

Image and Word: The Stages of Arthur Miller's Drama

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Abstract

While much has been written about theme and character in Arthur Miller's drama, little critical attention has been paid to the *didascalia* and staging of his plays. This study examines the metaphorical significance of sets, lighting, props, costumes, music, and sound effects in his dramatic texts. A second line of inquiry reveals the stages in the playwright's and his collaborators' creative processes in determining production elements, while a third analyzes the development of Miller's staging concepts from his first play written in 1935 through 2002.

An analysis of Miller's plays and their productions indicates three primary approaches to staging: the multiple, expressionistic sets evident in *Death of a Salesman*; the open, abstract stage first presented in *After the Fall*; and the dramatically unified single set, highly symbolic in *The Price*. An examination of two or three published versions, production scripts, early drafts, and three or four significant productions of each play reveals design choices and their textual implications couched within thematic, character, and formal analyses. The collaborators' training, experience, philosophies, intents, processes, and restrictions impinge upon their direction, designs, and compositions. The creative process alternates between image and word: images in Miller's mind are transformed into words, then transcribed to images in the production design, and ultimately encompassed within the written text.

Each of Miller's twenty-eight other published and produced plays fits within variations of the three primary staging paradigms. Detailed analyses shed light upon specific uses of staging elements in Miller's drama, including representing

absent characters, utilizing leitmotifs, creating seamless transitions between scenes, and revealing “the inside of his head.” The inherent significance and impact of staging upon text affirm the flexibility of the drama as it both embraces and inspires production designs.

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