

Death of a Salesman

Arthur Miller (1949)

Introduction

1. Describe what an audience would see and hear at the beginning of the play.
Draw a sketch of the stage.

page 5:

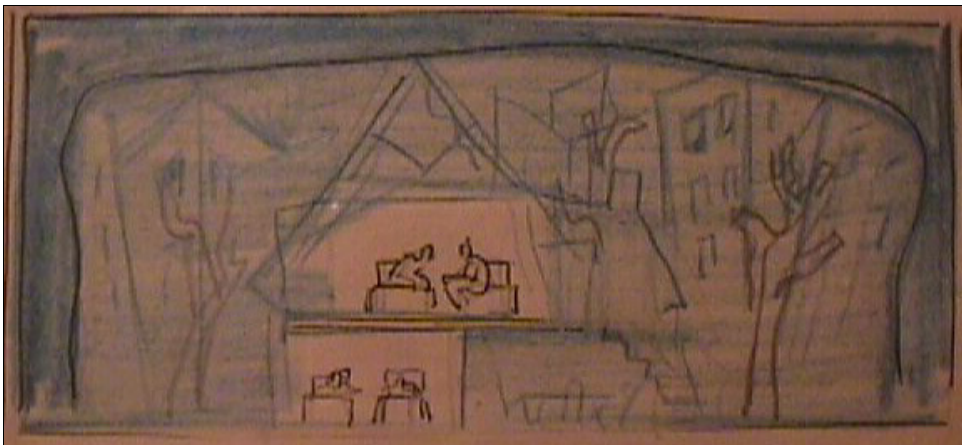
- "A melody is heard, played upon a flute."
- "The curtain rises."
- "Salesman's house"
- "towering, angular shapes"
- "the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and forestage"
- "the surrounding area shows an angry glow of orange"
- "a solid vault of apartment houses"
- "around the small, fragile-seeming home"
- "kitchen at center"
- "kitchen table with three chairs and a refrigerator"
- "at the back [...] a draped entrance, which leads to the living room"

page 6:

- "raised two feet, is a bedroom furnished only with a brass bedstead and a straight chair"
- "On a shelf over the bed a silver athletic trophy"
- "Behind the kitchen, on a level raised six and a half feet, is the boys' bedroom"
- "Two beds are dimly seen"
- "At the left a stairway curves up to it"
- The setting is "transparent"
- "The roof-line is [...] one-dimensional"

2. What atmosphere is created by the set design, music and lighting?

- At the beginning a **joyful tune** is heard, which creates a pleasant atmosphere
- However, when the curtain rises a **small, fragile** house can be seen amid **large, threatening** shapes which indicate the tall apartment buildings surrounding it.
- "As more light appears" the buildings around the small house are perceived as a "solid vault". This adds to the threatening effect of the surroundings.
- The pleasant atmosphere created by the music is undermined by what the audience now sees. What is seen and what is heard is not congruent.
- The **blue** light of the sky suggests **coldness**
- The **orange** light is described as an "**angry [cheerless, bleak]** glow of orange"
- The place is said to have **an air of the dream** which suggests that not everything we are about to see is real
- The kitchen, the living-room and the bedrooms, however, are "actual enough" and only sparsely furnished: the **lack of furniture** creates the atmosphere and impression of a poor home.
- There is a "**silver athletic trophy**" in the bedroom next to the kitchen.



Drawings by John Mielziner (1949), stage designer for the first production of Death of a Salesman in New York.