sketches by Katherine Maltwood entitled "Treetops". Many of the sheets were indeed studies of trees, the most popular subject being Arbutus, common to the Victoria area. Some of these were dated (November and December, 1939) and the title "Treetops" written on the back. However, also included in the portfolio was a number of landscape studies, some obviously from nature, others more likely pure invention. Only a few of these were titled and none dated. On the whole these exhibit a higher degree of skill and are more interesting. They reveal something of Katherine's interest in eastern mysticism (i.e. Spirit by a Temple Pool) and her own sense of the mysterious innate forces which she felt to be omnipresent in the natural world (i.e. Enchanted Lake). Her own very personal vision of these inanimate forces revealing their power by taking anthropomorphic likenesses can be seen in her sculpture (i.e. Head from "Canada Arising" and "Mirage") and likewise these same forms find their way into her landscapes. (Compare Headland with the Head from "Canada Arising"). They also bear a fascinating resemblance, at least in feeling, to the work of Emily Carr, who was a friend of Katherine's after the Maltwoods settled in Victoria. Indeed many of these intimate sketches seem to exhibit the same sense of the mysterious as do her monumental sculptures.

## Key to the Katherine Maltwood Sketches

1. Spirit by a temple pool
2. Landscape with water and mountains
3. Landscape with water and hills
4. Landscape with mountains and trees
5. Landscape with heron
6. Landscape with mountains
7. Seascape with lighthouse
8. Landscape with mountains and lake
9. Landscape with waterfall
10. Landscape with canoes
11. Landscape with mountains and sky
12. Arbutus, from "Treetops" dated November 30th, 1939
13. Mountains
14. "The long light shakes across the lake"
15. "Enchanted Lake"
16. Headland
17. Landscape with Mountains and lake
18. Landscape with mountains and tree



London. Pub. by J. REDINGTON, 208, Horton, Old Town & sold by J. WEBB, 75, Brick Lane, S. Luke's.

## THE ENGLISH TOY THEATRE

During the early 1800's increasing public interest in the English Theatre led to the development of a fascination with miniature model theatres.

Robert Dighton was mainly responsible for the popularity of a group of theatrical engravings which offered the theatre-goer an opportunity to obtain souvenir portraits of his favourite actors. Gradually these portraits became more like caricatures and were sold three or four to a sheet. Soon the miniature theatres began to appear as accompaniment to these caricatures and the pastime known as Juvenile Drama began.

Public interest in the caricatures led to the rise of many small publishing firms anxious to make a quick profit from the current fad. About 1811 William West published the first single sheets containing four miniature portraits. Soon entire plays of characters and scenery were printed. Due to popular demand playbooks were issued along with the plays. At first these books were replicas of those used on the London stage, but later they were specially adapted to include directions for the toy theatre. Hodgson was probably the 1<sup>st</sup> publisher to issue them.

When a publishing firm decided to print a play several

options were available. It was possible to design an original play, present a new version of an old play or boldly plagiarize another publisher's work. The play designer would consult his theatrical contacts to determine which plays were in fashion on the London stage. Then he himself visited the theatre performance where he made sketches of the actors, scenery and costumes. Later these sketches were transferred to copper plates for the engraving process. The resulting prints sold for "a penny plain" and "twopence coloured." They preserved a remarkably accurate record of the London stage in the early 1800's.

The theatres themselves were constructed of wood and cardboard, sometimes by the shops who sold them and sometimes by the customers who bought printed paper stage-fronts to decorate them. At first candles were used for illumination, but these were superseded by miniature metal footlights with oilburning wicks. The "penny plain" characters were painted, cut out, and pasted on to a cardboard backing. When cut from this backing they were ready for mounting in tin slides which ran through grooves cut into the stage.

Both children and adults participated in the preparation and staging necessary to produce a successful drama. Limitations imposed by the small scale and restricted movement of the cut-out characters tended to reserve some of the plays for adult use. Indeed, for both adults and children the initial preparation of the toy theatre and its plays often gave greater enjoyment than the dramatic productions themselves.

This juvenile drama reached its height in popularity between 1830 and 1840 when about fifty firms were publishing plays. West, Hodgson, Green and Skelt were possibly the most notable publishers. "The Miller and his Men," "Black Eyed Swan", "Aladdin" and "BlueBeard" were a few of the most commonly produced plays. Theatrical effects were more important than realism and dramatic techniques were standardized. Stock gestures and scenic details developed.

Increased production expenses led to the deterioration of quality when the "penny dreadful" sheets were produced and sold cheaply. However these crude plays were immensely popular.

Unfortunately public enthusiasm for miniature drama declined after 1850. Ready-made plays were increasingly available; and many of the original publishers had stopped. Possibly the worst hindrance to the toy theatre's popularity

1.1 HALL'S "THEATRE" PUBLISHED 1810.

could be found in its failure to adapt to new developments as they occurred on the London stage. It was still producing the old plays, or new plays which still conformed to the outdated theatrical conventions of the early 1800's.

Today only a few of these original toy theatres have survived, along with some of the plays once performed in them. We see them as a colourful record of the English theatrical world in the early 1800's and as a whimsical glimpse into a leisure activity popular during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

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CATALOGUE OF THEATRES ON DISPLAY

- 1.) WEBB'S "DRED" published 1859.
- 2.) WEBB'S "HARLEQUIN RED RIDING HOOD" published 1858.
- 3.) WEBB'S "THREE-FIGURED JACK" published 1850.
- 4.) WEBB'S "THE UNION JACK" published 1848.
- 5.) WEBB'S "THE SMUGGLERS" published 1822.
- 6.) WEBB'S "HARLEQUIN DAME CRUMP" published 1854.
- 7.) WEBB'S "THE MAID AND THE MAGPIE".
- 8 & 9.) WEBB'S "ALADDIN" or "THE WONDERFUL LAMP" published 1813.
- 10.) WEBB'S "THE BRIGAND'S SON" published 1861.
- 11.) WEBB'S "JACK THE GIANT KILLER" published 1861.
- 12.) WEBB'S "THE MILLER AND HIS MEN" published 1861.
- 13 & 14.) SKELT'S "RICHARD LLL".
- 15.) SKELT'S "HARLEQUIN JACK SHEPPARD" published 1839.
- 16.) SKELT'S "THE WATERMAN" or "THE FIRST OF AUGUST".
- 17.) POLLOCK'S "OLIVER TWIST" FROM DICKENS.
- 18.) POLLOCK'S "SILVER PALACE" by G. ALMER.
- 19.) POLLOCK'S "DON QUIXOTE" G. MACFARREN.
- 20.) POLLOCK'S "WOODSMEN HUT".
- 21.) "PRISONER OF ROCHELLE".
- 22.) DANISH "SNOW WHITE".
- 23.) GERMAN "DEVILS COMPOSITE".
- 24.) COMPOSITE FROM DANISH PLAYS.