

The Renaissance/Baroque Theatre

14th Century

Trade, urbanization and rise of a wealthy new merchant class with the wealth, education and leisure to support the arts makes Florence, Italy the cradle of the Renaissance.

Spreads to rest of Europe over next three centuries.

1315 *Eccerinus*. Earliest native tragedy

1390 *Paulus*. Oldest extant comedy

15th Century

1450 Invention of the printing press revolutionizes scholarship, learning and literacy. Information and ideas spread further and more rapidly. Literacy rises.

1453 Fall of Constantinople (Eastern Roman Empire). Scholars flee to Venice and Florence with classical Greek and Roman manuscripts. Classical texts lost to the West since the fall of the Western Roman Empire rediscovered.

16th Century

1495-1597 Aldine Press in Venice collects manuscripts and publishes them. Between 1470 and 1518 the works of Horace, Vitruvius and Aristotle rediscovered and printed as well as the plays of Plautus, Terence, Seneca, Aristophanes, Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus.

1487-1522 Age of Discovery begins. Diaz rounds the Cape (1487), Columbus discovers America (1492), and Magellan circumnavigates the world proving the world isn't flat.

1473-1642 Scientific re-examination of the universe. Copernicus (1473-1543), Kepler (1571-1630), and Galileo (1564-1642) challenge the cosmic order of the planets and their movements.

1517 Luther publishes his 95 theses on the church door. Reformation starts, followed by the Counter-Reformation.

1508	<i>The Casket</i>	Launching of vernacular drama
1515	<i>Sofonisba</i>	first important vernacular tragedy
1513-1520	<i>The Mandrake</i>	significant vernacular comedy by Machiavelli
1540	- Strong native comedy tradition established in Italy by 1540, and Italian plays read with increasing frequency in France and England after 1575. Strong influence on replacing or moderating medieval practices with new humanistic models between late 14 th and late 16 th centuries.	
1500-1650	- Commedia dell' arte becomes popular throughout Europe, as Italian troupes travel to France, Spain, Germany, Poland and Austria. Influences native traditions of comedy.	
1545	- Serlio's <i>Architettura</i> published. 1 st Renaissance work to integrate classical ideas of stage design with Renaissance technology and innovation. Sabbatini (1574-1654) and Torelli (1608-1678) continue innovations in stage design and scenery.	
1580-1637	- Teatro Olimpico (1580-84), Teatro Farnese (1618), and San Cassiano (1637) attempt to integrate classical architecture with Renaissance innovation. Set the basic model for European architecture and stage design for the next 300 years.	

II Dominant Themes and Concerns

Medieval world view shattered by scientific advances, rediscovery of classical learning and secularization in the wake of religious dissent. Drama practice and aesthetics reflects struggle to reconcile medieval order and morality with classical form and beauty; the wisdom and authority of the Ancients with modern spirit of variety, innovation and inquiry. Perception of man and his relationship with his world, his God and his universe changes significantly with rise of humanism. Leads to flourishing of the fine arts right across Europe to celebrate the spirit of man and to demonstrate the wealth and learning of the new merchant classes; also leads to significant changes in form, themes and subject matter in the arts as the emphasis shifts from the cosmic to the temporal sphere.

Humanism

Man no longer seen as a cipher in an eternal, cosmic scheme, but a source of endless fascination and interest in himself. Resurgence of Greek faith in the potential of man and rebirth of desire to explore his nature as an individual and a social being especially as revealed in his works: art, politics, society. Ideal is less saintliness than to be a well-rounded man whose cultural, physical, social and personal aspects are all well-developed and controlled.

Age of discovery gives temporal, physical world a new fascination as new primitive, non-European civilizations come to light. World becomes a new place of unknown wonders, undiscovered riches and possible new Edens and Utopias.

Faith in ability to clearly understand the divine scheme and God's purpose on earth destroyed by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Religion becomes a source of bitter political, economic, personal and ideological dissent rather than a source of unity and unquestioned spiritual solace; more clan individual, subjective experience than a communal, universal one.

Concept of a serene, unchanging symmetrical cosmic order challenged by discovery that the earth moves around the sun contrary to the Bible, that planet orbits are elliptical, not perfect circles, and the universe is a place of motion and change not fixed serenity. Moves away from viewing the world as knowable through abstract philosophical contemplation or religious authority. Emphasis on discovering its workings through logic based on close, careful observation of the physical world and its phenomena.

Neo-Classicism

Formulated fully in Italy by 1570. Spread to Europe and dominated criticism from the mid- 17th to the late 18th century. Critical and aesthetic attempt to reconcile drama of the ancients with the vernacular drama at the time; pagan art and wisdom with Christian morality and the universe.

Purpose of drama

To delight and instruct with heavier emphasis falling on instruction. Drama seen as a force for moral instruction even if it was no longer used to teach religion or theology

Genres

Comedy and tragedy seen as distinct and separate forms with their own rules and it was wrong to mix them

Comedy - characters from the middle or lower classes. Stories based on domestic and private affairs, have happy endings, imitate style of everyday speech

Tragedy - draws its characters from the ruling classes, bases its stories on history or mythology, employs lofty, poetic style.

Versimilitude

- appearance of truth

A. Physical Reality

dramatists should portray only events that can happen in real life and be portrayed realistically on stage. (Dispense with supernatural events and characters; chorus and soliloquy; battle, death and violence scenes) Stage time and place should correspond closely to real time and place. Unity of time (action should take place in 12 to 24 hour period), place (Should take place in one locale or those reachable in 12 to 24 hours) and action (one single linear plot. no subplots)

B. Moral Reality

As God is both just and omnipotent so are the ultimate workings of his world even when evil appears to triumph in the short term. Dramatist must not just copy life and the apparent aberrations in justice, but the ideal moral pattern underlying the whole of life. Ultimate truth is inseparable from morality and justice. Poetic justice- virtue shall triumph and wickedness be punished.

C. General or abstract Reality

One seeks to express not the variables, aberrations and individual details of life but the universal traits shared by all of a certain kind. The things that unite and bind things into categories, not the incidentals that divide them. Representations should be true to real life then, but they should also embody truth in its most essential form: one that remains unchanged regardless of historical period or geographical location.

Characterization

- strongly influenced by decorum. As the dramatist was expected to write about the permanent aspects of human nature rather than those particular to time and place. humanity was carefully categorized according to age, rank., sex, profession and predisposition. Neoclassical drama presents types who prosper if they observe decorum and who are punished if they do not

III Dramatic Forms

Native Comedy and Tragedy

- attempt to combine contemporary settings, language and subjects, and existing popular and medieval traditions with Roman and Greek plot lines and dramatic style and structure.

Works of Seneca, Plautus and Terence in particular serve as models.

Tragicomedy

-pastoral play. Based loosely on the satyr play but featured idyllic rather than licentious society of shepherds, nymphs and satyrs. and glorified the pursuit of love. usually of the highest, purest and more ideal sort.

Opera

- arises from attempts to create plays similar to Greek tragedies. Based on thought that dialogue and choral passages were recited or chanted to musical accompaniment Monteverde (1567-1643) shifts balance towards musical values.

Commedia dell' arte

- roots seen as lying in Italian farce, improvisations on Plautus and Terence. or Italian farce of the early 16th century. Two main characteristics:

improvisation:

actors work from a scenario or plot outline, on the basis of which they improvise dialogue and action. Includes standardized bits of comic business (lame).

Stock characters:

(A) Masters - Capitano, Pantalone, Dottore. Conventionally masked and costumed types that satirize pretended prowess in military, amatory and academic pursuits

(B) Zanni (servants)- Also conventionally masked and costumed types.

Harlequin or Arlecchino, Fantesca - elements of naivete or stupidity but alien clever, intriguing and witty . sometimes lovers Brighella, Pulcinello, - often stupid, or cruel and cynical

(C) Inamorata. Inamorato (lovers) - “Straight” characters played without mask or special costuming. Bright, witty, handsome, and fashionable. Sympathetic

IV Acting and Actors

Tradition of amateur drama presented within the school or court environment to facilitate learning, or demonstrate the wealth, education and culture of the monied upper classes expands. Beginnings of touring professional theatre with male and female actors Professional Commedia troupes employing 7-8 men and 3-4 women tour Europe. and in some notable cases become attached to important courts within Italy and abroad in France, Spain and Poland.

V Audience

Plays written and performed for court or academics audiences assumed a small and well -educated enough audience to appreciate the classical allusions, the new experimentations with dramatic form and technique, and the expertise in classical learning needed to implement them skillfully. Commedia was designed to appeal to a broader audience, though the best troupes were viewed as sophisticated enough in material and technique to be court favorites. Permanent public playhouses built in 16th and 17th centuries were designed to accommodate all social classes, but segregated them according to price and seating arrangement, the lower classes getting the pit; the middle and upper classes, the galleries: the particularly rich or influential often had boxes usually located on the lower galleries.

VI Theatre and Staging

Because the Commedia were touring companies, and most of the remaining drama was performed at special occasions at court or at the school, there was little need for permanent theatres until the late 16th century. Oldest remaining theatres reflect desire to combine the ideals of classical architecture, as found in Vitruvius’ Treatise on Roman Architecture, with a practical need to accommodate the Renaissance taste for spectacle, illusionism and increasingly elaborate stage machinery, and the mechanics of seating a public, multi-classed audience in an indoor auditorium.

Theatre

Theatro Olimpico (1580-84)

Palladio and then Scamozzi commissioned by Olympic academy to build a classical theatre in an existing building. Effect as of a miniature Roman theatre brought indoors. Narrow, rectangular stage with decorated *scenae frons*. semi-circular seating and five entrances, including 1 at each end and 3 at the back. Renaissance touch - street scenes built in perspective behind each of the stage openings help create impression that the stage is a city square into which a number of streets lead.

Teatro Farnese (1618)

First surviving structure with a proscenium arch. Proscenium staging to become increasingly important to accommodate the new emphasis on spectacle, illusion, and perspective scenery. Auditorium adapts the court theatre seating arrangement into a U-shaped stadium with seating around a large open space that could be used for dancing or flooded for water spectacles.

San Cassiano (1637)

First major public theatre, built at Venice where there was no court or monarch, and there was a strong middle class. Popularized box, pit and gallery structure to accommodate all classes while segregating them and allowing for various degrees of privacy and comfort depending on what one could afford. Five balconies, each with 31 boxes, and a pit. Also adopted the proscenium stage to accommodate machinery and perspective scenery.

Scene Design

Affected by:

- (1) classical scene design:
Vitruvius contributes idea of three basic settings for the genres (Palace - tragedy, Street Scene - comedy, Woodland scene - pastoral or satyr play). Also emphasis on symmetry
- (2) growing emphasis on perspective. illusionism and verisimilitude
techniques for creating the illusion of perspective in painting and drawing discovered and formulated by 15th century. Principles applied to stage setting after much experimentation.
- (3) growing taste for machinery and spectacular effects
starts with medieval theatre's delight in flying, transformations, appearances from pats or trapdoors and fire and explosion effects, and encouraged by the growth of court masque and opera which made increasingly elaborate use of spectacle and illusion.
- (4) need for artificial lighting in an indoor auditorium
candles and oil lamp. Chandeliers lit auditorium and part of stage. Supplemented by footlights and lights concealed behind overhead and side masking pieces and enhanced by reflectors. Dimming - raising, lowering or revolving of poles of lights. Colour - special effects using containers tilted with tinted fluids between the lamps and stage. Sun or moon - crystal sphere of water lit from behind by candles.

Serlio (1475-1554)

Architettura (1545). Illustrates Vitruvius' three main stage scenes for tragedy, comedy and satyr but interprets them in terms of Renaissance perspective design. Front portion of stage flat for actors, but then angles tip sharply at back to increase illusion of distance. Scenery - using three sets of angled wings and a fiat all on the raked portion. Designed for court halls or palaces. No scene changes.

Sabbatini (1574-1654)

Constructing Theatrical Scenes and Machines (1638). Willing to sacrifice some perspective illusion for greater flexibility in shifting scenery. Experiments with classical solutions - *periaktoi* and *pinakes*. Later - sliding flats- prove more popular and eventually evolve into the wing and groove system. Flats, usually angled, could be turned like pages in a book, or slid into place on grooves.

Torelli (1608-1678)

Revolutionized scene shifting with the chariot-and-pole system which spread to Europe and remained popular until the late 19th century. Replacing angled wings with fiat ones had allowed for flats - now existing in increasingly complex combinations of side wings, back shutters and overhead borders- to be stacked sequentially behind each other. and be moved out of the way along grooves to expose the next scene. Chariot- and-pole system solved problem of coordinating all the flat changes at once, by connecting all the scenery under-stage onto roiling chariots, connected by ropes and pulleys, which allowed the whole scene to be changed simultaneously with a single motion. Could produce almost magical transformations.