

Chapter 12

Stage Settings

Purpose of Scenery

- Provide a place to act
- Define the time of the play
 - Historical period
 - Time of day
 - Season of the year

- Define the place
 - The climate
 - Geographical conditions
 - Socioeconomic situation
 - Cultural background
 - Political-governmental system of the area
- Indicate interior or exterior setting
- Indicate real or imaginary setting
- Help inform the audience about the effects of the environment on the characters

- Reveals the interrelationships between people, their rank, station, influence or position.
- Should indicate the style of the production
- Create mood and atmosphere
- ***MUST ALWAYS SERVE THE ACTOR, NEVER DOMINATE.

Historical Development of Scenic Design

Renaissance Design

- Italy in 1508 – royal court of Duke of Ferrara
 - The Teatro Olimpico – modeled after the ancient Roman Theaters
 - Periaktoi – prism sets modeled after the revolving prisms of the Greek theater
- Other inventions
 - Raked Stage – Stage slanted from back to front
- Emphasized simplicity and used minimum scenic effects
- Experimented with backdrops, wing settings, revolving stages and shutters



Restoration

- Used raked aprons, little action in scenery behind the proscenium

Nineteenth Century

- Efforts to suit scenery to the individual play
 - Interior Sets – canvas drops and wings painted to represent a room
 - Exterior Sets – painted trees, fountains, gates and pathways
 - Entrances – wings parallel to the back wall
 - Street scenes – painted buildings, store windows, signs, and street lamps

- Realism began by middle of nineteenth century
 - Gradual shrinking of the apron
 - Addition of orchestra seats
 - Elimination of painted backdrops
 - Closing of the wings, gave the illusion of left and right walls

Twentieth Century

- Most sets strive for realism

Traditional Sets

- Box Set – a two-wall or three-wall set representing an interior of a room
- Unit Set – a basic stage setting from which several settings can be created
- Permanent Set – a set that remains the same throughout the play, regardless of change of locale.
- Screens – two-fold and three-fold flats used either as walls against a drapery background or to cover openings or furnishings when changing scenes

- Profile Set – forms the entire perimeter of the setting; can be constructed of screens
- Prisms – sets made up of three six-foot flats or two four-foot flats and one six-foot flat, shaped as equilateral or isosceles triangles mounted on a wheeled carriage that can be pivoted
- Curtain Set – the use of curtains as a backdrop for a play
- Skeleton Set – a set consisting of frames and openings

Open Space Techniques

- Thrust Stage – a low platform stage that projects into the audience
 - Audience surrounds on three sides.
 - Floating-screen or multiple-place set
- Arena Stage – (theatre-in-the-round) audience completely surrounds the stage
 - Use thin wires or furniture and open space

Designer's Preliminary Tasks

1. Read the play several times.
2. Discuss the play and production style with the director, who provides the foundation for design, including the basic floor plan
3. Make a sketch, called a rendering that scenically expresses the meaning and spirit of the play.
4. Consider available equipment, funds, and materials.
5. Enlarge the sketch into a perspective drawing.
6. Work out a detailed floor plan showing positions and sizes of entrances, windows, and props.
7. Build a three-dimensional model of the set design.
8. Draft elevations and working drawings (detailed construction illustrations or blueprints).