Theatre in the 18th Century

1700-1800
Age of Enlightenment

- New developments in learning and philosophy
  - Montesquieu – wrote *The Spirit of Laws* (1748) which called for a separation and balance of powers in government to end absolute monarchy
  - Voltaire – argued for religious tolerance
    - Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote *Nathan the Wise* (1779) which dramatized ideal of religious brotherhood
  - Jean-Jacques Rousseau – wrote *The Social Contract* (1762) which argued that government exists because of an agreement among the people governed, not between a ruler and subjects, and that therefore government officials are representatives and responsible for their constituents
Baroque Style

- Predominant in 17\textsuperscript{th} century
- Emphasized detail, color, and ornamentation to create a total visual illusion
  - Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)
  - Rembrandt (1606-1669)

*Garden of Love* by Peter Paul Rubens (1630-1632)

*A Scholar* by Rembrandt (1631)
Rococo Style

- Predominant in the 18th century
- Less ornate and grandiose, but still careful attention to detail
  - Jean-Antoine Watteau (1684-1721)

*The Delights of Life* by Jean-Antoine Watteau (1718)
Middle Class Tragedy

- Denis Diderot created new form called *drame*
  - defined as any serious play that did not fit the neoclassical definition of tragedy

- Bourgeois, or Middle-Class, tragedy
  - ignored neoclassical requirement of royal protagonists
    - drew tragic heroes and heroines from the emerging middle class
  - Domestic Tragedy focused on middle class family concerns

- Often dramatizations of 18th century middle-class morality and tended to be sentimental and melodramatic
  - Openly appealed to emotions as they pitted good against evil
Ballad Opera

- Parody of Italian Opera
- No sung dialogue
  - Spoken dialogue alternated with songs set to popular contemporary melodies
- Characters were drawn from the lower classes
- Frequently social and political satires poking fun at contemporary issues
John Gay's opera was set in contemporary times with roguish vagabonds as characters. His characters included thieves, prostitutes, corrupt managers and justice figures living and ruling as if they were elite.

- Combined popular tunes of the day, witty text, and political, social, and cultural satire.

- Took an erotic or sleazy tune of the day and place it with sweet and docile lyrics.
  - This same shock would be experienced by a contemporary audiences if hymn lyrics were placed in a song by Snoop Doggy Dogg or Madonna.
Comic Opera

- **Pantomime-like entertainment**
  - Actors dressed as cupids held signs onstage on which were printed other characters’ speeches
  - Action was mimed by the performers
  - Spectators would often sing the dialogue, encouraged by performers planted in the audience

- **Used popular music for its songs**

- **Satirized political and social issues**
  - By midcentury, it became less satirical and less comic in tone
Sentimental Comedy and Comédie Larmoyante

- **Sentimental Comedy**
  - Like Restoration Comedy except it reaffirms middle-class morality: the virtuous are rewarded and the wicked punished
  - Satirize social conventions and norms
    - Example: *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) by Sir Richard Steele

- **Comédie Larmoyante**
  - French sentimental comedy which featured overwrought emotions and dealt with virtuous characters who were threatened by serious misfortune but lived happily ever after
  - Means “tearful comedy” because it was meant to bring sentimental tears to the audience’s eyes
    - Example: *The School for Scandal* by Richard Brinsley Sheridan
Modifications of Sentimentality

- More subtle version of sentimental comedy
  - Focused more on characters’ psychological makeup
  - Also socially and politically satirical
- Examples
  - *The Surprise Love (1722)* by Marivaux
  - *The Barber of Seville (1775)* by Beaumarchais
  - *The Marriage of Figaro (1783)* by Beaumarchais
The Marriage of Figaro (1783)

- **Main Story Line**
  - Figaro, a servant, is engaged to marry Suzanne, another servant; his master, the unfaithful Count Almaviva, wants to sleep with her but is thwarted. At the end of the play, the count is caught in his plotting and is humiliated; he pledges fidelity to his wife, and Figaro and Suzanne are brought together.
  - It’s real point is social and political satire.
    - It is the master who is ridiculed and frustrated; his servants outwit him.

- Some thought that the play threatened French society with the kind of revolution seen at that time in the new world.
  - Caused more controversy in France than *Tartuffe*.
    - King Louis XVI refused to give his permission for the production.
Sturm und Drang

- **Means “Storm and Stress”**
  - German movement who rebelled against the neoclassical ideals and questioned the clear-cut morality of sentimental comedy and bourgeois tragedy
  - They were not uniform in their playwriting techniques
    - Used episodic structure, mixed genres, and presented violence onstage
  - Only a few productions were staged, but the movement was the forerunner of 19th century romanticism
19-25 year old men in 1770s-1790s
Took a neoclassical rule of good art and broke it
Revolutionized theatre
Breaking anyu rule they could, what they saw as rules
Heightened emotion
  - What is Enlightenment? The whole point is that nature has cherished the need to have free thought – gradually it acts on the minds of people and treats men with dignity.
Took us to bigger movement - Romanticism
Realism v. Antirealism

- Carlo Goldoni
  - Wanted theatre to be more realistic and less fanciful
  - His form of commedia discouraged masks and improvisation in order to make the characters more lifelike
    - He softened the traits of the stock characters and made them less vulgar

- Carlo Gozzi
  - Wanted theatre to emphasize the imaginative, the fanciful, the theatrical elements
  - His form of commedia would be a mixture of prose and poetry and a combination of improvised and planned actions

WHO WON??? It’s difficult to say.

- Gozzi’s plays were more popular at the time, but Goldoni heralded a movement that would dominate the modern period
- Gozzi inspired the romantics of the early 19th century and nonrealistic theatre of the 20th century
Theatres in Europe

- Retained Italian Renaissance features
- Took audience off the stage to create a "fourth wall" effect
- Seats for everyone
- Apron shrank in size
Theatre in America

- First professional entertainer arrived in 1703 and performed in Charleston and New York.
- In 1753, an acting company led by Lewis Hallam and his wife arrived in Boston and became very successful.
  - Their first performance was *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare.
- Philadelphia became the theatrical center in the early 19th century.
Scenery

- Pole and Chariot system
- Other additional elements were occasionally incorporated into painted design
  - Ground rows: silhouette cutouts along the stage floor
  - Act drops: curtains at the front of the stage
  - Borders at the top to mask the fly space
  - Rolled backdrops to replace shutters
- Angle or multiple-point perspective
  - Many vanishing points within a painted stage design
- Chiaroscuro
  - Painting technique which emphasized the contrast between light and shadow
- Local Color
  - Including places audience members will recognize from their own community
Chiaroscuro: a bold contrast between light and dark.

Sacred Love Versus Profane Love by Giovanni Baglione (1602-1603)

The Matchmaker by Gerrit van Honthorst (1625)

St. Peter in Prison by Rembrandt (1631)
Scenic and Technical Experiments

- More three-dimensional elements introduced
  - screens

- Experiments in Lighting
  - Attempts to mask lighting sources
  - Use silk screens for coloring
  - Introduce oil lamps and other alternatives to candles
Costumes

- Costuming as a production element is usually intended to create an illusion of time and place rather than an accurate reconstruction.
- Actors and actresses believed that the chief criterion for a costume was showing the performers off to the best advantage.
- Costumes were not unified within a production, nor was there much attempt to make costumes appropriate for characters or time periods.
- Experimented with historical accuracy:
  - Not often the exact historical reconstruction
    - Accurate information was limited
    - Audiences expected traditional costuming
    - Too expensive to create new costumes for a show with a short run
  - Three French performers experimented with costuming that was supposedly appropriate for the character:
    - Marie-Justine Favart (1727-1772)
    - Clairot (1723-1803)
    - Henri-Louis Lekain (1729-1778)
Acting Styles

- Predominant approach to acting is described as *bombastic* or *declamatory*
  - Emphasis on oratorical skills
- Standard patterns of stage movement necessary because of brief rehearsals and changes in shows
- Actors address audience with lines, not to the character to whom they were supposed to be speaking
- Actors “possessed” their parts
  - Once they performed a role, it would remain theirs until their retirement or death
- Other actors were opposed to the emphasis on declamation, stereotypical positions and singsong delivery of verse
  - Wanted to create individual characters and they wanted to have more careful rehearsals
  - These are the ancestors of modern realistic performers
Dumesnil and Clairon

**DUMESNIL**
- Dumesnil was considered excellent in passionate roles, such as Medea and Clytemnestra
- Considered to have more natural talent
  - Relied on the inspiration of the moment to suggest how to play a part
- Continued to wear expensive contemporary fashions for every role
- Considered more erratic, spontaneous, intuitive

**CLAIRON**
- Clairon made her debut in tragedy as Phaedra
- Much more studied of a performer
  - Relied on intelligent and industrious preparation
- Adopted a less declamatory, more natural speaking style
- Costumes used to reflect different periods and places
- Considered more consistent in performances, reliable and more impressive
Emergence of the Director

- Until now, playwrights or leading actors normally doubled as directors of stage business
  - Needed someone to oversee and unify productions, assist performers, and ensure the appropriateness of the visual elements

- Two founders of modern stage direction
  - David Garrick
  - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Between 1747 and 1776, Garrick was a partner in the management of the Drury Lane Theatre, he made his directorial innovations:

- Championed a more naturalistic style of acting and careful development of characters
- Longer rehearsals
- Required his actors to:
  - Be on time
  - Know their lines
  - Act, not simply recite, during rehearsals
    - Established penalties for infractions to the rules
- Experimented with historical accuracy
- Attempted to “mask” or hide stage lighting
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

- Remembered for his intensive rehearsals and expected his actors to work as a unified ensemble company
  - Penalized those who broke the rules
  - Closely monitored his actors’ personal behavior in order to improve their social status
  - Forced his actors to take their craft and profession seriously
  - Developed uniform “stage German” so his performers would not speak a variety of dialects

- Believed actors should address the audience rather than each other

- Followed routine blocking patterns, emphasized careful stage composition
  - Pictorial arrangement of performers onstage

- Trained his audiences by establishing rules for their conduct
  - The only appropriate reactions were applause and the withholding of applause