EDWIN WILSON

The THEATER EXPERIENCE

Mc Graw Hill Education

FOURTEENTH EDITION

The Theatre Experience

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EDWIN WILSON
Professor Emeritus
Graduate School and University Center
The City University of New York

Mc Graw Hill Education

THE THEATRE EXPERIENCE, FOURTEENTH EDITION

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About the Author

Teacher, author, and critic, Edwin Wilson has worked in many aspects of theatre. Educated at Vanderbilt University, the University of Edinburgh, and Yale University, he received an MFA from the Yale School of Drama, as well as the first Doctor of Fine Arts degree awarded by Yale. He has taught at Yale, Hofstra, Vanderbilt, Hunter College, and the CUNY Graduate Center. At Hunter, he served as chair of the Department of Theatre and Film and head of the graduate theatre program. At CUNY, he was executive director of the Center for the Advanced Study of Theatre Arts, later known as the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center. Edwin Wilson served as theatre critic for *The Wall Street Journal* for twenty-three years. In addition to *The Theatre Experience,* he is coauthor with Alvin Goldfarb of *Living Theatre: A History*, published in its first six editions by McGraw-Hill and in its seventh edition by W. W. Norton. He is also coauthor of *Theatre: The Lively Art* and the *Anthology of Living Theater,* both also published by McGraw-Hill. In addition he edited the volume *Shaw on Shakespeare.*

Wilson was president of the New York Drama Critics Circle and served for several terms on the Tony Nominating Committee and the Pulitzer Prize Drama Jury. He is on the board of the John Golden Fund and for thirty years was on the board of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. He served for many years on the board of the Theatre Development Fund, of which he was also president. Before turning to teaching and writing, Edwin Wilson was assistant to the producer for the film *Lord of the Flies,* directed by Peter Brook, and the Broadway play *Big Fish, Little Fish,* directed by John Gielgud. He produced several off-Broadway shows and coproduced a Broadway play directed by George Abbott. He also directed in summer and regional theatre, serving one season as resident director of the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia, and was executive producer of the film *The Nashville Sound.* As a playwright, Wilson has had successful stage readings or productions of a farce, a history play, a musical revue, and a musical version of Dickens's *Great Expectations,* for which he wrote book and lyrics. He also authored a murder mystery, *The Patron Murders*.

To the memory of my wife, Catherine.

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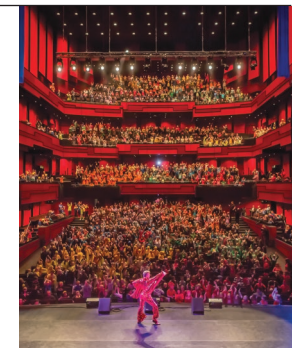

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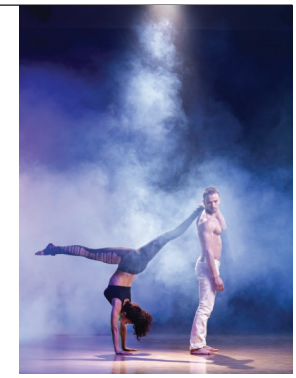

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Preface

ACTIVE AUDIENCE PARTICIPANTS, ACTIVE CLASS PARTICIPANTS

The Theatre Experience prepares students to be well-informed, well-prepared theatre audience members. With an audience-centered narrative that engages today's students, a vivid photo program that brings concepts to life, and features that teach and encourage a variety of skill sets, students master core concepts and learn to think critically about theatre and the world around them. As a result, students are better prepared for class, and better prepared for theatregoing.

Engage with Your Role

- True to its original vision—to focus on the audience's experience of attending a live theatre performance—the 14th edition of *The Theatre Experience* **opens with three chapters that focus on the student as an audience member.** Topics include the difference between being at a live performance and watching a dramatic performance on film, TV, or an electronic device; the enhancement of the experience aided by the proper preparation and background; and the awareness of the role of the audience in live theatre.

(©VisitBritain/Eric Nathan/Getty Images)

- **Play Links** allow you to read many of the plays mentioned in the text online. Any play referenced in the text that can be found online is highlighted in blue typeface when first mentioned in a chapter. Should you want to read one of these plays, you can refer to the list that precedes the Glossary at the end of the book and find its URL. Titles are listed alphabetically.

  The plays can be used to highlight key concepts and to complement the discussions found in *The Theatre Experience,* 14th edition. In addition, many of the new "Thinking about Theatre" and "Experiencing Theatre" exercises can also be supplemented and enhanced with examples from these plays.

Master the Basics

Parts Two, Three, and Four cover the important elements of theatre: acting, directing, playwriting, and design. The authors' efficient structure and succinct style set up students for a clear understanding of the basic concepts, freeing up valuable class time for deeper discussions and more personal engagement with course concepts.

Photo Essays and a dynamic art program allow students to visualize the core theatrical concepts introduced in each chapter. Topics include modern domestic drama (Chapter 8), forms of comedy (Chapter 8), costumes and masks (Chapter 10), uses of stage lighting (Chapter 11), and others.

Think Critically and Engage Actively

Based on feedback from instructors and students, the 14th edition of *The Theatre Experience* offers both time-tested and newly revised text features that help students deepen their understanding and appreciation of the theatrical experience.

- **"Playing Your Part"** is a feature in each chapter that includes two distinct sets of questions and activities that emphasize thinking and engaging critically.
  - **"Experiencing Theatre"** activities help students actively engage with the concepts of the text. These exercises ask students to undertake activities within the classroom or to understand how aspects of their everyday lives connect to core concepts discussed in the text.

PLAYING YOUR PART: EXPERIENCING THEATRE

1. If you were to write a play about your life, what would you choose as your opening scene? What would some of your complications be? Would there be a climactic moment?
2. If you were to write a play about a family you know (your own or another), what point of view would you take? Why? Are there strongly opposed forces or balanced forces in this family?
3. If you were told you were going to have to attend a play that lasted over four hours, what would your reaction be? Why? What are your traditional expectations about the space and time of a play?
4. After watching a popular film, describe how the opening scene aids in setting the action. Describe one or two of the complications in the film. Can you discuss the film's point of view?

- **"Thinking about Theatre"** questions challenge students to analyze and examine elements of a theatre experience.

PLAYING YOUR PART: THINKING ABOUT THEATRE

1. Think of a play you have read or seen where the main character encounters one impediment or roadblock after another. Describe the various obstacles that must be overcome before the end of the play.
2. Think of a play or musical you have seen or read where two major characters are in conflict with one another. Describe the two characters and explain the source of their conflict. How does it play out?
3. Think of a situation some people saw as very serious, but another person viewed as humorous. Explain what you believe led different people to see it so differently. What was your own feeling—was the incident funny or sad?

- **"In Focus"** boxes, also appearing in every chapter, help students understand and compare different aspects of theatre. They address historical perspectives on theatre, contemporary applications of technology, issues of theatrical structure, and global and other current issues in theatre, such as color-blind and nontraditional casting. Theatre artists such as Peter Brook and Josef Svoboda are also featured.

WHAT'S NEW IN THE 14TH EDITION OF *THE THEATRE EXPERIENCE*

The 14th edition of *The Theatre Experience* has been updated, taking note of new talent that has appeared on the scene as well as new approaches to writing, directing, acting, and design presented in previous editions. New plays, new productions, new approaches, and new subject matter have all been recognized and explained. At the same time, well-established forerunners in the theatre universe, whether Greek, Roman, Elizabethan, or later, have been looked at anew.

The most significant changes in the 14th edition appear in Part Five, "The Theatre Today." This has been condensed to two chapters from three, and detailed information on history has been edited and reduced. This movement away from extensive theatre history in Part Five has allowed more space for what is suggested in the title of this section—the theatre today—therefore making this edition of *The Theatre Experience* more relevant to today's instructors and learners alike.

All elements of today's theatre are covered more thoroughly and clearly. Subjects such as women's theatre, LGBTQ theatre, global theatre, and theatre of diversity are dealt with in more detail and depth than in previous editions.

Selected Chapter-by-Chapter Changes

In addition to the major changes outlined earlier, we have included significant new material throughout the text, including the following:

Chapter 1: The Audience: Its Role and Imagination

- The opening section of Chapter 1 has been completely revised. In addition, a section titled "The Mediated Arts: Film and Television" has been introduced.

Chapter 3: Theatre Spaces

- New description of the transformation of the Broadway Imperial Theatre for the musical *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* as an example of how space is a key element of a production.
- The discussion of stage directions has been moved to this chapter from the chapter on scenery to help students better understand the proscenium theatre.

Chapter 4: Acting for the Stage

- More extensive discussion of contemporary acting techniques and actor training.
- New "In Focus" box on technology and the actor.

Chapter 5: The Director and the Producer

- Extensive discussion of the responsibilities of the stage manager and the casting director.
- New "In Focus" box on color-blind and nontraditional casting.

Chapter 7: Dramatic Structure and Dramatic Characters

- Updated "In Focus" box on writing for theatre, film, and television as well as extensive coverage of dramatic structure in all its forms and variations. Also, detailed analysis of dramatic characters, both human and nonhuman. Included as well are such matters as the orchestration and juxtaposition of characters.

Chapter 8: Theatrical Genres

- New "In Focus" box on additional forms and the debate over categorization.

Chapter 9: Scenery

- Enhanced discussion of video and projection design.
- New "In Focus" box on projection design.
- Enhanced discussion of the use of technology to assist the scene designer.

Chapter 10: Stage Costumes

- New "In Focus" box on technology and costume design.

Chapter 11: Lighting and Sound

- New "In Focus" box on rock concert and theatre lighting.
- New discussion of assistive listening devices for audience members who are hearing impaired.

Chapter 12: Theatre Today: Traditional, Musical, Nontraditional, and Political Theatre

- A complete, thorough revision of both Chapters 12 and 13 (reduced from three chapters in previous editions to two in this edition).

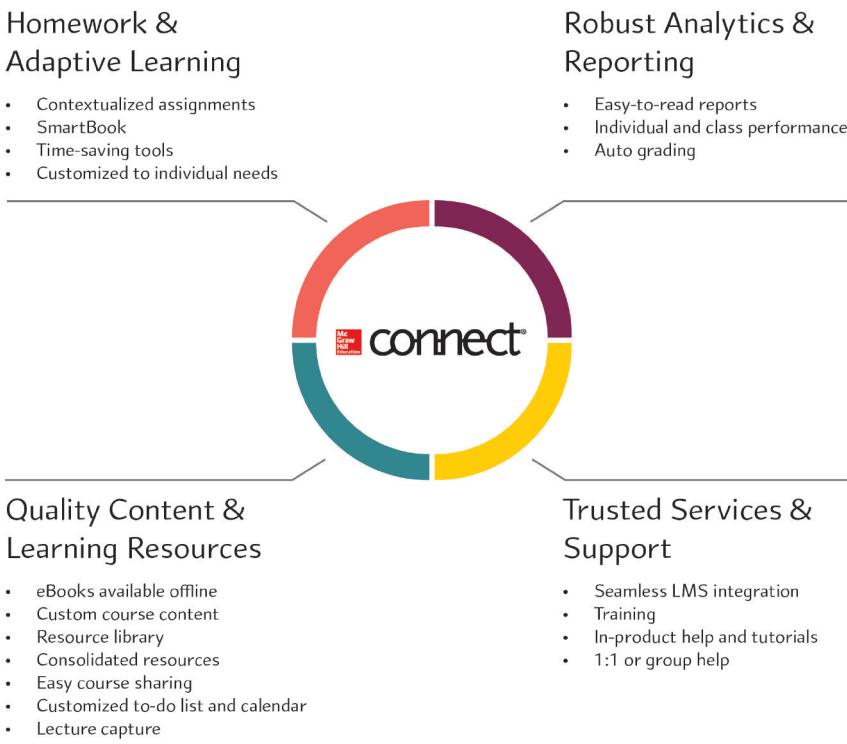
- This chapter includes revised coverage of traditional theatre in today's theatre as well as musical theatre. In addition, it covers new material on nontraditional and political theatre.

Chapter 13: Theatre Today: Diverse and Global

- Covers a wide range of contemporary theatre, including new material on feminist and women playwrights, continuing with LGBTQ, African American, Latino/a, and Native American theatre, and concluding with global theatre covering theatrical activity in six continents.
- Questions on how to evaluate a production of a historic play as well as how to evaluate a production of a new or contemporary play.

CONNECT: ENHANCING THE THEATRE EXPERIENCE

Connect combines the content of *The Theatre Experience* with award-winning adaptive tools that help students prepare for their time in class with you. The tools in Connect help students understand and retain basic concepts: parts of the theatre, the creative artists and technicians who make it happen, and the tradition and historical background from which theatre springs. When students successfully master concepts using McGraw-Hill's Connect, you can spend more class time discussing theatre and theatrical performances, fostering a greater appreciation for the course and inspiring students to become lifelong audience members. Connect is reliable, easy to use, and can be implemented on its own or paired with your school's learning management system. Contact your McGraw-Hill Higher Education representative to learn more or to speak with an instructor who already uses Connect for his or her theatre courses.



Connect for *The Theatre Experience* now includes two ways to read: an eBook and SmartBook. The eBook provides a simple, elegant reading experience, available for offline reading on a tablet. SmartBook creates a personalized online reading experience by highlighting the most impactful concepts that a student needs to learn. Students periodically test their knowledge as they read, and SmartBook adapts accordingly, highlighting content based on what the student knows and doesn't know. Real-time reports quickly identify the concepts that require more attention from individual students—or the entire class.

SmartBook

DESIGNED FOR

- Preparing for class
- Practice and study
- Focusing on key topics
- Reports and analytics

SUPPORTS

- Adaptive, personalized learning
- Assignable contents
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eBook

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- Reference
- Offline reading
- Accessibility

SUPPORTS

- Simple, elegant reading
- Basic annotations
- Smartphone and tablet via iOS and Android apps

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Support for Instructors and Students

The Theatre Experience offers a wealth of supplemental materials to aid both students and instructors, including the Instructor's Manual and both computerized and print versions of the Test Bank.

For students, resources keyed directly to this edition include:

- The Theatre Goer's Guide, which is an excellent introduction to the art of attending and critiquing a play. This guide will assist students in everything from making theatre reservations and knowing when to applaud to evaluating a performance and doing web research.

- Detailed explanations and examples of major theatrical forms and movements.
- Synopses of plays.

Craft your teaching resources to match the way you teach! With McGraw-Hill Create, you can easily rearrange chapters, combine material from other content sources, and quickly upload content you have written, like your course syllabus or teaching notes. Search through thousands of leading McGraw-Hill textbooks, and arrange your book to fit your teaching style. Create even allows you to personalize your book's appearance by selecting the cover and adding your name, school, and course information. Order a Create book and you'll receive a complimentary print review copy in 3–5 business days or a complimentary electronic review copy (eComp) via e-mail in about one hour. Go to www.mcgrawhillcreate.com today and register. Experience how McGraw-Hill Create empowers you to teach your students your way.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I wish to thank Professor Alvin Goldfarb for his invaluable and indispensable contribution to this and the previous edition of *The Theatre Experience.* My coauthor on *Living Theatre* and *Theatre: The Lively Art,* Al's ideas, his research and writing skills, his originality and imagination, and his persistence have been indispensable in completing this, the most audience-oriented and concise version of *The Theatre Experience* of the entire series.

I first developed many of the ideas in this book while teaching a course in Introduction to Theatre at Hunter College of the City University of New York. To my former students and colleagues at Hunter, I express my continuing appreciation. Also, to those professors and other experts who have contributed importantly to prior versions, I express my deep appreciation. They include Alexis Greene, Naomi Stubbs, Susan Tenneriello, Donny Levit, and Frank Episale. In addition, I express my gratitude to Professor Jeff Entwistle for his prodigious contribution to the chapters on design, and I also thank Professor Laura Pulio for her helpful suggestions on acting. A special thanks also to Professor Oliver W. Gerland and his fellow teachers at the University of Colorado. I would also like to thank Professor Scott Walters, University of North Carolina–Asheville, for developing the first teacher and student study guide materials for *The Theatre Experience,* and Professor John Poole, Illinois State University, for his revisions that are now found in the instructor resources.

We'd also like to thank the following reviewers who have contributed to this edition:

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Through twenty-six editions of my three textbooks published by McGraw-Hill, including the previous edition of this text, my colleague Inge King, the incredible photography expert, discovered every photograph that appeared in every edition of every text. Inge is amazing as well as being an irreplaceable colleague and there is no way adequately to acknowledge her taste and abiding loyalty, as well as her creativity. At the same time, a new photography editor, Emily Tietz, has taken over the duties of researching and obtaining permission for illustrations in this edition of *The Theatre Experience.* Emily has proved to be resourceful, energetic, and persistent in these endeavors as well as a person with excellent taste. I am most grateful to her.

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The Audience

THE AUDIENCE

The basic encounter in the theatre is the exchange, the chemistry, the electricity between the audience and the actors performing onstage. The presence of the audience sets live theatre apart from all other forms of dramatic entertainment. Here the audience is gathered for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Shakespeare's Globe Theatre on the South Bank of the River Thames on July 16, 2013, in London, England. (©Oli Scarff/Getty Images)

We may not realize it, but when we attend the theatre, we, as spectators, are essential to the experience. To be complete, each one of the performing arts—opera, ballet, symphony concerts as well as theatre—requires an audience. Whether watching a classic like *Romeo and Juliet,* or a modern family play, for most of us, it is likely that our first encounter with a dramatic work was on film, television, or a handheld electronic device. No matter how impressed we were with seeing a play or a musical in this way, however, it must be remembered that the experience of watching television or a movie is quite different from attending the theatre. With TV or movies, we are looking at a screen on which there are no live people but only images of people. And the experience of being in the presence of a living, breathing person makes all the difference. Another way of putting this is to say that the audience is not an incidental factor in a theatrical performance; if we are audience members, we become an indispensable element in what is occurring.

At a theatrical performance, we become keenly aware of the actors onstage. What we may not realize is that the actors are just as aware of our presence. Laughter at a comedy or a deep silence at a tense moment in a serious drama is communicated directly to the actors and has a very real effect on their performance.

In a number of events other than the performing arts, spectators often play a key role. For example, most sports contests—football, baseball, basketball, soccer, tennis, NASCAR races—elicit huge interest from fans. This is true whether the sports event is at the high school, college, or professional level. In other spheres as well, the participation

Fans cheering at the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series auto race in Martinsville, Virginia. (©Don Petersen/AP Images)

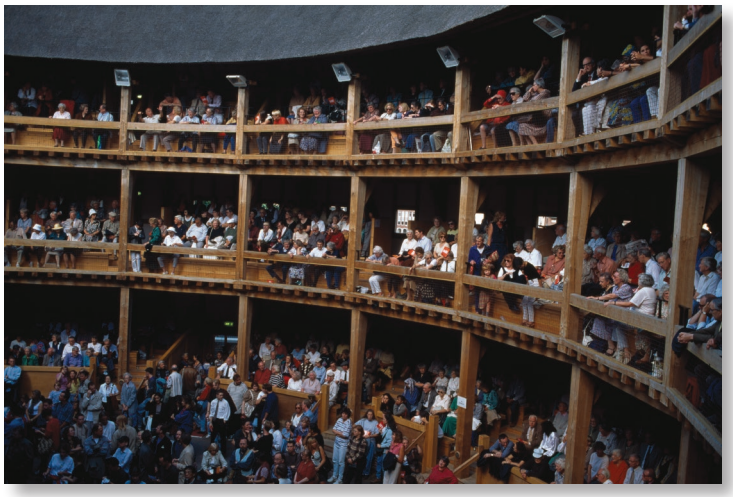
Seen here is a group of people gathered to watch the August 21, 2017, eclipse of the sun. (©Volkan Furuncu/Anadolu Agency/Getty Images)

of viewers is crucial. Political conventions and political rallies depend on large, supportive crowds to be considered successful. A good example is a national nominating convention. The hall where the event takes place becomes a giant stage set, with a stagelike platform, backdrops, and carefully arranged positions for entrances and exits. The programs are carefully scripted to build to a climax, with a finale consisting of stirring music and literally thousands of balloons dropping from the ceiling.

Despite the similarity between theatre events and sports events, there is one unmistakable difference. Theoretically, a sports contest could take place in an empty stadium and still be considered complete: though the thrill and the excitement would be missing, the results would be entered in the record book, and the won–lost statistics would be just as valid as if the game had taken place before a large crowd.

This is not true for the performing arts. Each theatre, ballet, or opera performance, each musical concert is intended specifically to be presented in the presence of an audience, which is an absolutely essential part of the event. Of course, any of these can be recorded digitally or otherwise, but listening to or viewing one of these is not the same as attending a live event. In a very real sense, a theatre performance at which no audience is present is actually *not* a performance. It may be a rehearsal of some kind, but the performance occurs only when the actors perform in the presence of an audience.

In Part One we will explore who makes up the audience, how audiences are created, how they differ from one another, how they respond to what is happening onstage, and how they interact with performers.



The audience at a performance of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at Shakespeare's Globe in London. (©Gideon Mendel/Corbis Documentary/Getty Images)

The audience watching a 3D movie. (©Image Source/Getty Images)

1

The Audience: Its Role and Imagination

Live theatre: The performance of a dramatic event by a group of actors in the presence of their counterparts, the audience members.

The title of this book tells us that attending the theatre is an experience. It is an experience, but more than that, it is a *unique* experience. Along with the other performing arts—music, dance, and opera—it occurs only in the presence of an audience. Music can consist of a concert by a symphony orchestra, a pop concert before thousands, or an intimate cabaret performance: the key factor is that there is a live audience in attendance. The same would be true of dance: it could be a formal ballet in a concert hall or a modern dance group in a small, intimate setting. However, it occurs only when there is a live audience present. A presentation by any performing arts group involves a different dynamic from the appreciation of other artworks such as painting, sculpture, or literature. A theatre performance, for instance, changes from moment to moment as the audience encounters a series of shifting impressions and stimuli. It is a kaleidoscopic adventure through which the audience passes, with each instant a direct, immediate experience.

The transitory nature of the performing arts sets them apart in other ways from literature and the visual arts. A painting, a piece of sculpture, a novel, or a collection of poems is a fixed object. When it leaves the artist's hands (or, in the case of a book, when it leaves the printer's shop), it is complete. In a world of change and uncertainty, these objects remain the same. Today, the statue of the *Winged Victory* at the Louvre Museum in Paris is the same majestic figure that was fashioned 2,200 years

◀ **THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE**

The audience and the performers are the two essential elements of theatre: both are required for theatre to occur. The presence of the audience sets theatre apart from the experience of watching a theatrical presentation on film, on television, or in any other electronic medium. A comparison can be made to the theatricality of a rock performance and the impact on the audience by the performers. Here the audience watches and reacts to the performance of Pall Oskar, an Icelandic pop singer, songwriter, and disc jockey, performing in Harpa Concert Hall, Reykjavik, Iceland. *(©Arctic-Images/Corbis Documentary/Getty Images)*

ago on the island of Samothrace in Greece. When we see this statue, we are looking at a soaring figure, facing into the wind, which is essentially what the Greeks saw at the time it was created. A theatre production changes from performance to performance because of differences in audience responses or in slight changes in the interactions among the cast members. And once a specific production is over, that production no longer exists.

Beyond the transitory nature of theatre, a second point to be made is that theatre alone among the performing arts centers entirely on human beings and their behavior, a point that we will discuss in more detail later in this chapter. A case could be made that opera focuses on people as well, but it should be remembered that though opera deals with human beings and their actions, it does so primarily through the medium of music. Confirmation of this fact is that operas are invariably identified by the name of the composer, never the playwright or librettist. It is always Mozart's or Verdi's opera, never the writer's opera. Music, of course, is sound: the notes produced by a singer or instrumentalist bringing alive a musical score. And dance is motion, the graceful, sometimes incredible movements made by performers in ballet, modern and popular dance, or tap.

THE MEDIATED ARTS: FILM AND TELEVISION

mediated arts The mediated arts, which include radio, film, television, digital streaming, and the like, are performances captured or recorded through the use of other types of media.

Standing between the performing arts and the fixed arts (painting, sculpture, literature) is a third art form: the ***mediated arts*** (radio, film, television, digital streaming, and the like), that is, performances captured or recorded through the use of other types of media. Whereas the other art forms have been with us for thousands of years, this third art form is relatively new. Ever since the inception of these various media, there have been dire warnings that each one would make the performing arts—especially live theatre—obsolete. Beginning in the early years of the twentieth century, mechanical and electronic inventions came fast and furiously. First there was radio, then black-and-white cinema, followed by movies in color; after that, television, again first in black and white and then in color and later, in quick succession, an electronic smorgasbord of digital devices (such as microcomputers, smartphones, and tablets) that now allow for the streaming of performances (recorded and even live), and so forth.

At every step of the way it was argued that live theatre could not possibly withstand this onslaught of rivals that were so readily accessible and so much less expensive. Why go to the theatre when we could see the same thing so much more easily in our neighborhood or at home and at such a sharply reduced cost? Surely this overwhelming electronic competition would lead to a sharp diminution of theatre attendance. Oddly enough, however, the falling off of live theatre has not happened; in fact, theatre attendance has noticeably increased. Live theatre today takes place at varying levels of professionalism in more locations across the United States (and the globe, for that matter) than at any time in its history. In the chapter "Background and Expectations of the Audience," we will discuss in detail the breadth and depth of live theatre across the United States and, later

in the text, our global theatre. In the meantime, we should examine why live theatre can thrive in the midst of what appears to be unbeatable competition. The answer lies in the nature of a dramatic performance by actors in the presence of a live audience.

The essence of live theatre is that it is immediate and spontaneous; it happens at a given moment before our very eyes. We are there watching it; more important, we are actually participants in the event. The twentieth-century critic Walter Kerr (1913–1996), for whom a Broadway theatre is named, explained what it means for audience and actors to be together:

> It doesn't just mean that we are in the personal presence of performers. It means that they are in *our* presence, conscious of us, speaking to us, working for and with us until a circuit that is not mechanical becomes established between us, a circuit that is fluid, unpredictable, ever-changing in its impulses, crackling, intimate. *Our* presence, the way we respond, flows back to the performer and alters what he does, to some degree and sometimes astonishingly so, every single night. We are contenders, making the play and the evening and the emotion together. We are playmates, building a structure. This never happens at a film because the film is already built, finished, sealed, incapable of responding to us in any way. The actors can't hear us or feel our presence; nothing we do, in our liveness, counts. We could be dead and the film would purr out its appointed course, flawlessly, indifferently.[1]

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THEATRE AND FILM

As Walter Kerr suggests, one way to explain the special nature of live theatre is to contrast a drama seen in a theatre with one shown on film or television. Both present a story told in dramatic form—an enactment of scenes by performers who speak and act as if they were the people they represent. The same actress can play Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare (1564–1616) on both stage and screen. Not only the dramatization and the acting but also other elements, such as scenery and costumes, are often similar on stage and screen. In fact, many films and television specials have been based on stage productions: *A Chorus Line, The Phantom of the Opera, The Importance of Being Earnest, Les Misérables,* and numerous plays by Shakespeare. Also, one can learn a great deal about theatre from watching a play on film or television, which can also give us many of the same feelings and experiences that we have when watching a theatre performance. Moreover, the accessibility of film and television means that they play a crucial role in our overall exposure to the depiction of dramatic events and dramatic characters.

As important as the similarities are, however, there is a crucial difference between experiencing live theatre or watching it on television or on film. We are not speaking here of the technical capabilities of film or television, the ability to show outdoor shots taken from helicopters, cut instantaneously from one scene to another, or create special effects such as those in science fiction films like the popular *Star Wars* films. No, the most significant—in fact, the overriding—difference between films and theatre is the *performer-audience relationship.* The experience of being in the presence of the performer is more important to theatre

than anything else. With a film or with television, we are always in the presence of an *image,* never a person.

The American playwright Jean-Claude van Itallie (b. 1936) has explained the importance of the performer–audience relationship in theatre, and how theatre differs from films and television:

> Theater is not electronic. Unlike movies and unlike television, it does require the live presence of both audience and actors in a single space. This is the theater's uniquely important advantage and function, its original religious function of bringing people together in a community ceremony where the actors are in some sense priests or celebrants, and the audience is drawn to participate with the actors in a kind of eucharist.[2]

The Irish playwright Conor McPherson (b. 1971), who has had great success in theatre and film, also points out how the two art forms are distinct by comparing the difference between a rock band playing a live performance and its recorded music:

> Ultimately the difference between making films and putting plays on is analogous to the band of musicians who go into the studio to record an album and the completely different world of performing the music live to an audience. If you want to play live, you'd better be able to play well. . . . It's a great feeling to see a talented person perform live in front of you. Curiously, the live experience both demystifies the performer and at the same time creates a whole other set of mysteries: "How do they do that?"[3]

THEATRE IS TRANSITORY AND IMMEDIATE

As noted earlier, theatre performance changes from moment to moment as the audience encounters a series of shifting impressions and stimuli. Each instant is a direct, immediate experience.

The essence of literature and the visual arts is to catch something at a moment in time and freeze it. With the performing arts, however, that is impossible because the performing arts are not objects but events. Specific objects—costumes, props, scenery, a script—are a part of theatre, but none of these constitute the art. Bernard Beckerman (1921–1985), Shakespeare scholar and director, explained the difference:

> Theater is nothing if not spontaneous. It occurs. It happens. The novel can be put away, taken up, reread. Not theater. It keeps slipping between one's fingers. Stopping, it stops being theater. Its permanent features, facets of activity, such as scenery, script, stage, people, are no more theater than the two poles of a generator are electricity. Theater is what goes on between the parts.[4]

Plays are often printed in book form, like literature, and many novels and short stories contain extensive passages of dialogue that could easily be scenes in a play. But there is an important difference between the two forms. Unlike a novel, a play is written to be performed. In some respects a script is to a stage production as a

musical score is to a concert, or an architectural blueprint is to a building: it is an outline for a performance.

Drama can be studied in a classroom in terms of imagery, character, and theme, but with drama, study of this sort takes place *before* or *after* the event. It is a form of preparation for or follow-up to the experience; the experience is the performance itself. Obviously, we have more opportunities to read plays in book form than to see them produced; but when we read a play, we should always attempt to visualize the other aspects of a production in our mind's eye.

HUMAN BEINGS—THE FOCUS OF THEATRE

Books often focus on people, but they can also focus on science or nature; music focuses on sound; abstract painting and sculpture focus on shapes, colors, and forms. Uniquely among the arts, theatre focuses on one thing and one thing only—human beings. This is true even though different plays emphasize different human concerns, from profound problems in tragedy to pure entertainment in light comedy. And even when the performers play animals, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas, theatre concentrates on the human concerns involved.

In the modern world, human beings have lost the central place they were once believed to occupy in the universe. In the Ptolemaic view of the universe, which prevailed until the sixteenth century—when Copernicus theorized that Earth revolved around the sun—it was assumed that Earth was the center of everything. In science, we have long since given up that notion, particularly in light of explorations in outer space and other transformative discoveries regarding our universe. The human being has become seemingly less and less significant, and less and less at the center of things. But not in theatre, where the preoccupations of men and women are still the core, the center around which other elements orbit.

THE CHEMISTRY OF THE PERFORMER–AUDIENCE CONTACT

The fascination of being in the presence of a famous person or observing firsthand a special occasion is difficult to explain but not difficult to verify. No matter how often we have seen a favorite star in the movies or have seen a singer on television or listened to his or her songs on a handheld device, we will often go to any lengths to see the performer in person. Probably, at one time or another, each of us has braved bad weather and shoving crowds to see celebrities at a parade, a political rally, or a concert. Even a severe rainstorm will not deter many of us from seeing our favorite star at an outdoor concert. The same pull of personal contact draws us to the theatre. At the heart of the theatre experience, therefore, is the performer–audience relationship: the immediate, personal encounter whose chemistry and magic give theatre its special quality.

As suggested earlier, during a stage performance the actors and actresses can hear our laughter, can sense our silence, and can feel our tension as audience members. In short, we, as audience, can affect, and in subtle ways change, the performance. At the same time, as members of the audience, we watch the performers closely, consciously or unconsciously asking ourselves questions: Are the performers convincing in their roles? Will they do something surprising? Will they make a mistake? At each moment, in every stage performance, we, as fully participating audience members, should be looking for answers to questions like these. Actually two experiences are occurring almost simultaneously: our individual experience, which is highly personal; and the group experience, which we will discuss below.

THEATRE AS A GROUP EXPERIENCE

Certain arts—such as painting, sculpture, and literature—provide solitary experiences. The viewer or reader contemplates the work alone, at her or his own pace. This is true even in a museum: although many people may flock to look at a single painting and are with each other, they respond as individuals, one by one. In the performing arts, however, including theatre, the group experience is indispensable.

The performing arts share this trait with other communal events such as religious services, spectator sports, and celebrations. Before the event can take place, a group must assemble, at one time and in one place. When people are gathered together in this way, something mysterious happens to them. Though still individuals, with their own personalities and backgrounds, they take on other qualities as well, qualities that often overshadow their independent responses.

Psychology of Groups

Not all crowds are alike. Some are aggressive, such as an angry mob that decides to riot or a gang that terrorizes a neighborhood. Others are docile—a group of spectators on a sidewalk observing a juggler, for example. A crowd at a football game is different from a congregation at a religious observance; and a theatre crowd is distinct from any of these. In spite of being different, however, the theatre audience shares with all such groups the special characteristics of the *collective mind.* Becoming part of a group is a crucial element of the theatre experience. For a time, we share a common undertaking, focused on one activity—the performance of a play. Not only do we laugh or cry in a way we might not otherwise; we also sense an intangible communion with those around us. When a collection of individuals respond more or less in unison to what is occurring onstage, their relationship to one another is reaffirmed. If there is a display of cruelty at which we shudder, or sorrow by which we are moved, or pomposity at which we laugh, it is reassuring to have others respond as we do. For a moment we are part of a group sharing an experience; and our sorrow or joy, which we thought might be ours alone, is found to be part of a broad human response.

THEATRE AS A GROUP EXPERIENCE
In theatre, the size, attitude, and makeup of the audience affect the overall experience. The theatre can be large or small, indoors or outdoors, and the audience can be people of similar tastes and background or a collection of quite varied individuals. Shown here is a production of *Pride and Prejudice*, a play being performed to a large audience at the Regents Park Open Air Theatre in London. (©VisitBritain/Eric Nathan/Getty Images)

How Audience Composition Affects the Theatre Experience

Although being part of a group is an essential element of theatre, groups vary, and the makeup of a group will alter a theatrical event. Some audiences are general—for instance, the thousands who attend outdoor productions such as the Shakespeare festival in Ashland, Oregon, and *Unto These Hills,* which is a play about the Cherokee Indians presented each summer on a Cherokee reservation in western North Carolina. General audiences include people of all ages, from all parts of the country, and from all socioeconomic levels. Other audiences are more homogeneous, such as spectators at a high school play, a children's theatre production, a Broadway opening night, a political play, or a performance in a prison.

Another factor affecting our experience in the theatre is our relationship to the other members of the audience. If we are among friends or people of like mind, we feel comfortable and relaxed, and we readily become part of the group experience. On the other hand, if we feel alien—for example, a young person with an older group or a liberal with conservatives—we will be estranged from the group as a whole. The people with whom we attend theatre—their relative homogeneity and our relation to them—strongly influence our response to the total event.

IN FOCUS: GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

Augusto Boal: The Theatre of the Oppressed

If ever there were an international theatre figure in recent times, it was Augusto Boal (1931–2009). Born in Brazil, Boal (pronounced "Bo-AHL") attended Columbia University in the United States. Returning to Brazil, he began working in the Arena Theatre in São Paulo. At first he directed conventional dramatic works, but Boal was a man with a powerful social conscience. During his early years he began to develop his philosophy of theatre. He concluded, for example, that mainstream theatre was used by the ruling class as a soporific, a means of sedating the audience and inoculating it against any impulse to act or revolt. In other words, conventional theatre oppressed ordinary citizens, especially the underprivileged.

Boal also became fascinated with the relationship of actors to audience members. He established a partnership between them, and he felt strongly that spectators should participate in any theatre event, that a way must be found for them to become performers, and a part of the action. In putting these theories into practice, he began to present *agitprop* plays, that is, plays with a strong political and social message. He experimented with several versions of such plays. One was the Invisible Theatre, in which actors, seemingly spontaneously, presented a prepared scene in a public space such as a town square or a restaurant. Another was his Forum Theatre, in which a play about a social problem became the basis of a discussion with audience members about solutions to the problem.

Considered an enemy of the authoritarian government in Brazil for his work in the 1960s, he was jailed in 1971 and tortured. Released after a few months, he was exiled from his native land. Following that he lived in various countries: Argentina, Portugal, and France. He decided along the way that his approach should be less didactic than it had been, that he would be more effective if he engaged audiences in the theatrical process rather than confronting them. This was the basis of his Theatre of the Oppressed, which became the cornerstone of his lifework from then on. He wrote a book by that title, which appeared in 1974.

Augusto Boal (©Sucheta Das/AP Images)

In 1985 Boal returned to Brazil. From that point until his death, for the next quarter century, he traveled all over the world directing, lecturing, and establishing centers furthering the Theatre of the Oppressed. He also wrote other books, which were widely read. His approach to theatre found adherents in more than forty countries. Wherever the Theatre of the Oppressed was established, its productions challenged injustice, especially in poor and disenfranchised communities where citizens are often without a voice or an advocate. In his later years he was looked upon by many as the most inspirational person of his time in propagating socially oriented theatre.

THE SEPARATE ROLES OF PERFORMERS AND SPECTATORS

It is important to note the difference between *observed* theatre and *participatory* theatre. In observed theatre, as audience members we participate vicariously or empathetically with what is happening onstage. Empathy is the experience of mentally or emotionally entering into the feelings or spirit of another person—in this case, a character onstage. Sometimes we will not be in tune with the characters onstage but will react vehemently against them. In either situation, though, we are participating empathetically. We might shed tears, laugh, pass judgment, sit frozen, or tremble with fear. But we participate through our imagination while separated from the action.

There are also times when observers and audience members participate in a theatre event. In rituals and ceremonies in parts of Africa and among certain tribes of Native Americans, those attending have become, in effect, participants, joining in the singing and dancing, for instance. At a number of contemporary theatre events spectators have also been urged to take part. For example, one of the chief aims of the Theatre of the Oppressed created by Augusto Boal was to eliminate the distinction between audience members and performers. In Boal's philosophy, every spectator could be and should be an actor, and he developed a number of strategies to bring this about.

How Should the Audience Be Involved?

The attempt to involve audience members directly springs from a desire to make theatre more immediate and intense, and such work can be innovative and exciting. It remains, however, an exception to the kinds of theatre most of us are likely to encounter. The theatre most of us will experience requires a degree of distancing, in the same way that all art requires a certain perspective. Imagine trying to get the full effect of a large landscape painting when standing a few inches from the canvas: one would see only the brushstrokes of a single tree or a small patch of blue sky. To perceive and appreciate a work of art, we need distance. This separation, which is called ***aesthetic distance,*** is as necessary in theatre as in any other art.

aesthetic distance Physical or psychological separation or detachment of audience from dramatic action, usually considered necessary for artistic illusion.

In the same way that we must stand back from a painting to get its full effect, so too, as theatre spectators we must be separated from the performance in order to see and hear what is happening onstage and absorb the experience. If an audience member becomes involved in the proceedings or goes onstage and takes part in the action, as often occurred in a Boal production, he or she reverses roles and becomes a performer, not a spectator. The separation between performers and spectators remains.

Audience Participation through Direct Action

Today a range of educational or therapeutic activities employ theatrical techniques. The aim is not a performance viewed by an audience, as such. Those who take part in such activities are not performers in the usual sense, and there is no attempt to follow a written script. Rather, the emphasis is on education, personal development, or therapy—fields in which theatre techniques have opened up new possibilities. In schools, for example, creative dramatics, theatre games, and group improvisations have proved invaluable for self-discovery and the development of healthy group attitudes. By acting out hypothetical situations or giving free rein to their imagination, children can build self-confidence, discover their creative potential, and overcome their inhibitions.

DRAMA THERAPY
Theatre techniques can be used for educational and therapeutic purposes. Shown here is a moment from the play *Circle Mirror Transformation*, by Annie Baker and directed by Sam Gold, at Playwrights Horizons in New York in 2009 that depicts the use of theatre for therapeutic purposes. The actors in this scene (from left to right) are: Tracee Chimo, Deirdre O'Connell, Heidi Schreck, Reed Birney, and Peter Friedman (©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)

In some situations, creative dramatics can teach lessons that are difficult to teach by conventional means. Playwriting, too, has often proved to be an invaluable educational tool. Students who write scenes, whether autobiographical or fictional, find the experience not only fulfilling but also enlightening. In addition to creative dramatics, a wide range of other activities—*sociodrama, psychodrama,* and *drama therapy*—incorporate theatrical techniques. For adults as well as children, these activities have come to the forefront as educational and therapeutic methods. In sociodrama, the members of participating groups—such as parents and children, students and teachers, or legal authorities and ordinary citizens—explore their own attitudes and prejudices. One successful approach is *role reversal.* A group of young people, for instance, may take the part of their parents while the adults assume the roles of the children; or members of a street gang will take the roles of the police, and the police will take the roles of the street gang. In such role playing, both groups become aware of deep-seated feelings and arrive at a better understanding of one another.

Psychodrama uses some of the same techniques as sociodrama but is more private and interpersonal; in fact, it can become so intense that it should be carried out only under the supervision of a trained therapist. In psychodrama, individual fears, anxieties, and frustrations are explored. A person might reenact a particularly traumatic scene from childhood, for example. In participatory drama, theatre is a means to another end: education, therapy, group development, or the like. Its aim is not public performance, and there is little emphasis on a carefully prepared, expertly performed presentation before an audience; in fact, just the opposite is true. In observed drama, on the other hand, the aim is a professional performance for spectators, and this requires a separation between the performers and the audience—the "aesthetic distance" described earlier.

immersive theatre In immersive theatre, audience members play an active role in some way, often moving through a performance space, sometimes even choosing where they should go within that space and what they should see and do. Many such productions use transformed, redesigned spaces as well as requiring audience members to engage in a complete sensory experience (touch, smell, even taste of foods and drink).

Participatory and Immersive Theatre

There are some times, however, when observers and audience members are invited, even urged, to participate actively together in a theatre event. In the 1960s, for example, many politically and socially engaged theatre groups created productions in which spectators were encouraged to ignore the traditional boundaries between audience members and performers. In other words, instead of viewing the stage action as taking place in a separate space, audience members were asked to see the stage and the viewing area as a single entity.

In recent years a new phenomenon, ***immersive theatre,*** has become popular internationally. In immersive theatre, audience members play an active role in some way,

often moving through a performance space, sometimes even choosing where they should go within that space and what they should see and do. Many immersive productions use transformed, redesigned spaces as well as requiring audience members to engage in a complete sensory experience (touch, smell, even taste of foods and drink). The goal is to personalize the experience for each audience member while still emphasizing the social interaction between small groups in the audience as well as with the performers.

An example of such a work is *Sleep No More* (2003), an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* which the British company Punchdrunk staged successfully in New York and London. Another group, the Australian theatre company One Step at a Time Like This, also focuses on immersive theatrical experiences. Its production *En Route,* for example, takes individual audience members through city spaces while connecting those spaces to theatrical interactions with individual performers along the way.

Although there has been a long history of participatory theatre where audience members are asked to take an active role, the most traditional role of audience members in the contemporary theatre is as observers.

THE IMAGINATION OF THE AUDIENCE

For those who create it, theatre is a direct experience: an actress walks onstage and impersonates a character; a carpenter builds scenery; a scene designer paints it. For these people the experience is like cutting a finger or being held in an embrace: the pain or the warmth is felt directly and physically. Members of a theatre audience experience a different kind of pain or warmth. As spectators in a theatre, we sense the presence of other audience members; we observe the movements and gestures of performers and hear the words they speak; and we see costumes, scenery, and lighting. From these we form mental images or make imaginative connections that provoke joy, laughter, anger, sorrow, or pain. All this occurs, however, without moving from our seats.

We naturally assume that those who create theatre are highly imaginative people and that their minds are full of vivid, exciting ideas that might not occur to the rest of us. If we conclude, however, that we in the audience have only a limited theatrical imagination, we do ourselves a great injustice. As we saw earlier, theatre is a two-way street—an exchange between performers and audience—and this is nowhere more evident than in the creation of *illusion.* Illusion may be initiated by the creators of theatre, but it is completed by the audience.

THE IMAGINATION OF THE AUDIENCE
The audience and the performers are the two essential elements of theatre: both are required for theatre to occur. One aspect of the audience's participation is the use of its imagination. For the Broadway musical *Avenue Q*, audience members were expected to focus on the puppets as well as the clearly visible performers/operators. Shown here is a scene presented at the 2004 Tony Awards. Left to right are: Jennifer Barnhart, Rick Lyon, and John Tartaglia. (©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)

PLAYING YOUR PART: EXPERIENCING THEATRE

1. Watch a scene from the film *Les Misérables*. Now try to imagine why it would be different as a live theatrical experience.
2. Read aloud the balcony scene from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. What is realistic about the scene? What are some nonrealistic elements?
3. Discuss your favorite current nonrealistic film or television show. What fantastic elements are most appealing? Why?
4. Discuss a recent film or television show that you felt was realistic. What was real about it? What wasn't real?
5. Read a speech from a play (or a paragraph from a novel) aloud in class. How did your classmates affect your reading? How would you describe your class as an audience? Homogeneous? Heterogeneous? Explain.

In the eerie world of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, when three witches appear out of the mist or when Banquo's ghost interrupts the banquet, we know it is fantasy; witches and ghosts like those in *Macbeth* do not appear in everyday life. In the theatre, however, we take such fantasy at face value. In Shakespeare's own day, for instance, a convention readily accepted by audiences was that women's parts were played by boy actors. Shakespeare's heroines—Juliet, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth—were not acted by women, as they are today, but played by boys. Everyone in the audience at an Elizabethan theatre knew that the boys were not actually women but accepted without question the notion that a boy actor was presenting an impression or an imitation of a woman. The film *Shakespeare in Love* (1998) afforded a fascinating glimpse of this: the actress Gwyneth Paltrow plays a young woman portraying a boy actor (in secret), while her acting partner is a young man playing a young woman portrayed by a boy (in the open).

Along with fantasy, we, as audience members, accept drastic shifts in time and space. Someone onstage dressed in a Revolutionary uniform says, "It is the winter of 1778, at Valley Forge," and we do not question it. What is more, we accept rapid movements back and forth in time. ***Flashbacks***—abrupt movements from the present to the past and back again—are a familiar technique in films and television shows such as *Looper* and *Dexter;* but they are also commonplace in modern drama. A similar device often used in drama is *anachronism.* An anachronism involves placing some character or event outside its proper time sequence: for example, having people from the past speak and act as if they were living today. Medieval mystery and morality plays frequently contained anachronisms.

flashback In a narrative or story, movement back to a time in the past to show a scene or an event before the narrative resumes at the point at which it was interrupted.

The medieval play *Abraham and Isaac*, for instance, is set in the time of the Old Testament, but it makes several references to the Christian trinity—a religious concept that was not developed until centuries later. The medieval audience accepted this shift in time as a matter of course, just as we do in theatre today.

In his frequently revived play *Angels in America* (1993), Tony Kushner includes a number of bizarre and fantastic characters or events. For example, a character in the play called Mr. Lies is an imaginary person created in the mind of Harper, a housewife who is addicted to pills. Near the end of part 1, Mr. Lies takes Harper on a fantasy trip to the Antarctic. At the very end of part 1, an angel crashes through the ceiling and speaks to Prior, a man ill with AIDS. In the

theatre, then, our imagination allows us to conceive of people and events we have never seen or experienced and to transcend our physical circumstances to the point where we forget who we are, where we are, or what time it is. How is this possible? It happens because in the theatre our imagination works for us just as it does in everyday life.

Tools of the Imagination: Symbol and Metaphor

We can understand this process better if we look closely at two tools of our imagination: symbol and metaphor.

Functions of Symbols In general terms, a ***symbol*** is a sign, token, or emblem that signifies something else. A simple form of symbol is a sign. Some signs stand for a single, uncomplicated idea or action. In everyday life we are surrounded by them: road signs, such as an S-shaped curve; audible signals, like sirens and foghorns; and a host of mathematical and typographical symbols: $, 1/4, @, &. We sometimes forget that language itself is symbolic; the letters of the alphabet are only lines and curves on a page. Words are arrangements of letters that by common agreement represent something else. The same four letters mean different things depending on the order in which they are placed: *pear, reap, rape.* These three words set different imaginative wheels in motion and signal responses that vary greatly from word to word.

symbol A sign, a visual image, an object, or an action that signifies something else; a visual embodiment of something invisible. A single image or sign stands for an entire idea or larger concept—a flag is a symbol for a nation; a logo is a symbol for a corporation.

At times, symbols exert incredible emotional power; a good example is a flag, embodying a nation's passions, fears, and ambitions. Flags are symbols: lines, shapes, and colors that in certain combinations become immediately recognizable. Like flags, some symbols signify ideas or emotions that are far more complex and profound than the symbol itself. The cross, for example, is a symbol of Christ and, beyond that, of Christianity as a whole. Whatever form a symbol takes—language, a flag, or a religious emblem—it can embody the total meaning of a religion, a nation, or an idea.

THE POWER OF SYMBOLS
Symbols and metaphors, though not real in a literal sense, have enormous power to influence our lives; in that respect, they become "realer than real." A forceful symbol of the bravery, tragedy, and losses of the Vietnam War is the wall designed by Maya Lin in Washington, D.C., where the names of those who died are etched into the side of the memorial. (©Win McNamee/Getty Images)

Functions of Metaphors A similar transformation takes place with metaphor, another form of imaginative substitution. With metaphor we announce that one thing is another, in order to describe it or point up its meaning more clearly. (In poetry, you will remember, a simile says that one thing is *like* another; metaphor simply states directly that one thing *is* another.) The Bible is filled with metaphors. The psalmist who says, "The Lord is my shepherd," or who says of God, "Thou art my rock and my fortress," is speaking metaphorically. He does not mean literally that God is a shepherd, a rock, or a fortress; he is saying that

IN FOCUS: THE CONTRAST BETWEEN REALISM AND NONREALISM

The distinction between realistic and nonrealistic techniques in theatre becomes clearer when the two approaches are examined side by side. This distinction is present in all aspects of theatre.

Realistic Techniques	Nonrealistic Techniques
STORY	
Events that the audience knows have happened or might happen in everyday life: Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* goes to New Orleans to visit her sister and brother-in-law.	Events that do not take place in real life but occur only in the imagination: in Kushner's *Angels in America,* a character in a housewife's mind takes her on an imaginary trip to the Antarctic.
STRUCTURE	
Action is confined to real places; time passes normally, as it does in everyday life: the hospital room setting in Margaret Edson's *Wit* is an example.	Arbitrary use of time and place: in August Strindberg's *The Dream Play,* walls dissolve and characters are transformed, as in a dream.
CHARACTERS	
Recognizable human beings, such as the priest and the nun in John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt*.	Unreal figures like the ghost of Hamlet's father in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* or the three witches in *Macbeth*.
ACTING	
Performers portray people as they behave in daily life: the men on a summer holiday in the country house in Terrence McNally's *Love! Valor! Compassion!*	Performers portray animals in the musical *The Lion King;* they also engage in singing, dancing, and acrobatics in musical comedy or performance art.
LANGUAGE	
Ordinary dialogue or conversation: the two brothers trying to get ahead in Suzan-Lori Parks's *Topdog/Underdog*.	Poetry such as Romeo speaks to Juliet in Shakespeare's play; or the song "Tonight" in the musical *West Side Story*.
SCENERY	
Rooms of a real house, as in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*	Abstract forms and shapes on a bare stage—for example, for a Greek play such as Sophocles's *Electra*.
LIGHTING	
Light onstage appears to come from natural sources—a lamp in a room, or sunlight, as in Ibsen's *Ghosts,* where the sunrise comes through a window in the final scene.	Shafts of light fall at odd angles; also, colors in light are used arbitrarily. Example: a single blue spotlight on a singer in a musical comedy.
COSTUMES	
Ordinary street clothes, like those worn by the characters in August Wilson's *The Piano Lesson*.	The bright costumes of a chorus in a musical comedy; the strange outfit worn by Caliban, the half-man, half-beast in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.
MAKEUP	
The natural look of characters in a domestic play such as Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.	Masks worn by characters in a Greek tragedy or in a modern play like the musical *Beauty and the Beast*.

God is similar to and has qualities like these things. Just as with symbols, metaphors are part of the fabric of life, as the following common expressions suggest:

"How gross."

"He's off the wall."

"It's a slam dunk."

"Give me the bottom line."

"That's cool."

We are saying one thing but describing another. When someone describes a person or event as "cool," the reference is not to a low temperature but to an admirable quality. The term *slam dunk* comes from basketball, but in everyday parlance is applied to a wide range of activities that have nothing to do with sports. We can see from these examples that metaphors, like symbols, are part of daily life.

The "Reality" of the Imagination

Our use of symbol and metaphor shows how large a part imagination plays in our lives. Millions of automobiles in the United States can be brought to a halt, not by a concrete wall, but by a small colored light changing from green to red. Imagine attempting to control traffic, or virtually any type of human activity, without symbols. Beyond being a matter of convenience, symbols are necessary to our survival.

The same holds true for metaphor. Frequently we find that we cannot express fear, anxiety, hope, or joy—any of the deep human feelings—in descriptive language. That is why we sometimes scream. It is also why we have poetry and use metaphors. Even scientists, the men and women we are most likely to consider realists, turn to metaphor at crucial times. They discuss the "big bang" theory of the origin of the universe and talk of "black holes" in outer space. Neither term is "scientific," but both terms communicate what scientists have in mind in a way that an equation or a more logical phrase could not.

Dreams provide another example of the power of the imagination. We dream that we are falling off a cliff; then, suddenly, we wake up and find that we are not flying through the air but lying in bed. Significantly, however, the dream of falling means more to us than the objective fact of lying in bed. Theatre functions in somewhat the same way. Though not real in a literal sense, it can be completely—even painfully—real in an emotional or intellectual sense. The critic and director Harold Clurman (1901–1980) gave one of his books on theatre the title *Lies Like Truth.* Theatre—like dreams or fantasies—can sometimes be more truthful about life than a mundane, objective description. This is a paradox of dreams, fantasies, and art, including theatre: by probing deep into the psyche to reveal inner truths, they can be more real than outward reality.

THE IMAGINARY WORLDS OF THEATRE

As theatre audience members, we are asked to accept many kinds of imaginary worlds. One way to classify these imaginary realms is as ***realism*** and ***nonrealism (or departures from realism).*** At the outset, it is essential to know that in theatre the

realism Broadly, an attempt to present onstage people, places, and events corresponding to those in everyday life.

nonrealism (or departures from realism) Means all types of theatre that depart from observable reality.

REALISTIC AND NONREALISTIC THEATRE CONTRASTED
These scenes illustrate some of the differences between two approaches to the make-believe of theatre. At the left we see Gabriel Brown as George Murchison, Edena Hines as Beneatha Younger, and Susan Kelechi Watson as Ruth Younger in the Westport Country Playhouse production of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun.* In contrast, the scene at the right is from a revival of an avant-garde production presented at the Brooklyn Academy of Music of *Einstein on the Beach,* directed and designed by Robert Wilson. Note the abstract setting, the eerie lighting, the symbolic characters. This kind of theatre contrasts sharply with realism. (left: ©T Charles Erickson; right: ©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)

term *realistic* denotes a special application of what we consider "genuine" or "real." A realistic element is not necessarily more truthful than a nonrealistic element. Rather, in theatre, realistic and nonrealistic denote different ways of presenting reality.

Realistic Elements of Theatre

In theatre, a realistic element is one that resembles *observable* reality. It is a kind of photographic truth. We apply the term *realistic* to those elements of theatre that conform to our own observations of people, places, and events. Realistic theatre follows the predictable logic of everyday life: the law of gravity, the time it takes a person to travel from one place to another, the way a room in a house looks, the way a person dresses. With a realistic approach, these conform to our normal expectations. In realistic theatre, we are called upon in our imaginations to accept the notion that what we see onstage is not fantastic but real, even though we always know we are in the theatre and not watching an actual event.

We are quite familiar with realism in films and television. Part of the reason is mechanical. The camera records what the lens "sees." Whether it is a bedroom in a house, a crowded city street, or the Grand Canyon, film captures the scene as the eye sees it. Theatre too has always had realistic elements. Every type of theatre that is not pure fantasy has realistic aspects. For example, characters who are supposed to represent real people must be rooted in a human truth that audiences can recognize. When we are so readily able to verify what we see before us from our own experience, it is easy to identify with it and to accept its authenticity. For this reason, realistic theatre has become firmly established in modern times, and it seems likely to remain so.

Nonrealistic Elements of Theatre

Nonrealistic elements of theatre include everything that does not conform to our observations of surface reality: poetry instead of prose, ghosts rather than flesh-and-blood people, abstract forms for scenery, and so forth. Again, we find a counterpart in films and television. The extremely popular vampire and zombie films and television shows present us with fantastic characters and situations. All of the *Star Wars* films have intriguing computer-generated characters and effects, which is one of the reasons audiences look forward to each of the new additions to the series.

In theatre, the argument for nonrealism (or *departures from realism*) is that the surface of life—a real conversation, for instance, or a real room in a house—can never convey the whole truth, because so much of life occurs in our minds and imagination. If we are depressed and tell a friend that we feel "lousy" or "awful," we do not even begin to communicate the depth of our feelings. It is because of the inadequacy of ordinary words that people turn to poetry, and because of the inadequacy of other forms of daily communication that they turn to music, dance, art, sculpture, and the entire range of symbols and metaphors discussed earlier.

soliloquy Speech in which a character who is alone onstage speaks inner thoughts aloud.

pantomime A form of theatrical presentation that relies on dance, gesture, and physical movement without speech.

A wide range of theatrical techniques and devices fall into the category of nonrealism. One example is the ***soliloquy,*** in which a solitary character speaks to the audience, expressing in words a hidden thought. Another example is ***pantomime,*** in which performers pretend to be using objects that are not actually present, such as drinking from a cup or opening an umbrella. Many aspects of musical comedy are nonrealistic. People in various human circumstances do not break into song or dance as they do in musicals like *Guys and Dolls, West Side Story, Wicked, The Book of Mormon,* or *Hamilton.* One could say that any activity or scenic device that transcends or symbolizes reality tends to be nonrealistic.

NONREALISTIC ELEMENTS
Realism has been a major approach to theatre since the late nineteenth century, but for hundreds of years before that, theatre incorporated many unrealistic elements. One example is Shakespeare's use of ghosts and various otherworldly creatures. Shown here in a Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Hamlet* is Vaneshran Arumugam in the title role (right background) encountering the ghost of his dead father, played by John Kani (left foreground). (©Geraint Lewis)

Combining the Realistic and the Nonrealistic

In discussing realistic and nonrealistic elements of theatre, we must not assume that these two approaches are mutually exclusive. The terms *realistic* and *nonrealistic* are simply a convenient way of separating those parts of theatre that correspond to our observations and experiences of everyday life from those that do not. Most performances and theatre events contain a mixture of realistic and

FACT-BASED THEATRE
A popular form that has emerged in the past half century is theatre based on facts. This includes documentary theatre taken from court trials, congressional hearings, and interviews. Shown here is Lynn Japjit Kaur, center, as Jyoti Singh Pandey, a woman who died in 2012 after she was gang-raped and tortured in New Delhi, in the play *Nirbhaya*. The testimony of five Indian women describing their experiences of sexual abuse is used by South African playwright and director Yael Farber to create a harrowing documentary drama that was performed internationally, including at the Lynn Redgrave Theater in New York in 2015. (©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)

nonrealistic elements. In acting, for example, a Shakespearean play calls for a number of nonrealistic qualities or techniques. At the same time, any performer playing a Shakespearean character must convince the audience that he or she represents a real human being.

To take a more modern example, in *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams (1911–1983), and in *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder (1897–1975), one of the performers serves as a narrator and also participates in the action. When the performer playing this part is speaking directly to the audience, his actions are nonrealistic; when he is taking part in a scene with other characters, they are realistic.

Distinguishing Stage Reality from Fact

Whether theatre is realistic or nonrealistic, it is different from the physical reality of everyday life. In recent years there have been attempts to make theatre less remote from our daily lives. For example, plays have been presented that

PLAYING YOUR PART: THINKING ABOUT THEATRE

1. Think of an event you have recently attended in person: a rock concert, a circus, a dance or musical presentation, a religious or memorial service. Explain what it meant to you to be present, in the same space at the same time as those performing or officiating. What was the feeling, the emotion, the stimulation you experienced that would not have been the same if you had watched the event on television?
2. During a performance you may observe a puppet or group of puppets who appear as real as people we deal with every day. Or you may see on a bare stage two or three props (a tree, for example, or a throne) and you assume you are in a forest or a royal palace. Why do you think during a performance we are able to let our imaginations take over? Is this something we also do in everyday life?
3. While watching a performance you may dissolve into laughter or cry real tears. The whole time, on some level, you know what you are observing is not "real." But does this matter? In some sense is the experience real? What is the relationship between a theatre experience such as this and an experience in daily life?

were largely transcripts of court trials or congressional hearings. This was part of a movement called *theatre of fact,* which involved reenactments of material gathered from actual events. Partly as a result of this trend, theatre and life have become intertwined. Television has added to this with *docudramas,* dramatizing the lives, for example, of ordinary, often actual people who become heroic. There has also been a vogue for what is called "reality television," in which real people are put in stressful situations with a presumably unplanned outcome.

This kind of interaction—and sometimes confusion—between life and art has been heightened, of course, by the emergence of television and film documentaries that cover real events but are also edited. In addition, today we have "staged" political demonstrations and hear of "staged news." In politics staged events have become commonplace: a presidential or senatorial candidate visits a flag factory, an aircraft carrier, or an elementary school for what is called a "photo opportunity." When news becomes "staged" and theatre becomes "fact," it is difficult to separate the two.

These developments point up the close relationship between theatre and life; nevertheless, when we see a performance, even a re-creation of events that have actually occurred, on some level we are always aware of being in a theatre. Most of us have seen plays with a stage setting so real we marvel at its authenticity: a kitchen, for instance, in which the appliances actually work, with running water in the faucets, ice in the refrigerator, and a stove on which an actor or actress can cook. What we stand in awe of, though, is that the room *appears* so real when we know, in truth, that it is not. We admire the fact that, not being a real kitchen, it looks as if it were. We are abruptly reminded of the distinction between stage reality and physical reality when the two lines cross. If an actor unintentionally trips and falls onstage, we suddenly shift our attention from the character to the person playing the part. Has he hurt himself? Will he be able to continue? A similar reaction occurs when a performer forgets lines, or a sword falls accidentally during a duel, or a dancer slips during a musical number.

We remember the distinction, also, at the moment when someone else *fails* to remember it. Children frequently mistake actions onstage for the real thing, warning the heroine of the villain's plan or assuming that blows on the head of a puppet actually hurt. There is a famous story about a production of *Othello* in which a spectator ran onstage to prevent the actor playing Othello from strangling Desdemona. Most people, however, are always aware of the difference; our minds manage two seemingly contradictory feats simultaneously: on the one hand, we know that an imagined event is not objectively real, but at the same time we accept it completely as fantasy. This is possible because of what the poet and critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) called the "willing suspension of disbelief." Having separated the reality of art from the reality of everyday life, the mind is prepared to go along unreservedly with the reality of art.

SUMMARY

1. During the past 100 years, theatre has been challenged by a succession of technological developments: silent movies, radio, talking movies, television, and electronic handheld devices. It has survived these challenges partly because of the special nature of the performer–audience relationship.
2. The relationship between performer and audience is "live": each is in the other's presence, in the same place at the same time. It is the exchange between the two that gives theatre its unique quality.
3. Theatre—like the other performing arts—is a group experience. The composition of the audience has a direct bearing on the effect of the experience.
4. Participants and spectators play different roles in the theatre experience; the role of spectators is to observe and respond.
5. There is a difference between participating in theatre by direct action and by observation. In the former situation, nonactors take part, usually for the purpose of personal growth and self-development. In the latter, a presentation is made by one group to another, and the spectators do not participate physically in the experience.
6. For the observer, theatre is an experience of the imagination and the mind. The mind seems capable of accepting almost any illusion as to what is taking place, who the characters are, and when and where the action occurs.
7. Our minds are capable of leaps of the imagination, not just in the theatre but in our everyday lives, where we use symbol and metaphor to communicate with one another and to explain the world around us.
8. The world of the imagination—symbols, metaphors, dreams, fantasies, and various expressions of art—is "real," even though it is intangible and has no objective reality. Frequently it tells us more than any form of logical discourse about our true feelings.
9. Theatre makes frequent use of symbols and metaphors—in writing, acting, and design—and theatre itself can be looked upon as a metaphor.
10. Theatre calls upon audiences to imagine two kinds of worlds: realistic and nonrealistic. Realistic theatre depicts things onstage that conform to observable reality; nonrealistic

theatre includes the realm of dreams, fantasy, symbol, and metaphor. In theatre, realism and nonrealism are frequently mixed.

11. In order to take part in theatre as an observer, it is important to keep the "reality" of fantasies and dreams separate from the real world. By making this separation, we open our imagination to the full range of possibilities in theatre.

2

Background and Expectations of the Audience

We are soon going to attend a theatre performance, either for personal enjoyment or as a class assignment. As a soon-to-be audience member is there a way we can prepare so that the production will be more entertaining or more meaningful? Are there steps we can take beforehand that will enhance the experience, make it more rewarding, and make us a more engaged audience member? The answer to these questions is "yes."

In a sense, this entire book is a preparation for going to the theatre. Chapter by chapter it explains the various elements of a production—the acting and directing, the script, the scenic and costume design—and how all these fit together in the final stage presentation. But initially, before getting to these specifics, there is information and preparation that will make attending a specific production more exciting and pleasurable, as well as make us a more informed, engaged, and knowledgeable audience member.

For one thing, when we attend a theatre event, we bring more than our mere presence; we bring a background of personal knowledge and a set of expectations that shape the experience. Several important factors are involved:

1. Our knowledge and personal memories.
2. Our awareness of the social, political, and philosophical world in which the play was written or produced—the link between theatre and society.
3. Our knowledge about the play and playwright.
4. Our personal expectations concerning the event: what we anticipate will happen at a performance. As we will see, misconceptions about what the theatre experience is or should be can lead to confusion and disappointment.

◀ **THE AFRICAN AMERICAN EXPERIENCE**

Members of a theatre audience come to a performance with individual, personal backgrounds, which can make the experience more meaningful. An example would be an African American audience member seeing A Raisin in the Sun, *which depicts an African American family trying to move into a home in an all-white neighborhood in mid-twentieth century, originally opening on Broadway in 1959. Shown here is a 2014 revival at the Barrymore Theatre in New York, directed by Kenny Leon. From left to right are: LaTanya Richardson Jackson and Sophie Okonedo.* *(©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)*

BACKGROUND OF INDIVIDUAL SPECTATORS

A background element that each of us brings to a theatre performance as an audience member is our own individual memories and experiences. Each of us has a personal catalog of childhood memories, emotional scars, and private fantasies. Anything we see onstage that reminds us of this personal world will have a strong impact on us. When we see a play that has been written in our own day, we bring with us also a deep awareness of the world from which the play comes, because we come from the same world. Through the books we have read, through newspapers and television, through our discussions with friends, we have a background of common information, values, and beliefs. Our shared knowledge and experience are much larger than most of us realize, and they form a crucial ingredient in our theatre experience.

The play *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry (1930–1965) tells the story of an African American family in Chicago in the late 1950s whose members want to improve their lives by finding better jobs and moving to a new neighborhood. But they face a number of obstacles put in their way by society. Any African American—or, for that matter, any person who belongs to a minority or to any group that has lacked opportunities—can readily identify with this situation. Such a person will know from personal experience what the characters are going through.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE PLAY OR PLAYWRIGHT

Often to enhance our experience of attending a theatre production we need additional information about a play or a playwright. For instance, a play may contain difficult passages or obscure references, which it is helpful to know about before we see a performance. As an example, we can take a segment from Shakespeare's *King Lear:* the scene in the third act when Lear appears on the heath in the midst of a terrible storm. Earlier in the play, Lear divided his kingdom between two of his daughters, Goneril and Regan, who he thought loved him but who, he discovers, have actually deceived him. Gradually, they have stripped him of everything: his possessions, his soldiers, his dignity. Finally, they send him out from their homes to face the wind and rain in open country. As the storm begins, Lear speaks the following lines:

> Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
> You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
> Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!

In the first line, the expression "crack your cheeks" refers to pictures in the corners of old maps showing a face puffed out at the cheeks, blowing the wind. Shakespeare is saying that the face of the wind should blow so hard that its cheeks will crack. In the second line, "cataracts and hurricanoes" refers to water from both the heavens and the seas. In the third line, "cocks" refers to weathercocks on the tops of church steeples; Lear wants so much rain to fall that even the weathercocks on the steepletops will be submerged. If we are aware of these meanings, we can join them with the sounds of the words—and with the rage the actor expresses in his voice and gestures—to get the full impact of the scene.

In contemporary theatre, playwrights frequently use special techniques that will confuse us if we do not understand them. The German playwright Bertolt Brecht

(1898–1956), who lived and wrote in the United States during the 1940s, wanted to provoke his audiences into thinking about what they were seeing. To do this, he would interrupt a story with a song or a speech by a narrator. His theory was that when a story is stopped in this manner, audience members have an opportunity to consider more carefully what they are seeing and to relate the drama onstage to other aspects of life.

If we are not aware that this is Brecht's purpose in interrupting the action, we might conclude that he was simply a careless or inferior playwright. Here, as in similar cases, knowledge of the play or playwright is indispensable to a complete theatre experience.

BACKGROUND OF THE PERIOD

Even when we identify closely with the characters or situation in a play and we have knowledge about the play and the playwright, often in drama from the past there are elements we cannot understand unless we are familiar with the history, culture, and philosophy of the period when it was created. This is because there is a close connection between any art form and the society in which it is produced.

AUDIENCE MEMBER'S PERSONAL BACKGROUND
The personal background of individual audience members will affect their experience in attending a theatre production. Young people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds who have worked together on a project or other undertaking will have a better understanding than others of a theatre piece such as *Emotional Creature* by Eve Ensler, shown here. In the play, six young actors from different countries around the globe develop an involvement in their mutual social problems that inspires them to express their feelings in song and dance. (©Carol Rosegg)

THEATRE REFLECTS SOCIAL ISSUES
Theatre can be a powerful tool in calling attention to social and political injustices. A good example is Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer Prize–winning play *Sweat*, directed by Kate Whoriskey. The play is set in Reading, Pennsylvania, and dramatizes the impact of global economic changes on blue-collar steelworkers as they lose their livelihoods and their humanity and camaraderie are eroded.
(©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux)

Theatre and Society

Art does not occur in a vacuum. All art, including theatre, is related to the society in which it is produced. Artists are sometimes charged with being "antisocial," "subversive," or "enemies of the state," and such accusations carry the strong suggestion that artists are outsiders or invaders rather than true members of a culture. To be sure, art frequently challenges society and is sometimes on the leading edge of history, appearing to forecast the future. More often than not, however, such art simply recognizes what is already present in society but has not yet surfaced. A good example is the abstract painting that developed in Europe in the early twentieth century. At first it was considered a freakish aberration, an unattractive jumble of jagged lines and patches of color with no relation to nature, truth, or anything human. In time, however, abstract art came to be recognized as a genuine movement, and the disjointed and fragmentary lines of abstract art seemed to reflect the quality of much of modern life.

Art grows in the soil of a specific society. With very few exceptions—and those are soon forgotten—art is a mirror of its age, revealing the prevailing attitudes, underlying assumptions, and deep-seated beliefs of a particular group of people. Art may question society's views or reaffirm them, but it cannot escape them; the two are as indissolubly linked as a person and his or her shadow. When we speak of art as "universal," we mean that the art of one age has so defined the characteristics of human beings that it can speak eloquently to another age; but we should never forget that every work of art first emerges at a given time and place and can never be adequately understood unless the conditions surrounding its birth are also understood.

Two societies that produced an astonishing output of dramatic works were Athens, Greece, in the fifth century BCE and the Elizabethan period (named for Queen Elizabeth I) in England. The former gave us the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides as well as the comedies of Aristophanes. It was during the Elizabethan era that William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson emerged. In each instance the advances in politics, science, philosophy, and the arts in general provided the environment in which theatrical masterpieces could emerge. In understanding the dramatic works of each period, it is helpful to understand what was occurring in society generally. The same is true of any period or culture in which outstanding or landmark theatrical works appear, whether in the past or present, or where it occurs—in Asia, western Europe, or around the globe.

Modern Theatre and Culture

Moving to the contemporary period, we find once again a link between theatre and society. Modern society, especially in the United States, is heterogeneous. We have people of different races, religions, sexual orientations, and national backgrounds

IN FOCUS: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Women in Greek and Elizabethan Theatres

Did women attend theatre in ancient Greece? In Elizabethan England, why were women forbidden to appear onstage? These are only two of many significant and intriguing questions that arise when one examines the role of women at various times in theatre history. And of course, they are inextricably linked to larger questions about the treatment of women in society in every age.

In Athenian society of ancient Greece, only male citizens had the right to participate in politics. Although women counted as citizens, they were generally excluded from the institutions of government. They were thus also excluded from appearing onstage in the annual spring theatre festival called the City Dionysia. The plays were written and acted by men, even though many feature important female characters. A broader social question is whether women were allowed to attend the dramatic festivals as spectators. There appears to be no conclusive answer, and the question continues to perplex classical scholars. Even if a select number of women were at performances—after all, men brought their male slaves to the theatre—the plays primarily address a large male audience. Contemporary sources supporting the view that women attended theatre are fragmentary and inconclusive; for instance, a character in *The Frogs* by Aristophanes (c. 447–388 BCE) remarks ironically that all decent women committed suicide after seeing one of Euripides's plays. Later commentaries, such as an often-repeated story that a few women who saw the chorus of Furies in *The Eumenides* by Aeschylus (525–456 BCE) had miscarriages, are discounted because women did attend theatre after the classical period.

One argument for the attendance of women is the important role women often played in other aspects of the cultural life of the city-state. They contributed to civic life, for example, by playing leading roles in religious ceremonies, celebrations, and other ritual activities. In fact, they were creatively involved in theatre at other festivals. Because the public activities of women were regulated in order to protect their reputation, female entertainers came to be associated with indecent behavior. Even so, popular entertainments included female performers as singers, dancers, acrobats, and musicians.

In the sixteenth century, actresses appeared onstage in continental Europe. Also, women had appeared in medieval theatre productions in England, but in the English public theatres in the time of Elizabeth I (r. 1558–1603), women were forbidden by law to appear onstage. Although some actors rose to become celebrities, actresses were often associated with "public women" or prostitutes—particularly by Puritans who viewed theatre as an immoral profession. Female roles therefore were played by boys, notable for their ability to imitate feminine beauty and grace. An exception to the prohibition of actresses was the appearance of Italian singers and French actresses who performed in England for both the nobility and commoners. Outside the public theatres, historians identify a vast, hidden tradition of female performance gleaned from private documents, such as letters and diaries. At court and in manor houses aristocratic women took part in extravagant spectacles called masques; parish dramas and pageants included female members of the community; other women worked as traveling entertainers. The disapproval of women performing in public changed with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, when actresses were finally permitted to appear in licensed theatres.

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living side by side. Moreover, the twentieth century was marked by increasingly swift global communication. By means of television, computers, and the Internet, an event occurring in one place can be flashed instantaneously to the rest of the world. Text messaging and social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, now make us aware of events instantaneously. By these means, too, people are continually made aware of cultures other than their own.

When cultures and societies are brought together, we are reminded of the many things people have in common but also of the differences among us. At the same

time that we are brought together by immediate global communications, other aspects of life have become increasingly fragmented. A number of institutions that had held fairly constant through many centuries—organized religion, the family, marriage—have been seriously challenged in the century and a half preceding our own day. Discoveries by Charles Darwin (1809–1882) about evolution, by Karl Marx (1818–1883) on economics, by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) about the importance of the unconscious, and by Albert Einstein (1879–1955) on relativity questioned and threatened long-established views of the universe, of religion, economics, psychology, and science.

Similar changes in viewpoint and discoveries about nature have continued to the present, the cumulative effect of which has been to make human beings much less certain of their place in the cosmos and of their mastery of events. Today, in the early twenty-first century, life appears much less unified and less ordered than it once did. We must add to these developments the effect of the horrific events that have occurred over the past 100 years: the two World Wars, the second of which saw the Holocaust, the extermination of millions of Jews and others by the Nazi regime; the highly controversial Vietnam War; terrorism and the effects on our society of the events of 9/11; more recently, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars; and natural disasters such as the deadly typhoon in the Philippines on November 8, 2013, in which thousands of people were killed, and the 2017 and 2018 hurricanes in Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. All of these global and historical developments are reflected in our theatre today, which is an inclusive theatre, fragmented and *eclectic*, and embracing different styles and traditions. The theatre productions we attend today come from around the world, and range from the darkest of tragedies to the lightest of comedies to the highly experimental, created by dramatists who write on many subjects and in many diverse styles.

A typical theatre company today performs a wide range of plays. In a single season, the same company may present a tragedy by Shakespeare, a farce by the French dramatist Molière (1622–1673), a modern drama by the Spanish writer Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), a play like *Eurydice,* by Sarah Ruhl (b. 1974), a young American playwright, as well as a one-person show by a performance artist.

The three periods we have discussed—the Greek, the Elizabethan, and the modern—are examples of the close relationship between a society and the art and theatre it produces. One could find comparable links in every culture and period. It is important to remember, therefore, that whatever the period or culture in which it was first produced, drama is woven into the fabric of its place and time.

To sum up, for our purposes it is important to realize that when we go to the theatre, it is extremely helpful to be aware of the period and circumstances in which a play of whatever sort was created. These are things our professors and instructors can teach us, but things we can also learn ourselves by going online or checking reference books.

EXPECTATIONS: THE VARIETY OF EXPERIENCES IN MODERN THEATRE

If we have not often been to the theatre, we might expect that all theatre experiences will be much alike. In fact, most of us go to the theatre for entirely different reasons. Some of us enjoy the escape offered by movies and television and are interested