TWELFTH EDITION

THEATRE *BRIEF*

Robert Cohen
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Mc Graw Hill Education

Theatre Brief

Twelfth Edition

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THEATRE BRIEF, TWELFTH EDITION

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Preface

Robert Cohen and Donovan Sherman's *Theatre Brief* emphasizes that theatre is a reflection of ourselves, because at the core of any great art is a commentary on the human experience. The authors stress that theatre is not merely entertainment, but a way for people to connect with one another and express important ideas about our culture and society.

Theatre also immerses its readers in the world of theatre, giving them in-depth descriptions of many job functions and various aspects of a play's production from beginning to end. Through the coverage of design, acting, and directing, students are given a behind-the-scenes look at professional theatre artists performing their craft. The Photo Essay features that appear in multiple chapters include interviews with well-known figures both onstage and offstage. Conducted personally by the authors, they provide readers with firsthand accounts of what it's like to work in the field.

Every culture has developed theatre of some kind, and this edition makes a greater effort to include plays from non-Western countries in its examples. There is also greater attention to individual diversity within the U.S. theatre community. The authors incorporate more examples of women and ethnic minorities in both onstage and backstage roles, including a new profile on Young Jean Lee, the first Asian American woman to have her work staged on Broadway.

The text has also been updated to reflect the latest plays on Broadway, London's West End, and other international locations, as well as the latest trends in theatre production.

In addition to these general additions, the 12th edition includes the following content changes:

Chapter 1: A new introduction; new coverage on performance as it relates to theatre; a new Spotlight feature "Why Study Theatre?"

Chapter 2: A new introduction; extensive updating to reflect more traditions and innovations in global theatre.

Chapter 3: Fully revised content that is more inclusive of global acting techniques.

Chapter 4: Additional examples from non-Western playwriting traditions; inclusion of additional female and ethnically diverse playwrights; new coverage on devised theatre; a new excerpt from Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*; new sections on award-winning playwrights Annie Baker, Ayad Akhtar, Young Jean Lee, and Tarell Alvin McCraney; a new Photo Essay feature that includes an exclusive interview with Young Jean Lee.

Chapter 5: New coverage of selective realism and a focus on new technological advances, such as motion-capture technology.

Chapter 6: A new section on global directors; a new Spotlight feature "Diversity and Casting"; a new Photo Essay that follows the step-by-step process of putting on a production of *The Tempest,* featuring 28 new images.

Chapter 7: Updated coverage on the relationship of ritual to theatre.

Chapter 8: A new introduction to define "modern drama"; a new section "Global Modern Drama"; a new Spotlight feature that includes an interview with Oskar Eustis, artistic director of the Public Theater in New York City; new coverage of different types of stylized theatre: expressionism (using the example of *Machinal* by Sophie Treadwell), contemporary allegory (using the example of *Dutchman* by Amiri Baraka), and postmodern farce (using the example of *Cloud Nine* by Caryl Churchill).

Chapter 9: New coverage on the cultural phenomenon *Hamilton.*

Chapter 10: Updated coverage in the "Theatre and Race" and "Theatre, Gender, and Sexuality" sections; new examples that are more global and diverse; a new section "Theatrical Innovators Today," which highlights the work of global theatre luminaries Ivo van Hove, Jesusa Rodríguez, Rimini Protokoll, and Ong Keng Sen.

Chapter 11: This chapter title has changed from "The Critic" to "The Audience" to emphasize the critical perspective all audience members can bring to the theatre.

Mastering Concepts

SMARTBOOK® Connect combines the content of *Theatre Brief* 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 instructors who already uses Connect for their theatre courses.

Connect for *Theatre Brief* 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.

Does Your Course Cover Theatre History?

Seven history chapters, formerly included in the comprehensive edition *(Theatre),* are available for instructors who want a greater historical focus in their course:

- The Ancients
- The Middle Ages
- The Renaissance
- The Theatre of Asia
- The Royal Era
- The Modern Theatre: Realism
- The Modern Theatre: Antirealism

These history chapters are available in two ways:

1. In **SmartBook** at no extra cost. Simply order the 12th edition of *Theatre Brief* in SmartBook to get all-digital access to all 18 chapters.
2. Through **McGraw-Hill Create.** Add the history chapters of your choice to the chapters that you will cover in *Theatre Brief* for a tailored print solution.

create Also available through SmartBook and Create is a theatregoer's guide written by Robert and Lorna Cohen called "Enjoy the Play!" McGraw-Hill Create allows you to create a customized print book or eBook tailored to your course and syllabus. You can search through thousands of McGraw-Hill Education texts, rearrange chapters, combine material from other content sources, and include your own content or teaching notes. Create even allows you to personalize your book's appearance by selecting the cover and adding your name, school, and course information. To register and to get more information, go to http://create.mheducation.com.

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When assessing the current state of theatre and theatre education, we received helpful feedback from a host of scholars and artists; many thanks are especially due to Katrina Bugaj, Kate Elswit, Lindsay Brandon Hunter, Julia Reinhard Lupton, Elise Morrison, William Murray, Vincent Olivieri, Sara O'Toole, Kate DiMarco Ruck, Jon Foley Sherman, and Jonah Spear for their considerable insights.

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University of Pennsylvania; Mark E. Lococo, Loyola University Chicago; and Lisa McNiel, El Paso Community College, Valle Verde Campus.

The team at McGraw-Hill Higher Education has guided the creation of this edition with care and thoughtfulness. Susan Trentacosti and Lisa Bruflodt ably provided assistance to the digital aspects of production, Sarah Remington oversaw the many moving parts of the process with grace and resourcefulness, and Emily Tietz demonstrated considerable alacrity and inventiveness in researching new photographs. Finally, the authors are deeply grateful to the indefatigable Victoria DeRosa, who provided keen and incisive feedback through every step of the process; her unerring eye has made the text so much stronger and more cohesive.

Finally, we wish to thank Lorna Cohen for her assistance throughout the process.

About the Authors

ROBERT COHEN was the founding chair of the drama program at the University of California, Irvine, in 1965 and was the sole creator of the original edition (and nine subsequent editions) of *Theatre* starting in 1981. A prolific theatre scholar, teacher, director, playwright, translator, critic, and acting theorist for over fifty years as professor of drama at UCI, he is the author of twenty-three books (translated into six languages), thirty-six scholarly articles, numerous published and produced plays and play translations, and over four hundred published reviews of plays produced in America and around the world. He has also directed fifteen plays at the Utah and Colorado Shakespeare Festivals and ninety more at both regional and academic theatres in the United States and abroad. In addition to teaching at UCI, Cohen has served multiple times as master teacher at the Actors Center in New York City and at TVI Studios in New York and Los Angeles; he also speaks at and conducts acting workshops regularly, with residencies in Japan, Korea, China, Hungary, Finland, Estonia, Sweden, Poland, Costa Rica, Hong Kong, Canada, Romania, Australia, and approximately half the states in the United States. His books include *Shakespeare on Theatre, Acting Power: The 21st Century Edition, Acting in Shakespeare, Acting One, Acting Professionally, Advanced Acting, Creative Play Direction, Working Together in Theatre, Falling into Theatre, Jean Giraudoux: Three Faces of Destiny,* and various plays, translations, and anthologies.

UCI awarded Cohen its highest honor, the UCI Medal, in 1993 and conferred on him a Claire Trevor Professorship and Bren Fellowship in 2001 and the UCI Distinguished Faculty Award for Research in 2015. He has also received the Career Achievement Award in Academic Theatre from ATHE (the Association for Theatre in Higher Education), the Honoris Causa Professor degree at Babes-Bolyai University in Romania, and—for bringing the great Polish director Jerzy Grotowski to UCI for three years—the Polish Medal of Honor.

DONOVAN SHERMAN is an associate professor of English at Seton Hall University. His research focuses on the drama and performance of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, as well as theatre history, philosophy, and critical theory. Scholarly works include the book *Second Death: Theatricalities of the Soul in Shakespeare's Drama,* published in 2016 by Edinburgh University Press, along with essays on Shakespeare, performance studies, film, and early modern religion and philosophy in *Shakespeare Quarterly, The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Literature/Film Quarterly, English Literary Renaissance, Upstart,* and *Theatre Journal.* Currently, he is working on a book about portrayals of ancient philosophy in early modern drama. As a theatre artist, Sherman has performed with the Actors Theatre of Louisville, the SITI Company, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, and several other regional theatres in the United States. Donovan received his doctoral degree from the Joint Program of Theatre and Drama at the University of California, Irvine, and the University of California, San Diego.

Brief Contents

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Contents

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Introduction

IT IS EVENING IN MANHATTAN. On Broadway the marquees light up, and "Performance Tonight" signs appear in front of double doors. Beneath a few box-office windows placards announce, "This Performance Completely Sold Out." At Grand Central Station and Penn Station, trains release eager suburbanites from Greenwich, Larchmont, and Trenton; students from New Haven and Philadelphia; and day-trippers from Boston and Washington. Out of the Times Square subways pour mobs of locals, inhabitants of the bustling island and the neighboring boroughs. They head to the TKTS booth to line up and buy the discount tickets that go on sale a few hours before curtain time for shows with seats yet to be filled. Now, converging on these few midtown blocks of America's most populated city, come buses, cars, taxis, and limousines, whose drivers search for a curbside slot to deposit their riders among the milling throngs of pedestrians. Wall Street bankers, college students, teenagers gazing at their smartphones, sleek executives in expensive suits, Brooklyn hipsters, arm-in-arm widows, out-of-town tourists and conventioneers, celebrities, honeymooners, old and young, people of all different cultures, classes, and identities—all commingle in this bizarre mass that is the New York Broadway audience. Even during (and perhaps especially during) troubled times in this vibrant city, it is as bright, bold, and varied a crowd as is likely to assemble at any single place in America.

It is eight o'clock. In close to forty theatres within two dozen blocks of each other, houselights dim, curtains rise, and spotlights pick out performers who have fervently waited for this moment to arrive. Here a hot new musical, here a star-studded revival of an American classic, here a contemporary English comedy from London's West End, here a new play fresh from its electrifying Seattle or Chicago premiere, here a one-woman show, here an experimental play that has transferred to larger quarters, here a touring production from eastern Europe, and here the new play everyone expects will capture this year's coveted Tony Award. The hours pass.

It's 10:30. Pandemonium. All the double doors open simultaneously, as if on cue, and once again the thousands pour out into the night. At nearby restaurants, servers stand by to receive the after-theatre onslaught. In the private upstairs room at Sardi's restaurant, an opening-night cast party gets under way; downstairs, the patrons rehash the evening's entertainment and sneak covert glances at celebrities. Actors sip their drinks while impatiently awaiting the reviews that will determine whether they will be employed next week or back on the street looking for new jobs.

Now let's turn back the clock. It is dawn in Athens, the thirteenth day of the month of Elaphebolion in the year 458 B.C.E. From thousands of low mud-brick homes in the city, from the central agora, and from temples and agricultural outposts, streams of Athenians and visitors converge on the south slope of the Acropolis, Athens's great hill and home of its grandest temples. Bundled against the morning dampness, carrying breakfast figs and flagons of wine, they pay their tokens at the entrance to the great Theatre of Dionysus and take their places in the seating spaces allotted them. They have

Plays were often the sources of films in the early days of cinema, but now major films are increasingly turned into plays—mostly musicals—and very successful ones (for example, *The Lion King, The Producers, Once*). This scene is from the 2012 Broadway hit *Newsies,* adapted by Disney from its 1992 film of that name; the musical won Tony Awards for both its score and choreography. *©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux*

gathered for the City Dionysia festival, which celebrates the rebirth of the land and the long sunny days that stretch ahead. It is a time for revelry and for rejoicing in fertility and all its fruits. And it is above all a time for the ultimate form of Dionysian worship: the theatre.

The open stone seats carved into the hillside fill up quickly. The crowd of seventeen thousand comprises not only the majority of Athenian citizens but also thousands of tradesmen, foreign visitors, slaves, and resident aliens. Even paupers are in attendance, thanks to the two obols apiece provided by a state fund to buy tickets for the poor; they take their place with the latecomers on the extremities of the theatron, as this first of theatre buildings is called. Now, as the eastern sky grows pale, a masked and costumed actor appears atop a squat building set in full view of every spectator. A hush falls over the crowd, and the actor, his voice magnified by the wooden mask he wears, booms out this text:

> I ask the gods some respite from the weariness of this watchtime measured by years I lie awake . . .

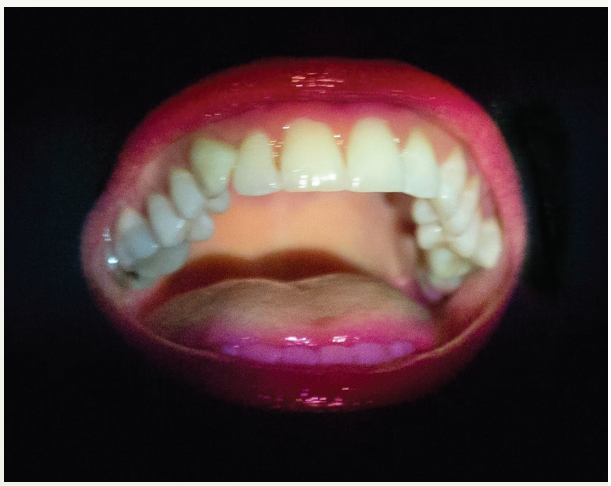
The entranced spectators settle in, secure in the knowledge that today they are in good hands. Today they will hear and see a new version of a familiar story—the story of Agamemnon's homecoming and his murder; the revenge of that murder by his son, Orestes; and the final disposition of justice in the case of Orestes' act—as told in the three tragedies that constitute *The Oresteia.* This magnificent trilogy is by Aeschylus, Athens's leading dramatist for more than forty years. The spectators watch closely, admiring but critical. Tomorrow they or their representatives will decide by vote whether the festival's prize should go to this work, or

Singer, songwriter, guitarist, thumb pianist, and now playwright, Jonatha Brooke, wrote and performed her one-woman play, *My Mother Has 4 Noses*, to great success off-Broadway in 2014, basing her play on the last years of her own mother's life—and playing both her mother and herself. *©Sandrine Lee*

whether the young Sophocles, whose plays were presented in this space the day before, had better sensed the true pulse of the time.

Let's zoom ahead in time. It is noon in London, and Queen Elizabeth I sits on the throne. Flags fly boldly atop three of the taller buildings in Bankside, across the Thames, announcing performance day at The Globe, The Rose, and The Swan theatres. Boatmen have already begun ferrying theatregoers across the river, where The Globe will present a new tragedy by Shakespeare (something called *Hamlet*), and The Rose promises a revival of Christopher Marlowe's popular *Dr. Faustus*. North of town, The Fortune and The Curtain are likewise opening their gates for new plays of their own.

Now at The Globe, two thousand spectators have arrived for the premiere. A trumpet sounds, then sounds again, and then builds into a full fanfare. Members of the



Theatre is not always grandiose. Samuel Beckett virtually revolutionized the theatre in 1958 with his *Waiting for Godot*, which basically shows two men under a tree waiting for a man who never comes. It was ridiculed at first, but by 2000 was cited as the greatest play of the century. From there his plays were steadily reduced in characters and actions until, in his 1972 *Not I*, there was but one performer—whose mouth, eight feet above the stage, is all the audience sees. This 2014 performance was performed by Lisa Dwan at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Harvey Theatre. *©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux*

Some plays never die. This Pulitzer Prize–winning 1936 production of Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman's farce *You Can't Take It With You* flooded the stage with fireworks in its 2014 Broadway revival, directed by Scott Ellis.
©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux

audience, standing on the ground before the stage or seated in bleachers overlooking it, exchange a few final winks with their friends old and new before turning their attention to the platform stage. Through a giant door a guard bursts forth, lantern in hand. "Who's there?," he cries, and across from him another guard hollers, "Nay! Answer me!" In two thousand imaginations, the bright afternoon has turned to midnight, London's Bankside has given way to the battlements of Denmark's Elsinore, and a terrified shiver from the onstage actor has set up an answering chill among the audience members. A great new tragedy has begun its course.

It is midnight in a basement in the East Village, or in a campus rehearsal room, or in a coffee shop in Pittsburgh, Seattle, Sioux Falls, or Berlin. Across one end of the room, a curtain has been drawn across a pole suspended by wires. It has been a long evening, but one play remains to be seen. The author is unknown, but rumor has it that this new work is brutal, shocking, poetic, and strange. The members of the audience, by turns skeptical and enthusiastic, look for the tenth time at their programs. The lights dim. Performers, backed by crudely painted packing crates, begin to act.

What is the common denominator in all of these scenes? They are all theatre. There is no culture that has not had a theatre in some form, for theatre is the art of people acting out—and giving witness to—their most pressing, illuminating, and inspiring concerns. Theatre is a medium through which a society displays its ideas, fashions, moralities, and entertainments, and debates its conflicts, dilemmas, yearnings, and struggles. Theatre has provided a stage for political revolution, social propaganda, civil debate, artistic expression, religious conversion, mass education, and even its own self-criticism. It has been a performance ground for priests, shamans, intellectuals, poets, painters, technologists, philosophers, reformers, evangelists, jugglers, peasants, children, and kings. It has taken place in caves, fields, and forests; in circus tents, inns, and castles; on street corners and in public buildings grand

and squalid all over the world. And it goes on incessantly in the minds of its authors, actors, producers, designers, and audiences.

Theatre is, above all, a *living* art form. It consists not only of plays but also of playing, and a play is not simply a series of acts but a collective ritual of acting. Just as *play* and *act* are both noun and verb, so theatre is both a thing and a happening, a result and a process: it is fluid in time and rich in feeling and human experience.

Above all, then, theatre is live and alive: an art that continually forms before our eyes and is present to an audience even as it is presented by its actors. In fact, this very quality of "presentness" (or, in the actor's terminology, "stage presence") defines every great theatrical performance.

Unlike the more static arts, theatre presents us with a number of classic paradoxes:

- It is spontaneous, yet it is rehearsed.
- It is real, yet it is simulated.
- It is unique to the moment, yet it is repeatable.
- The actors are themselves, yet they play characters.
- Audience members believe in the characters, yet they know they are actors.
- Audience members become emotionally involved, yet they know it is only a play.

These paradoxes comprise the glory of theatre. The actors may "live in the moment" during their performances, yet they have carefully studied, planned, and rehearsed the details of their roles beforehand. And audience members respond to their performance by rooting for their characters to achieve their goals, and then applauding the actors who play those roles during the curtain call. But this is also how we live our own lives, which we both experience and, at various points, present to others. The theatre shows us to ourselves in all of our human complexity.

And so this book about the theatre is also, ultimately, a book about ourselves.

Chapter

1

What Is Theatre?

©Evgenia Eliseeva

WHAT IS THEATRE? To start, let's look at the origin of the word. *Theatre* comes from the Greek *theatron*, or "seeing place." So on a basic level, a theatre is a place where something is seen. Already, with this simple definition, we gain an important clue about what theatre is. For something to be seen, after all, there must be people to do the seeing. So the theatre involves those who watch and those who are watched—the audience and the actors onstage.

Theatre depends on a separation of the viewer and the viewed. This separation need not be literal, however. In fact, some of the most powerful theatre happening today happens very intimately, with performers mere inches away from the audience. Rather, the separation of the theatre is something abstract, a feeling of distance between the viewer and what is seen. Theatre can simply be the result of a change in the attitude of the spectator: If I take on the attitude that I am watching life around me *as if* it were onstage, the everyday can suddenly take on a magical quality.

This kind of theatre—we might call this a theatre of perception—is demonstrated beautifully by a section of the High Line, a public park in New York City built on old railroad tracks elevated above the bustling city streets. In one section of the park, pedestrians can enter an "urban theatre"—a set of benches and aisles in front of a stage. But this "stage" is not typical: it's a big window that frames a busy intersection. Walkers on the High Line can sit on a bench and watch the spectacle of people rushing to work, hailing a cab, talking on their phones, laughing with their friends, and otherwise carrying on with their lives. When viewed as if they were on a stage, these actions take on a new sense of importance. Their circumstances are

heightened. They might not realize it, but they are performing!

Another kind of theatrical separation can exist when audience members might not realize they are an audience. The "invisible theatre" of the Brazilian activist and director Augusto Boal often used this technique. Boal's actors would stage an altercation on the street, only to reveal to onlookers afterward that they were, in fact, just performing. Suddenly passersby became audience members, where before they were bystanders. And these audience members were forced to question their own "performances" in the play that took place: Did they help the person under attack? Or did they just watch or even inch away?

Most of the time, though, audiences and performers know that they are part of a theatrical event. They have a mutual understanding. The audience will watch and react to the play, and the performers will put on a show. Everyone knows that what happens will be different than everyday life. Even if the play attempts to emulate everyday life—and some of the theatre we will examine in this book does exactly that—it still does so in circumstances that make it, in some way, extraordinary.

To summarize our description thus far, *theatre* describes a set of heightened circumstances that depend on a separation (whether acknowledged or not) of audience and performer. But we also use the word to refer to the physical space in which theatre often takes place. Theatre can occur in a theatre. It could also exist elsewhere, though. In this book, we will examine theatre that takes place in streets, in homes, in abandoned weapons factories, and in quarries—just to name a few examples. But even then, we refer to these spaces as a *theatre*. They transform, just as the performers do, from ordinary to exceptional.

At the High Line park in New York City, spectators can sit at the "urban theatre" section to witness the ongoing play of the city itself. *©Francois Roux/Shutterstock*

Spotlight

Why Study Theatre?

Perhaps you are reading this book because you have a deep passion for theatre. However, chances are that some of you are also reading this book because you are just curious about theatre, or perhaps simply to get college credit. These are all perfectly fine reasons. One of the book's aims is to show you how knowledge of theatre can help you in many different settings, not just onstage. Regardless of your reasons for reading this book and of how frequently you engage with theatre afterward, knowing more about theatre can help you in both your professional and personal life.

This thought might give you pause. You might think, "Isn't theatre a lofty occupation?" It is, but it is also a highly pragmatic one. As we will discuss, it is first and foremost *work*. While studying theatre can be enormously rewarding for abstract reasons—for instance, it gives us an appreciation of culture and history—it also helps improve your occupational skills. And you do not even need to work in theatre to capitalize on your theatre studies. Theatre skills are crucial for work in law, education, and business. After all, if you study and participate in theatre, you know how to work as a team, listen to other opinions, collaborate across different skill sets, and learn how to speak in front of a crowd.

People who have theatre degrees, or who have studied theatre in college, draw on their skills constantly. If you have to give a speech to your coworkers or superiors, if you have to devise a project with a group of people you don't know well but with whom you must collaborate, if you have an encroaching deadline and need to find a creative solution to a problem, or if you have to analyze a document and share your interpretation, then you are using theatre skills. You're not that different from an actor stepping onto the stage, a director meeting for the first time with an artistic team, or a performer picking up a script minutes before an audition.

Experiencing theatre gives us confidence, and it is not, contrary to some understandings of the word, a fake or negative kind of confidence. As we discuss in this book, theatre is about pursuing the truth, not artifice. It's an effort of a group of people trying to create something new—and can't the same be said for nearly every line of work? Studying theatre gives us what theatre scholar Nancy Kindelan calls "artistic literacy"—a fluency in thinking creatively in a variety of settings. Theatre skills help us constantly because theatre, in some form, is everywhere.

In addition to a theatre building, there's yet another way we can use the word *theatre*: the collection of artists who create the theatre. We call this collection the *company*. So the theatre can be a physical place, what happens in that place, and the people who create what happens in that place. To take one example, when we refer to the Guthrie Theater, we refer to (1) the actual building in Minneapolis called the Guthrie Theater: (2) what happens in that building—the performed actions and the audiences who watch them; and (3) the artists and administrators who create these occurrences.

Finally, we also use the word *theatre* to summon the professional occupation—and often the passion—of thousands of men and women all over the world. It is a vocation and sometimes a lifelong devotion. If someone says, "I work in theatre," they are telling you that they work in a theatre, they participate in the activity of theatre, they collaborate with other theatre artists, and—perhaps most importantly—that they are inspired by theatre. Theatre is an occupation and an art. To work in the theatre is not just to labor, but also to create.

We have already discussed one definition of theatre—the separation of actor and audience—so let's now examine the three other main definitions: theatre as a building, a company, and an occupation.

The Theatre Building

When you picture the space of the theatre, you probably imagine a big room with seats, a stage, and maybe a curtain. A theatre building is not always an enclosed structure, however. The most ancient Greek *theatron* was probably no

Shakespeare's Globe has been meticulously reconstructed near its sixteenth-century location on the South Bank of London's Thames River. The reconstruction was spearheaded by the late Sam Wanamaker, an American actor who labored many years to acquire the funding and necessary permits (the theatre has the first thatch roof laid in London since the Great Fire of 1666). This is scholarship's best guess as to the specific dimensions and features of The Globe in Shakespeare's time. Since its 1997 opening, this Globe has produced a summer repertoire of the plays of Shakespeare's age, seen on a stage much like the stages for which they were written. *©Robert Cohen*

National theatre buildings in many European countries, generally supported by their governments, are often palatial. The National Theatre in Cluj, Romania, is regarded as the most beautiful building in this Transylvanian capital.
©Robert Cohen

more than a circle of bare earth where performers chanted and danced before a hillside of seated spectators. The requirements for building such a theatre were minimal: find a space to act and a space to watch and hear.

As theatre grew in popularity and importance, and spread out into different cultures and geographical locations, its structures grew larger and more elaborate. The theatre's producers had to seat larger and larger numbers of people, so the hillside soon became an ascending bank of seats, each level providing a good view of the acting area. And as the theatre grew, attention had to be paid to its *acoustics*, or sound quality (derived from the Greek *acoustos*, "heard"), so the sounds coming from the stage could be heard by the audience (from the Latin *audientia*, "those who hear").

Often, theatre spaces can be easily defined. The basic relationship set up in ancient Greece can still apply to theatres all over the world: the audiences are out in the seats, the actors are up on the stage. Occasionally, though, the spaces are merged together so that the actors mingle—and sometimes interact—with the audience.

Theatre buildings may also be complex. Greek theatres of the fourth century B.C.E.—the period immediately following the golden age of Greek playwrights—were gigantic stone structures, some capable of holding up to 17,000 spectators. Magnificent three-story Roman theatres, complete with gilded columns, canvas awnings, and intricate marble carvings, were often erected for dramatic festivals in the later years of the Republic. Grand, free-standing Elizabethan theatres dominate the London skyline in illustrated sixteenth-century pictorial maps of the town. Opulent theatres were built throughout Europe and in the major cities of the United States in the eighteenth

Theatre buildings need not be originally designed for theatre. Since 2007, audiences have flocked to the Park Avenue Armory in New York City to see theatre on a grand scale. In this 55,000-square-foot space, which was previously an ammunition storehouse, artists can realize spectacular visions, as with Heiner Goebbels's 2016 staging of Louis Andriessen's *De Materie*, pictured here. *©Stephanie Berger*

and nineteenth centuries. Many remain in full operation today, competing with splendid new stages and serving as cultural centers for metropolitan areas around the world.

The Theatre Company

Theatre is a collaborative art that involves dozens, or even hundreds, of people working closely together on a single performance. Historically, theatre practitioners of various specialties have teamed up in long-standing companies. Since the fourth century B.C.E., such troupes of players have toured the countrysides and settled in cities to present a *repertory*, or collection of plays, as a means of earning a livelihood. Generally such players have included actors, playwrights, and technicians—and often combinations thereof—who make the company a self-contained production unit capable of writing, preparing, and presenting whole theatrical works. Some of these troupes—and the works they produced—have become legendary. The Lord Chamberlain's Men, in London, counted William Shakespeare as a member. The Illustrious Theatre of Paris was founded and headed by the great actor-writer Molière. These companies remind us that the theatre depends on more than space; it also needs people. And these people represent the genius and creativity of theatre in ways that the buildings alone cannot.

The Occupation of Theatre

Theatre can be a full-time job for professionals or a hobby for amateurs. In either case, it is work. The fundamental act of theatre seems simple enough: actors impersonate characters in a live performance of a play. But an enormous amount of labor goes into this activity, including the design and creation of the set and props, the orientation of the lights, and the direction of the action to the actors—as well as countless other long hours spent honing specialized crafts and collaborating with other artists. We can

organize this vast web of labor into four major categories: work, art, impersonation, and performance.

WORK

Theatre is difficult work. *Rehearsals,* when actors and directors meet to create and practice staging for the play, normally take a minimum of four to six weeks. These rehearsals are usually preceded by at least an equal amount of time—but often months or years—of writing, researching, planning, casting, designing, and creating a production team. After the rehearsal period, the entire artistic team—the company—gathers to combine all the different elements into one work of art. These final weeks before a play *opens* (when it is first shown to audiences) consist of an incredible amount of labor, frequently with twelve-hour workdays and seven-day workweeks.

The work of the theatre is generally divisible into a number of crafts:

Production includes securing all necessary personnel, space, and financing; supervising all production and promotional efforts; fielding all legal matters; and distributing all proceeds derived from receipts.

Directing consists of controlling and developing the artistic product to provide it with a unified vision, coordinating all of its components, and supervising its rehearsals.

Acting comprises the most famous and visible of theatrical work, in which performers take on roles in a play.

Designing entails the creation of visual and aural elements of a production, including the scenery, properties, costumes and wigs, makeup, lighting, sound, programs, advertising, and general ambience of the location.

Building includes the realization of the designers' vision through the work of carpenters, costumers, wig-makers, electricians, makeup artists, recording and sound engineers, painters, and a host of other specially designated craftspeople who construct the "hardware" of a play.

The *crew* consists of technicians who execute, in proper sequence and with carefully rehearsed timing, the light and sound cues and the shifting of scenery, as well as oversee the placement and return of properties and the assignment, laundering, repair, and changes of costumes.

Stage management consists of *running*, or coordinating in real time, a play production in all its complexity in performance after performance.

House management includes the responsibilities for admitting, seating, and providing for the general comfort of the audience.

There is one craft that does not take place during the enactment of a play but is absolutely critical to the whole production. This work is *playwriting*—and for musical theatre, *composing*—which is in a class by itself. Playwriting takes place elsewhere, sometimes even continents and centuries away from the productions they inspire.

Of course, the work of the theatre need not be divided exactly along these lines. In any production, some people perform more than one kind of work. For example, many of the builders also serve on the crew. And it is not uncommon for playwrights to direct what they write, for directors to act in their own productions, and for designers to build at least some of what they design. On some celebrated occasions, multitalented theatre artists have taken on multiple roles at the same time: Aeschylus, in ancient Greece, and Molière, in seventeenth-century Paris, each wrote, directed, and acted in their own plays, and probably designed them as well; William Shakespeare was a playwright, actor, and co-owner of the Lord Chamberlain's Men in Elizabethan times; Bertolt Brecht revolutionized both playwriting and acting when writing and directing his plays in Berlin after World War II; and recently, Lin-Manuel Miranda composed, wrote, and starred in his blockbuster musical *Hamilton.*

Theatre is also work in the sense that it is not play. Or, at least, not *only* play. "Play" is, after all, the word used to describe the main product of theatre work, so the word refers to both the activity of children who "play games" and adults who "play roles" or "put on a play" as a profession. This is not a coincidence. The French *jeu*, the German *spiel*, the Hungarian *játék*, the Mandarin Chinese *xi*, and the Latin *ludi* all share the double meaning of the English *play* by referring both to children's games and dramatic plays and playing. This association points to a relationship that is fundamental to our understanding of theatre: while it is a kind of work, theatre is also a kind of playing, and it is useful for us to see why this is so.

Theatre and games have a shared history. Both were born as Greek events: the Dionysian theatre festival and the Olympian athletic festival were the two great cultural events of ancient Greece. Each embodied a form of competition for excellence. The Romans then merged sports and theatre in public circuses, where the two were performed side by side, often in competition with each other. More than a millennium later, the Londoners of Shakespeare's time built "playhouses" that could accommodate dramatic productions on one day and bearbaiting spectacles (somewhat akin to bullfights) the next day. The association of dramatic and athletic entertainment continues today: flip through your TV channels and you'll see serialized dramas and comedies run alongside live recordings of basketball, football, and other sports. We love to watch "play" of all sorts.

This link between games and theatre is formed early in life. "Child's play" can be competitive and athletic, but also creative and imitative. Children love to dress up, mimic, or in any way pretend to be someone else—in short, they love to be theatrical. This kind of play is also educational because it helps children prepare for adult life. As we get older, more unstructured and spontaneous games become organized and instructional. Sometimes the lessons we learn from playing are quite serious. Hide-and-seek, an exhilarating and engrossing game, also offers an opportunity to act out one of childhood's greatest fears—the terror of separation from the parent. Hide-and-seek allows a child to confront this separation anxiety within a safe environment. In this context, fear loses much of its frightening power, and over time, through the act of playing, the child gradually learns to cope with life's challenges and uncertainties. So while theatrical play is not real, it prepares us for reality.

Theatre and play have some important differences, as well. Unlike adult games, which are open-ended, every theatre performance has a preordained conclusion. The Patriots may not win the Super Bowl next year, but Hamlet definitely will die in the fifth act of *Hamlet*. The work of the theatre consists in keeping us invested in Hamlet while he is alive so that his death is moving and even surprising. We know he will die, but we are still emotionally affected when he does.

To return to an earlier point, theatre is not *only* play. We might say that theatre is the art of making play into work—specifically, into a work of art. It is exhilarating work, to be sure, and it usually inspires and invigorates the energies and imaginations of all who participate. But it is ultimately work. That is its challenge.

Sports, games, and theatre have always been related, and some plays combine these different "playing" motifs. Richard Greenberg's *Take Me Out* takes place in a baseball locker room in America, Eric Simonson's *Lombardi* in a football locker room, David Storey's *The Changing Room* in a rugby locker room, Andrew Lloyd Webber's *The Beautiful Game* on a soccer field in Ireland, and Thomas Meehan's musical adaption of the well-known film *Rocky* concludes in a boxing ring. Pictured here are Andy Karl and Dakin Matthews with World Middleweight Champ Gennady Golovkin making his Broadway debut in *Rocky* at the Winter Garden Theatre on July 23, 2014, in New York City. *©Walter McBride/Getty Images*

ART

The word *art* brings to mind a host of abstract ideas: creativity, imagination, elegance, power, harmony, and beauty. We expect a work of art to capture something of the human spirit and to address some of the biggest questions in all of humanity, such as, Why are we here? and What does it mean to live a good life? Certainly great theatre, regardless of the play, can pose—if not answer—these questions. And theatre does so in playful, surprising ways. In theatre we can mix physical and emotional exuberance with philosophical reflections of our search for purpose.

Art is one of the great pursuits of humanity. It empowers both those who make it and those who appreciate it. Art also sharpens thought and focuses feeling by mixing reality with imagination. Think of a great work of art that you love: a song that makes you fight back tears or jump up and down in excitement, or a poem that expresses familiar emotions—like love or sadness—in new ways. We are drawn to works of art like these because they lend meaning to our lives. We might find similar values in religion as well, but art is accessible without subscribing to any particular set of beliefs. It is surely for this reason that so many religions have employed art and artworks (including dramatic art) in their liturgies and services from the earliest of times.

IMPERSONATION

A fundamental quality of theatre is that it involves actors who impersonate characters. Even when actors play "themselves," actors are viewed differently when in the theatre. They are viewed as artistic creations, rather than as people. Just as the New Yorkers walking by the High Line are seen as somehow more than everyday pedestrians when they are viewed as "onstage," people take on new significance when they are part of the theatre. They become characters.

When we see an actor impersonate a character, we know, on some level, that the character is not "real." However, oftentimes we act like it is. We react as if an actual person were going through real emotions. It can sometimes be difficult to separate the actor from the character. Even today, fans send tweets and post Instagram comments to movie stars to express their feelings about the people they play, not the people they are. (To take this a step further, we can think of our online selves as a kind of theatrical fiction; social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat are in the business of turning us from people into characters.) Movie fans clutter message boards with theories as to what a certain character "means" or what fate might befall them after the closing credits, as if they were real people.

Imagine how confusing this must have been in the early days of theatre! The very first plays and audiences didn't have centuries of conventions to remind them that an actor was not a character. How could they separate the performer from the fiction? The solution the ancient world found was the mask. Western theatre had its true beginning that day in ancient Greece when an actor first stepped out of the chorus and placed an unpainted mask over his face, thereby signaling that the lines he was about to speak were "in character." He was no longer Demetrius the olive-grower; he was Agamemnon, hero of the Trojan War. The mask provides both a physical and a symbolic separation between the impersonator (the actor) and the impersonated (the character), thus aiding onlookers in temporarily suspending their awareness of the "real" world and accepting in its place the world of the stage. In a play, it must be the characters who have apparent life; the actors themselves are expected to disappear into the shadows, along with their personal preoccupations, anxieties, and career ambitions.

Masks were used throughout the ancient Greek theatre period, and as we shall see in the pages that follow, they were also staples of many other theatres of the past, including the *mmanwu* masquerades of the Igbo people in Nigeria, the *noh* and *kyōgen* drama of Japan, and the *commedia dell'arte* of Italy. The theatrical mask endures, not only in these historic forms but also in many cutting-edge productions that continue to play with our understandings of theatrical impersonation. The most recognizable symbol of theatre, after all, is the side-by-side masks of comedy and tragedy.

PERFORMANCE

Theatre is a kind of performance, but what exactly does *performance* mean? Performance is an action or series of actions taken for the ultimate benefit (attention, entertainment, enlightenment, or involvement) of someone else. We call that "someone else" the audience.

All theatre is performance, but not all performance is theatre. What counts as performance is quite broad. One way of defining performance is through more of a perspective than an actual set of activities. In other words, we might view an activity such as a baseball game as a performance, rather than as something else (a cultural institution, an expression of local pride, etc.). The same goes for other activities not typically thought of as

Masks were fundamental to ancient theatre and often appear in contemporary productions, particularly in revivals of such classic works. Christina Uribe's masks, sculpted in the ancient Greek tradition, were employed in this Greek/French production of Sophocles' *Antigone* directed by Philippe Brunet for his Demodocos company, which since 1995 has been devoted to the pursuit of what Brunet calls "Dionysian mystery theatre." The production, with costumes by Florence Kukucka, was featured at the 2008 Avignon Theatre Festival in France; shown here are two chorus members.
©Laurencine Lot

"performing": medical examinations, churchgoing, storytelling, and even aspects of our identity such as gender. When we view our cultural behavior as performance, it helps get us away from thinking of human activity as unchangeable. It reminds us that our identities depend on bodily enactment. The discipline of performance studies has taken this task to heart and offers many stirring analyses of human activity as a kind of endless performing.

But we need not be too academic about the issue. Performance is all around us. When two high school students arm-wrestle during lunch period, they may well be performing their physical prowess for the benefit of their peers. The student who asks a question in the lecture hall is often "performing" for the other students—and the professor performs for the same audience when providing a response. Trial lawyers examining witnesses invariably perform—often drawing on a considerable repertoire of body language—for the benefit of the courtroom audience, the jury. Politicians kiss babies for the benefit of parents (and others) who are in search of a kindly candidate. Even stony silence can be a performance—for example, if it is in response to an overly eager admirer. In this sense, we are all performers.

The difference between theatre and performance is that theatre makes an *art* out of performance: it expands something we all do every day into a formal mode of artistic expression. When you sing along to a song in your car, you might be performing, but you are not creating theatre.

Presentational styles make little pretense of mimicking ordinary life. Here, director Susan Stroman creates a wonderful comedic moment in *The Producers* as the director Roger De Bris (played by Gary Beach) desperately tries to keep his wig on. Facial expressions around the room focus the action and intensify the hilarity. Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane (*left*) are the producers from the musical's title. Scenic design is by Robin Wagner, costumes by William Ivey Long, and lighting by Peter Kaczorowski. *©Paul Kolnik*

The theatre makes use of two general modes of performance: *presentational* (or direct) and *representational* (or indirect). Presentational performance is the basic mode of stand-up comedy or concert singing. Presentational performers directly acknowledge the presence of audience members by singing to them, dancing for them, joking with them, and responding openly to their applause, laughter, requests, and heckling. Dramatic forms of all ages have employed these techniques and a variety of other presentational methods, including asides to the audience, soliloquies, direct address, and curtain calls.

Representational performance, however, is the more fundamental mode of drama. In representational performance, the audience watches behavior that seems to be staged as if no audience were present. As a result, the audience is encouraged to concentrate on the events that are being staged, not on the nature of their presentation; the audience believes in the play as if it were real. This belief—or, to borrow Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous phrase, this "willing suspension of disbelief"—attracts audience participation by encouraging a feeling of kinship with the characters. We can identify with their aspirations, sympathize with their plights, exult in their victories, and care deeply about what happens to them. When empathy is present, the audience experiences what is often called the "magic" of theatre. Well-written and well-staged dramas make people feel, not just think; they draw in the spectators' emotions, leaving them feeling transported and even somewhat changed.

Occasionally, presentational and representational styles are taken to extremes. In the late nineteenth century, the representational movement known as *realism* sought to have actors behave onstage exactly as people do in real life, in settings made as lifelike as possible. At times the representational ideal so dominated in certain theatres—for instance, the "Quiet Theatre" movement in Japan in the 1990s—that actors spoke with their backs to audiences, directors encouraged pauses and inaudible mumbling, and playwrights transcribed dialogue from fragments of randomly overheard conversations.

This production of Bertolt Brecht's sharply satirical *The Threepenny Opera*, directed by Robert Wilson at the Berliner Ensemble theatre (which Brecht founded in 1949), follows Brecht's representational concepts, with its bold colors, starkly white makeup, and deliberately artificial lighting. The production played in New York City in 2011. *©Aris/Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy Stock Photo*

Many theatre artists took the opposite approach, such as the twentieth-century German playwright-director Bertolt Brecht. Brecht advocated for a more presentational style that, by seeking to appeal directly to the audience on a variety of social and political issues, featured openly visible lighting instruments; signs, songs, slide projections, and speeches addressed directly to the audience; and a "distanced" style of acting intended to reduce emotional empathy or theatrical "magic."

No play can ever be completely representational or presentational, however. During naturalistic performances, we are always aware that we are watching actors perform for us, and the plays of Brecht and his followers, despite his theories, generate empathy when well performed. The fact is that theatrical performance is always both presentational and representational.

Two other aspects of theatre distinguish theatre from other forms of performance: theatre is live and, in most cases, is a scripted and rehearsed event.

Live Performance In contrast to movies, the theatre is a real-time event in which performers and audience members are fully aware of the others' immediate presence. The awareness of spectators can give performers an adrenaline charge and a magical feeling of responding and listening in the moment. Actors can feel the audience's energy, and audiences can feel the actors' focus. Everyone in the theatre is breathing the same air; all are involved at the same time and in the same space.

Live theatre also creates a relationship among the audience members. People attending a play arrive as individuals or in small groups, but they all quickly find themselves laughing at the same jokes, empathizing with the same characters, and experiencing the same revelations. Or perhaps they laugh at different moments, enjoy different characters, or arrive at different conclusions. Either way, they respond *together*; they become a community. While fans of TV shows and movies might exchange opinions

online, theatre audiences experience the same social activity together, at the same time.

It is no wonder that political demonstrations often incorporate theatre. In creating a spectacle, theatre also creates an audience, and that audience becomes energized. In a celebrated example, the Depression-era *Waiting for Lefty* was staged as if the audience were a group of union members; by the play's end, the audience was yelling "Strike! Strike!" in response to the play's call to action. Theatre also has a long history of street performances that take advantage of this power. There's a reason why activists frequently stage plays in public, as opposed to screening films: nothing mobilizes a crowd like the theatre.

Finally, live performance has the quality of immediacy. The action of the play is taking place right now, as it is being watched, and anything can happen. Although in most professional productions the changes that occur in performance from one night to the next are so subtle only an expert would notice, the fact is that each night's presentation is unique and everyone present—in the audience, in the cast, and behind the scenes—knows it. When you are watching an actor onstage, you and that actor are in the same place at the same time. This awareness lends an excitement that cannot be experienced while watching films or video. One reason for the excitement of live theatre, of course, is that mistakes can happen in its performance. This possibility creates a certain tension, perhaps even an edge of fright, which can create a thrilling feeling in the audience—something could go wrong! But just as disaster can come without warning, so too can splendor. On any given night, actors are trying to better their previous performance, and no one knows when this collective effort will turn into something sublime.

Scripted and Rehearsed Performance While theatre is always new and immediate, it is also scripted and carefully prepared. The art of theatre lives in the relationship between these two opposing principles: it is always spontaneous but also carefully and repeatedly rehearsed. In a popular phrase among theatre scholars, a play has "repetition with a difference." Theatre performances are largely prepared according to written and well-rehearsed texts, or play scripts. Sometimes theatre is instead devised rather than written. In these cases the play develops through workshops and collaborations, improvisation, and research. We will discuss this form of play creation in the chapter "The Playwright."

Mostly, though, plays depend on scripts. And in this way they are often distinguished from other forms of performance, such as improvisation and performance installations. Although improvisation and ad-libbing may play a role in the preparation process, and even in certain actual performances, most play productions are based on a script that was established before—and modified during—the play's rehearsal period, and most of the action is permanently set during these rehearsals as well. Professional theatrical productions, therefore, appear nearly the same night after night: for the most part, the Broadway production of *Wicked* that you see on Thursday will be almost identical to the show your friend saw on Wednesday or your mother saw last fall. And if you were to read the published text, you would see on the page the same words you heard spoken or sung on the stage.

But the text of a play is not, by any means, the play itself. The play fully exists only in its performance—in its "playing." The script is merely the record the play leaves behind after the audience has gone home. The script is to the play what a recipe is to a meal: it outlines the principal features of what you are preparing and gives you instructions for making it, but it can never capture the full sensations of the final product.

Published scripts are often an imperfect record. Often they carry over material left out of the actual production, or they include new material the author thought of after the production was over. The published texts of Shakespeare's plays include differing versions of many of his plays, including two versions of *King Lear* written several years apart. When American dramatist Tennessee Williams published his *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* after the play's premiere, he included both the third act he originally wrote and the third act written at the request of the director, Elia Kazan. Williams invited readers to select their preferred version. Moreover, even a fixed script is often as notable for what it lacks as for what it contains. Plays published before the twentieth century rarely have more than rudimentary stage directions, and even now a published play tells us almost nothing about the play's nonverbal components. The simple direction "they fight" takes less than a second to read, but onstage it could be a breathtaking duel, a brawl, or a quick gunshot: it is up to the artists to bring the printed word to life.

We now have a good grasp on the many definitions of the theatre. It is a way of looking and a way of being seen. It can also be a building and a company; it can be work, art, impersonation, and performance; it consists of living performers and written, rehearsed scripts. It is a production: a collection of actions, sights, sounds, ideas, feelings, words, light, and, above all, people.

In reading our breakdown of these definitions, you may have noticed a pattern. As soon as we try to define an essential rule of the theatre, we admit that it can sometimes

Spotlight

Film Stars on Stage Acting

The vast majority of film stars got their start acting onstage in high school, college, or small theatres near their hometowns. Many of them—including the most successful—return to live stage performing. Film and TV stars such as Al Pacino, Viola Davis, Bryan Cranston, Michelle Williams, Daniel Radcliffe, Samuel L. Jackson, Scarlett Johannson, Andrew Garfield, Jude Law, Denzel Washington, Laura Linney, Daniel Craig, Mark Ruffalo, Uma Thurman, and Benedict Cumberbatch all found themselves acting on Broadway in recent seasons. Why would these actors, plus the likes of David Hyde Pierce, Neil Patrick Harris, Katie Holmes, Cate Blanchett, Ben Affleck, Matthew Broderick, Anne Hathaway, Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellen, Geoffrey Rush, John Lithgow, Dame Judi Dench, Anthony Hopkins, Ethan Hawke, and Meryl Streep, leave Hollywood for such vastly lower-paying stage work? Here are some of their replies:

There's that side of theatre that appeals to me, where you give something and the response to what you've created is a communion between you and the dark that contains however many people. It's thrilling not having a reflection other than through the people you're communicating with.

—BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH[1]

Theatre is about authenticity. It's in front of you; you feel it. It's so hard to feel stuff anymore from film. . . . It can get very remote.

—MERYL STREEP

I love acting for the camera. But in film your performance doesn't really belong to you. It belongs to the director and the editor and the producers. Onstage [in Arthur Miller's A View from the Bridge*], the audience saw everything I had, not some reshaped version of it. The same arc was there every night, of course, and yet it was a living, breathing thing.*

—SCARLETT JOHANNSON[2]

Cause, I love it, I love it! I love the theatre, it is how and where I started. . . . The way I was raised as an actor was in the theatre.

—DENZEL WASHINGTON[3]

I didn't want to make any films. I only wanted to be in the theatre. Shakespeare was my passion. And that's what I did, so it didn't matter.

—JUDI DENCH[4]

If my movie career was totally terminated, I would be saddened and disappointed . . . but if that were to happen with the live theatre, it would be devastating. [Theatre] is like a fountain that I have to return to.

—PATRICK STEWART[5]

One of the glorious things about the theatre is that it cannot be preserved. You can't look at it again; it's live. . . . Cinema's dead. You can laugh, you can cry, you can shout at the screen and the movie will carry on. But an audience in the theatre, whether it knows it or not, is affecting the performance. . . . That's the stream of life at its best, isn't it?

—IAN MCKELLEN[6]

In film, the challenge is to be able to shape a performance when the process is so piecemeal. And the absolute joy of being onstage is you get to surf that wave. It's a much more muscular experience.

—CATE BLANCHETT[7]

There is only so long you can go from film to film. Theatre is a more raw experience. For an actor a live audience is creative inspiration.

—JUDE LAW[8]

I love the stage, and I love being on stage, and the rush and the fear and all of that.

—DANIEL RADCLIFFE

Nothing was going to stand in my way of doing that play.

—ASHLEY JUDD, ON WHY SHE TURNED DOWN THE TITLE ROLE IN *CATWOMAN* TO BE ONSTAGE IN A NEW YORK REVIVAL OF *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*

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[1]Oldman, Gary. (2013, November 11). "Benedict Cumberbatch," www.interviewmagazine.com/film/benedict-cumberbatch.

[2]Isherwood, Charles. (2010, May 12). Scarlett Johannson quoted in "Definitely Didn't Get Lost in Translation," *The New York Times*.

[3]Gencarelli, Mike. (2010, June 13). "Interview with Denzel Washington & the Cast of Broadway's 'Fences,'" http://mediamikes.com/2010/06/interview-with-denzel-\washington-the-cast-of-broadways-fences/.

[4]Sturm, Rudiger. (2017, October 11). "Judi Dench: 'I Have an Irrational Fear of Boredom,'" http://the-talks.com/interview/judi-dench.

[5]Courtesy of Patrick Stewart.

[6]Crews, C. (2001, December 28). "At the Top of His Form by Chip Crews," *Washington Post*.

[7]Dobkin, M. (2006, February 27). "Hedda Steam," *New York Magazine*.

[8]Gibbons, F. (2001, January 12). "The Next Stage: Stars Pledge Millions for Theatre Ventures," *The Guardian*. Copyright Guardian News & Media Ltd. 2001. Used with permission.

Bryan Cranston has appeared in over 100 movies and TV shows, including his starring role in TV's *Breaking Bad*, and has won dozens of acting awards. It was not a surprise, then, that he scored the 2014 Tony Award for Best Performance in a Leading Role in a Play for his first Broadway role playing President Lyndon B. Johnson in Robert Schenkkan's *All The Way*, directed by Bill Rauch. More recently, Cranston recreated the Johnson role for television. He is shown here in his initial American Repertory Theatre production, with Betsy Aidem playing his stage wife, Lady Bird. *©Evgenia Eliseeva*

break this rule. The theatre is a building, but it *could* take place anywhere. Theatre depends on the separation of actor and audience, but it *could* still occur with the two sides mingling. Theatre uses scripts, but it *could* be improvised. Rather than become frustrated with theatre's ability to always find an exception to any stable definition, we encourage you to see this as one of its characteristics. In other words, one of the theatre's defining qualities is its resistance to definition! Time and again, as soon as one clear understanding of theatre has taken hold, artists and innovators have broken free of these constraints and introduced new ideas. You'll notice this throughout the textbook, right up until the present day. This is something to celebrate: the theatre, like all art forms, is alive. It simply needs to involve humans who want to create plays—and plays to put on.

But what exactly is a play? That question deserves a separate chapter.

Design Elements: *Spotlight Icon: ©McGraw-Hill Education; Theatrical Masks: ©Ingram Publishing/Alamy Stock Photo; Camera: ©Tatiana Popova/Shutterstock*

Chapter

2

What Is a Play?

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A PLAY IS, ESSENTIALLY, WHAT HAPPENS in theatre. A play is not a thing but an event, and not just any event. Rock concerts, stand-up comedy, poetry readings, storytelling, and cabaret performances all occur onstage in a highly theatrical manner, but they are not plays. Why not? What makes a play a play?

To answer that question, we can look at a related word, *drama,* whose origin is from the Greek *dran*, "something done." Simply put, a play supplies the theatre with drama. The word *theatron*, as we remember from the first chapter, means "seeing place," so we can put these terms together to learn that a play is both done (it supplies drama) and communally witnessed (it is theatrical). A play, then, is a form of perceived action, not just words in a book.

This definition of a play goes all the way back to the Greek thinker Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), who wrote one of the first works about the theatre, the *Poetics*. A play, Aristotle observed, is an "imitation of an action." This kind of action, however, is not the kind we think of today—it is not merely movement. If a branch snaps and falls from a tree, it is not Aristotle's understanding of action. Rather, action must be willed, not accidental—it must result from thought. Action translates the inner landscape of our souls and minds into the external language of gesture, habit, and words. And since a play is an imitation of an action, rather than just the action itself, it is the poetic *interpretation* of human behavior. Plays take the raw material of our everyday lives and sculpt it into something that retains the truth, if not the exact reality, of our shared experience.

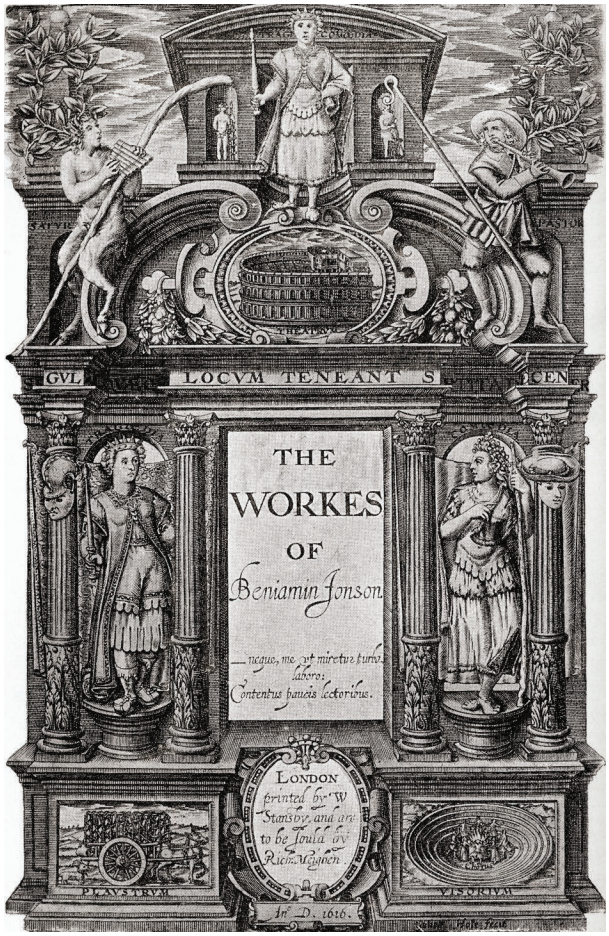
Around the same time Aristotle wrote the *Poetics,* another major text about drama emerged in ancient India. The *Natyasastra*, whose title roughly translates as "science of drama," is a vast compendium of instruction for how to create plays. While there are many differences between this work and Aristotle's, there are also some striking similarities. Both texts see plays as

elevated and removed from the everyday: the *Natyasastra* organizes drama into different categories based on popular myths and stories of the gods. Both texts, too, are interested in how the audience responds. For Aristotle, a tragedy—and tragedies are for him the highest form of dramatic art—should create a *catharsis*, or purging, of pity and fear from the audience. The *Natyasastra,* for its part, defines drama as something that creates pleasure on the part of its spectators.

It is striking that, roughly 6,000 miles away from each other, two ancient cultures felt the need to codify playmaking into a set of practices for future generations to follow. Plays were important enough that their creation needed to be remembered. This need points to the *social* aspect of drama that both texts emphasize. Plays were fundamentally public, and performing plays had a beneficial effect on society. Based on our definition of *play* thus far, we can see what these beneficial effects are: plays give us structure that we lack in the more disorderly stream of sensations in life, but they also give us situations and ideas that reflect something truthful. We both recognize and are separated from what happens onstage in a play. They offer a heightened version of our reality so that we can reflect on our own circumstances. It is no wonder that Aristotle borrowed the word "catharsis" from medicine: he saw plays as a healing agent, an event of shared therapy.

Sometimes, though, when we talk about "plays," we are not speaking of an event but of a piece of literature. We see plays, but we can also read them. This is a relatively new understanding of the word. In the early seventeenth century—over two millennia after the *Poetics* and the *Natyasastra*—the celebrated Renaissance writer Ben Jonson collected all of his works—mostly drama, but also poems and epigrams—in one large bound edition, or "folio." Such a practice might seem common today for famous authors, but this action made Jonson a laughing-stock; it was perceived as a cocky and useless endeavor. Today, though, reading plays is the primary way we encounter them. Plays are often printed in literary anthologies, are intermixed with poems and short stories, or are given their own anthologies. One can now easily purchase the collected works of William Shakespeare, Arthur Miller, or Wole Soyinka.

But drama should not be thought of as merely a form of literature. It is foremost a live performance, of which some repeatable aspects may be captured in a written and published text. The plays that we read can be remarkably different from the plays we see. The texts exist between live performances. They can prompt new productions or serve as evidence of previous ones. When read, plays can be exhilarating, but it is far more vital to see and hear plays and, when possible, to do them yourself.



We commonly encounter plays by reading them, but this wasn't always the case. Pictured here is the 1616 "folio," or collected works, of the playwright Ben Jonson. At the time, the publication of plays (and the idea of reading them) was perceived as an anomaly. *©Universal History Archive/Universal Images Group/Getty Images*

Classifying Plays

Plays can present action that takes place in a single room or across continents, but even the most expansive plays have constraints. They are framed with a beginning and end, which—along with what happens in the middle—help determine what kind of play they are. These classifications are usually made according to the play's *duration* and *genre*.

DURATION

How long is a play? When celebrated American playwright Arthur Miller first thought of writing for the theatre, he admitted "How long should it be?" was his most pressing question. The answer is far from obvious, and the fact that

Tom Stoppard's three-part and nine-hour-long *The Coast of Utopia,* set in nineteenth-century Russia with more than seventy acting roles and covering some thirty-plus years, received ten Tony Award nominations in 2007, winning a record seven of them, including Best Play for its New York production—which certainly proves that long plays need not become tedious ventures. *©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux*

even Arthur Miller had to puzzle over a play's duration makes it clear that a play's length is not just a technical consideration.

Historically, in drama that developed in Europe and the United States, a "full-length" play usually lasted between two and three hours. This is not an arbitrary period of time; it roughly represents the hours between lunch and dinner (for a matinee) or between dinner and bedtime. The seventeenth-century playwright John Webster wrote that the actor "entertains us in the best leisure of our life, that is between meals, the most unfit time either for study or bodily exercise." Webster was thinking of the afternoon performances in the outdoor theatres of his day. A few years earlier, speaking of indoor evening performances at court, Shakespeare's Theseus, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, asks for a play "to wear away this long age of three hours between our after-supper and bed-time." Elsewhere, Shakespeare refers to "the two-hours traffic of our stage," and this seems not to have changed much—plays on Broadway tend to run a little over two hours.

But plays can be much shorter or longer. One-act plays of an hour or less—sometimes even ten minutes—are occasionally combined to make a full theatre program. Short plays are often presented at dramatic festivals, school assemblies, social gatherings, street entertainments, cabaret performances, or other settings outside of a theatre building. One of the shortest plays on record is Samuel Beckett's *Breath*, which can be performed in one minute. There are exceptionally long plays as well. *The Peony Pavilion,* a celebrated example of the traditional Chinese theatre known as *kunqu,* consists of 55 scenes and lasts three days. Also, the classical Indian drama known as *Kutiyattam,* a form of Sanskrit play inspired by the guidelines of the *Natyasastra,* consists of several acts that can last as long as forty-one days each.

In recent decades, more lengthy productions have also proven popular in the West. One of the hottest tickets in New York for the 2016 theatre season was Taylor Mac's *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music,* a daylong show that surveyed American musical forms from 1776 to the present day—each decade of music took up one hour—and saw audiences staying up, bleary-eyed, from noon on Saturday to noon on Sunday. In addition, audiences have flocked to the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Wolf Hall* (seven hours), Tom Stoppard's *Coast of Utopia* (nine hours), Peter Brook's *Mahabharata* (nine hours), Peter Stein's production of Aeschylus's *Oresteia* (seven hours), and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* (six hours). (At the extreme end of this spectrum, Robert Wilson's *Ka Mountain* was once performed over 168 continuous hours.) Some plays are neither long nor short—they fall somewhere in between our usual categories. Take, for instance, David Mamet's *Glengarry*

Glen Ross. Mamet finished his script and worried that it was too short to be a full-length play and too long to be a one-act (the running time clocks in around 75 minutes). He sent a copy to his playwriting hero, Harold Pinter, and received the feedback that it was perfect as is. The play went on to win a Pulitzer Prize and has since been produced with regularity across the world.

Miller's question, it seems, does not have a precise answer: there are no concrete guidelines as to running time. Duration is critical but never set in stone.

GENRE

Genre provides a more subjective basis of classification than duration. No one argues how long a play lasts, but one could reasonably disagree over what genre it is. The word "genre" is directly derived from the French word for "kind" (it is also the root word for "gender"). So to classify a play by genre is to say what kind of play it is.

Just as there are different kinds of movies—comedies, westerns, action films, horror films, documentaries—there are different genres of plays. Historically, the first defined dramatic genres were tragedy and comedy. We are probably most familiar with comedy because of its popularity in films: we can easily recall moments and scenarios from movies that make us laugh just by thinking about them or describing them to friends. Tragedy, though, is not as common in films, or even in contemporary theatre. However, many of the great masterpieces of theatre are tragedies—from ancient Greece through the eras of Shakespeare and Jean Racine—and the genre deserves serious discussion.

Tragedy A *tragedy* is a profoundly serious play that always ends in the death of one or more of its main characters and focuses on a resonant theme about human life and society. Tragedy was first described by Aristotle, who considered it the greatest kind of play. The greatest tragedy is, for Aristotle, Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. This play has in many ways become the fundamental and defining work of tragedy in the West. To understand why, we need to look closer at how Aristotle defines the genre.

In Aristotle's construction, the central character of a tragedy, the *protagonist*, is a person of high rank or stature. During the play, the protagonist undergoes a decline of fortune, which leads to suffering and usually to death. Integral to tragedy, according to Aristotle, is the protagonist's self-recognition (*anagnorisis* in Greek) of a fundamental mistake (*hamartia*). Self-recognition causes a reversal of fortunes (*peripeteia*) that in turn leads to demise. This dire outcome elicits pity and terror from the audience and then a purging of those emotions (catharsis) aroused by the play's events.

Shakespeare took Sophocles' blinding motif one step further in his tragedy of *King Lear,* some two thousand years later, in which Lear's friend, the Duke of Gloucester, is brutally blinded onstage by Lear's daughter and her husband. Here, Japanese actor Kazunori Akitaya plays the blinded Gloucester in a stylized Japanese production by the Globe Theatre of Tokyo. *©Robbie Jack/Corbis Historical/Getty Images*

In *Oedipus,* the title character, the King of Thebes, learns that his city is suffering from the plague because the killer of the previous king, Laius, is still on the loose. Oedipus vows to find and destroy this killer. Soon, however, Oedipus discovers that he himself had killed Laius some years ago at a crossroads (his mistake), without knowing his identity. He then finds out that Laius was also his father and that by marrying Laius's widow

Jocasta, he had married his own mother (his self-recognition). Jocasta kills herself at this discovery. Wracked with shame, Oedipus gouges out his eyes with brooches from his mother's gown, which causes the emotional release—the catharsis—of the audience.

Struggle, self-recognition, and catharsis are central to tragic drama, elevating the genre above mere sadness or sentimentality. The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume proposed that tragedy must differentiate itself from the everyday violence of the world by producing a kind of beauty. This seems like a paradox: how can something so miserable also be beautiful? But this paradox is at the heart of what makes tragedy such an esteemed form of art. Tragedy cannot simply be sad or terrifying; it is neither pathetic nor maudlin. Instead, it focuses on greatness. By involving a bold, aggressive, heroic attack against huge, perhaps insurmountable, odds, tragedy is both recognizably human and larger than life. Tragic protagonists are always flawed in some way, but they are heroes, not victims. Their instigation of the play's action and their discoveries during its course bring the audience to deep emotional and intellectual involvement at the play's climax—and then great relief at its conclusion.

Tragedy is defined in part by its characters. The journey of the protagonist is complemented by the actions of the *antagonist* ("opposer of the action"). This duality gives tragedy its fundamental conflict. Tragic protagonists go forth against superhuman antagonists—gods, ghosts, fate—and their struggle, though doomed, takes on larger-than-life proportions. Through the heat of such conflict, they assume superhuman force and offer the audience a link outwardly to divine mysteries—or inwardly to the unconscious mind. The goal of tragedy is therefore to ennoble, not sadden, us. The tragic heroes we admire will fall, but not before they heroically challenge the universe. They carry us to the brink of disaster, but it is their disaster, not ours—at least, not yet. Experiencing a tragedy allows us to contemplate and rehearse in our own minds the great conflicts that may await us.

The basic structure of tragedy is not limited to the drama of the West; it is universal. The Kuwaiti playwright and director Sulayman Al-Bassam has noted the resonance of Aristotle's ideas with Islamic traditions, from the transcendental language of Sufism to the passionate conflicts of the traditional mourning play known as *ta'ziyeh,* a spectacular presentation that commemorates the bloody Battle of Karbala. Al-Bassam notes, "The themes of tragedy are with us: insanity in war, cruelty in the nature of the human condition, an individual's impulses to self-destruction." Tragedy prompts an unflinching look inward, a confrontation with our own deepest selves. This searching gaze is ultimately a human impulse.

Because tragedy is a universal form, its exact parameters are always evolving. There is no single recipe for tragedy: what constitutes a human conflict changes as humans change. In the 1950s, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* featured a central character, Willie Loman (that is, "low man"), who faces not gods but faceless bureaucrats, insensitive children, and an impersonal capitalistic system. Miller's vision was radical, yet the soul of this genre has remained more or less the same through the millennia. Frailty, freedom, self-sacrifice, and a yearning for the sublime will always be with us, and thus, so too will tragedy.

Comedy Comedy is a very popular genre and has been a staple of the theatre since ancient times. Playwrights of all eras have written comedies—sometimes with serious themes, sometimes with particularly dark humor. At yet other times, playwrights have no purpose other than to create continuous hilarity through common devices such as full-stage chases, mistaken identities, lovers hiding in closets or under tables, sexual puns, switched potions, clever disguises (often involving cross-dressing), misheard instructions, and sheer physical buffoonery; such works are usually labeled *farce*. Comedies have been immensely popular in all ages, but because they are about ordinary life rather than larger-than-life heroes, they usually lose their popularity sooner. And because they rarely probe as deeply into human destiny as do tragedies, they offer less fertile ground for academic scholarship and are less frequently published in anthologies, examined in scholarly literature, or placed on college course syllabi. Nevertheless, some comedies (particularly those of Shakespeare and Molière) are considered true masterpieces of human observation. Comedy's

Stagecraft

Genre-ly Speaking

Shakespeare often has brightly parodied the division of plays into genres, a practice that in his time was already becoming almost an affectation. In *Hamlet,* Polonius describes an acting company as "the best actors in the world, either for tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral; scene individable, or poem unlimited."

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is often considered the American theatre's finest tragedy, since its protagonist, the likeable but morally flawed Willy Loman, experiences a decline of fortune that eventually leads to his suicide. Here, in a dream sequence from the much-heralded 1999 Goodman Theatre production, Brian Dennehy as Willy (*center*) leans on the shoulders of his two sons (played by Kevin Anderson and Ted Koch), not as they are now but as he remembers them from better days. *©AF archive/Alamy Stock Photo*

The genre of tragedy is truly universal. Pictured here is a scene from *Richard III: An Arab Tragedy,* adapted and directed by Sulayman Al-Bassam. This version of Shakespeare's tragedy changes its setting to an unnamed Persian Gulf country but retains the themes at its core. *©Richard Termine*

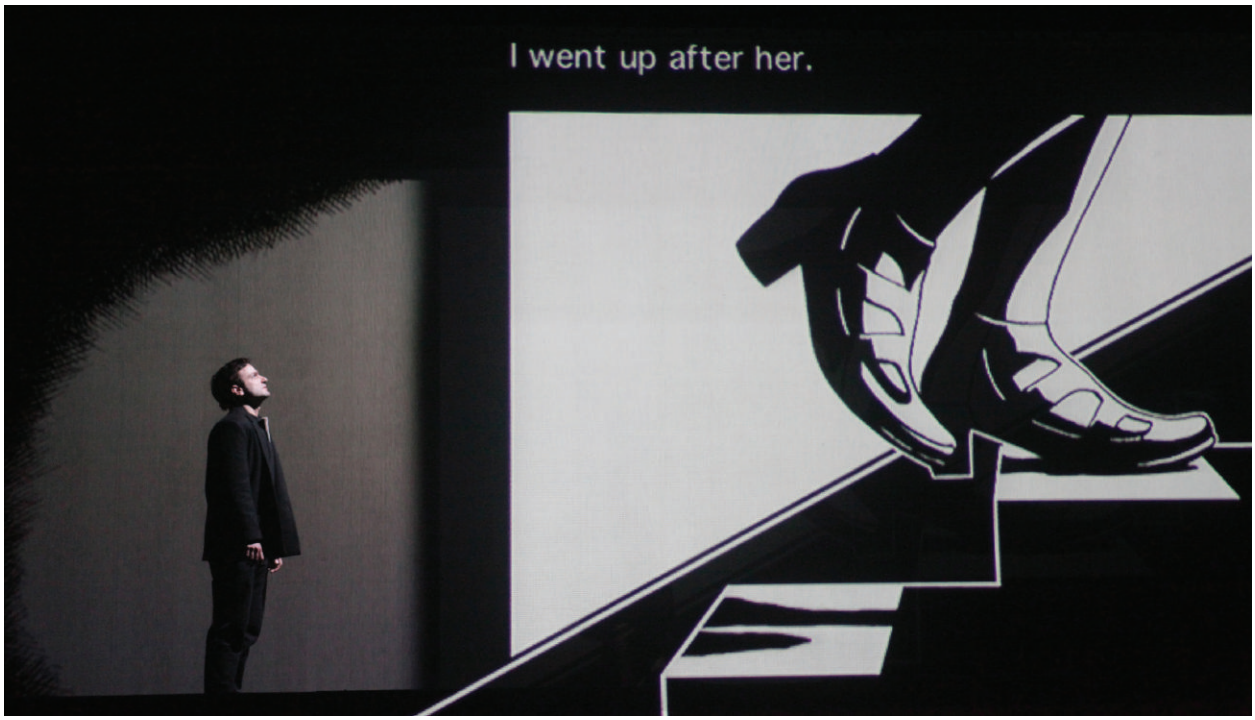
The fact that drama is a category of literature does not mean that it is necessarily serious, much less profound. Shakespeare, for example, is best known for his tragedies, but his comedies are among the greatest theatrical achievements of all time. This hilarious 2014 production of *Comedy of Errors* was directed by Blanche McIntyre at the replica of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London, with Matthew Needham (*left*) as Antipholus of Ephesus and Jamie Wikes (*right*) as Dromio of Ephesus. *©Geraint Lewis/Alamy Stock Photo*

place in the theatre world is every bit as secure as tragedy's, and comedy is as popular now as it was in the fifth century B.C.E., the era of the ancient Greek comic playwright Aristophanes.

Other Genres Other genres are defined from time to time, and playwrights often have fun creating genres of their own. The *history play* first came to popularity in the sixteenth century when Shakespeare wrote plays that depicted events that occurred decades before he was born. We still occasionally see works that examine historical figures; examples include George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*, Bertolt Brecht's *Galileo*, Alan Bennett's *The Madness of George III,* Lynn Nottage's *Las Meninas,* and, more recently, Mike Bartlett's *King Charles III,* which cheekily envisions the early reign of Britain's modern-day monarch in the verse of a Renaissance history play. More common today is the *documentary drama* (or *docudrama*), which makes use of actual documents—court records, for example, or transcribed interviews—to lend a sense of timeliness to the plot. The multitalented theatre artist Anna Deveare Smith is one of the leading lights of this genre. Smith's productions feature her embodying an array of roles, each a real-life person whose every spoken word is a direct transcription of an interview conducted by Smith herself. Recently, her production *Notes from the Field* focused on race, education, and incarceration; her "characters" included a pastor, a protester, an imprisoned mother, and many more.

Many genres exist in between the major categories. *Melodrama*, whose heyday was the nineteenth century, is embellished with spectacular staging and flamboyant dialogue, along with highly suspenseful, contrived plotting. Melodramas lack the moral complexity, bleak endings, or catharsis of tragedy. When performed today, they are almost always staged as parodies of their originals and played for laughs. Other hybrid genres have resurged as of late, as with recent productions that blend docudrama with tragedy. In Beirut, at the Al-Madina Theatre, a 2014 production of Sophocles' classical Greek tragedy *Antigone*—a sequel of sorts to his *Oedipus*—featured a cast of actual Syrian refugees. The performers interspersed the ancient drama with monologues about their harrowing real-life stories. In this instance, the shocking relevance of a current issue melds with the universal themes of suffering in the ancient form.

Sometimes genres can bring in art forms outside of theatre altogether. The *Tanztheatre* (dance-theatre) of the late, celebrated director-choreographer Pina Bausch incorporates dramatic elements like impersonation and narrative, while also relying on the highly technical and physically daunting movements of dance. Is a Pina



The Chilean theatre company Teatrocinema incorporates elements of film (animation, projection) with live performance, as demonstrated here in a scene from its critically acclaimed 2016 production *Historia de Amor.* ©Krissi Lundgren/Photoshot/Newscom

Bausch production a play or a dance? It's hard to say, which is the point. Her work provokes us by making us realize how thin the borders are between types of media. Many plays also incorporate film, as with the Chilean company Teatrocinema. (Like Bausch, this group combines two art forms in their name; "teatrocinema" means "theatre-cinema.") With live action and video, their work, such as the celebrated *Historia de Amor,* is hard to pin down as either theatre or cinema. Is it both? Or something new? Genres exist to be challenged and to challenge our expectations.

Furthermore, any system of classification should allow for the fact that each play is unique. The grouping of any two or more plays into a common genre is only a convenience for purposes of comparison and analysis. Maybe one person's tragedy is another's comedy. But applying genres can help us comprehend the broad spectrum of purposes to which plays may be put, and help us to perceive important similarities and differences between individual works. For the theatre artist, awareness of the possibilities inherent in each genre—together with knowledge of the achievements made in each—stimulates the imagination and aids in setting standards and ambitions.

Dramaturgy: The Construction of Drama and Dramatic Performance

A play is action, but it is *patterned* action. Unlike the action of, say, a street riot, dramatic action has clearly identifiable components and a specified beginning and ending. Even when improvised or radically experimental, a play's dramatic action tends to be crafted in patterns. We call these patterns a play's *dramaturgy*.

Action provides a play's thrills and excitement—Oedipus gouged out his eyes—while dramaturgy provides meaning by giving the action context—Oedipus gouged out his eyes *after finding out about his past* and *before he is exiled.* Dramaturgy leads an audience to see the play's action as consequential rather than as a random series of events. So while a street riot may be action, dramaturgy would lend structure and shape by determining how we *experience* the riot: Which characters do we follow? What events do we see unfold onstage? What information do we find out—and when? Action gives us the block of clay, but dramaturgy sculpts it. The most successful dramaturgy can create a profound engagement with the audience's thoughts and feelings.

The term "dramaturgy" also refers to the ingredients of the play: the elements that are needed to make it a play, such as plot, character, sound, and so on. These two different definitions of dramaturgy—the play's *components,* or what it is made of, and its *timeline,* or order of events—give us two different ways to analyze a play. As such, dramaturgy supplies us with a language to examine the theatre. Let's take a look at both aspects.

DRAMA'S COMPONENTS

The division of plays into components is an ancient practice begun by Aristotle. Although Aristotle spoke of tragedy in particular, his breakdown of dramatic elements has been influential to nearly all theatre since. He identified six components: plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle—in that order of importance. With some modification, Aristotle's list still provides a helpful breakdown of the major elements of most dramas, although the importance of each component is a matter of debate. Let's take a look at each component, as well as the conventions of theatre.

Plot Although we may think of *plot* as synonymous with story, the meanings of the two words are actually quite different. The story is simply the narrative of what happens in the play, as might be described by someone who has seen it. Plot refers to *why* things happen, not just *that* they do. Plot thus encompasses the means of storytelling. When we talk about plot, we refer to the order of characters' entrances and exits onstage as well as the order of what those characters do: the revelations, reversals, quarrels, discoveries, and actions that take place onstage. Plot is therefore the structure of actions, both external (a man shoots his brother) and internal (a man is overcome with guilt for committing murder). Perhaps Aristotle listed plot foremost among drama's six elements because it essentially makes drama dramatic. Without plot, we simply have a random series of events.

Character The word *character* can mean different things today. We speak of someone "having character" in terms of having a particular quality or virtue, and we speak of the "characters," or letters, of an alphabet. This latter definition may seem to be an anomaly, but it is actually closer to the way Aristotle used the term: as something formed by text. An understanding of character both as something formed and as a container of particular qualities helps us understand what Aristotle meant. Characters are fictional (formed by writing) and yet they seem human (they possess qualities).

Sometimes characters are simple and contrived—sometimes on purpose!—and other times they are as deeply felt as people we know. Many theatre traditions, like Italian *commedia dell'arte* of the Renaissance or classical Chinese opera, intentionally use "types" of characters rather than fleshed-out individuals. These "stock" characters are then fleshed out in live performance, where actors improvise their lines and movement. Other characters are drawn in intense, lifelike detail on the page, right down to their posture, hair, clothes, and histories. Eugene O'Neill's play *Long Day's Journey Into Night* features characters taken from his own past, and the text is filled with precise descriptions recalled from his personal memories.

However the characters appear in the text, they ultimately become human only when they are performed. It is when we see actors take on a character that we react to them, and only then can the play be fully realized.

Thought Aristotle used the word "thought" not in the sense of a mental picture or idea, but to refer to what a play is expressing: the arguments and concepts that emerge as a result of its performance. It is similar to the word "theme" as we use it today. A play's theme is an abstraction. It's not something you can point to, like an actor or a costume, and it's not immediately evident in the text, like plot. Some plays have obvious themes, such as Euripides' *The Trojan Women* (the horrors of war) or Molière's *The Bourgeois Gentleman* (the foolishness of social pretense). Other plays have less clearly defined themes, and the most provocative of these plays have given rise to much debate over what its theme is. In some cases, the lack of a clear theme is itself a theme: the plays lack conceptual unity just as the characters do, and the search for meaning becomes one of the play's central qualities. The recent play *An Octoroon* by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins begins with a surrogate of the playwright facing the audience and telling us that he isn't sure what he wanted to write about. The ensuing play—an adaptation of a nineteenth-century melodrama—becomes a vehicle for his own search for an understanding of his identity.

Sometimes a theme can change drastically over time. For example, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, which features a complex portrayal of a Jewish character in an anti-Semitic environment, cannot help but seem different today than it did before the Holocaust. If you read reviews of current plays, you will no doubt see talk of "relevance." Usually what this means is that the play's themes take on a new meaning in light of the context of its production. *The Laramie Project,* a piece of theatre devised by a group of artists in response to the 1998 murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student, is a popular play in the United States,

Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night,* considered an American masterpiece, features details drawn directly from the playwright's life, from the characters to the dimensions of the house. Pictured here is a scene from the 2015 Broadway revival, starring (*left to right*) Jessica Lange, Gabriel Byrne, John Gallagher Jr., and Michael Shannon.
©Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux

but the play arguably took on even more relevance in a recent production in Uganda, a country that has outlawed homosexuality. Themes are ultimately *why* plays are produced—they are the beating heart of the theatre.

Diction If the theme is *what* is expressed, then diction is *how.* We use the term to describe the quality of a play's language. At times, the language can be almost musical; consider, for example, this passage from Suzan-Lori Parks's *In the Blood*:

WELFARE: My dear husband.
The hours he keeps.
The money he brings home.
Our wonderful children.
The vacations we go on.
My dear husband he needed
a little spice.
And I agreed. We both need spice.
We both hold very demanding jobs.
We put an ad in the paper: "Husband and Bi-Curious Wife seeking—"
But the women we got:
Hookers. Neurotics. Gold diggers!

The character is simply known as "Welfare," and here we see how the characteristics of her language reveal aspects of her personality. There is repetition in phrases ("My dear husband") as well as rhythm: the first five lines end quickly with a period. But the sixth line ends with a hanging phrase ("My dear husband he needed") and the seventh line picks up the end of the sentence ("a little spice"). This is a poetic technique called enjambment: after getting the audience used to a specific rhythm—the rat-a-tat of the first lines—we suddenly break the pattern. Why? Perhaps this is the moment when the character breaks, too—when she can no longer order her thoughts. We see here how diction affects the other elements. We learn about her character and the play's theme. (And the plot moves along, as well—the woman who answers the ad in the paper, Hester, is the protagonist of the play.)

Diction need not always be complicated or even beautiful. It can be simple. Some of the most devastating lines in drama are also the smallest: after a young woman in Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* asks her father if she can play piano with her distant stepmother, and thus begin a

friendship with her, she returns and says, soberly: "He said no." The act ends, as do her hopes.

Music Aristotle called music the "most pleasing" of the elements of drama. We should remember, however, that plays in Aristotle's time were sung or chanted, not simply spoken. That mode of presentation has all but disappeared, yet music, more broadly understood, remains directly or indirectly present in almost all plays performed today.

Such music can take many forms. Songs are common in the plays of Shakespeare; oftentimes in the Renaissance actors would break into a popular song (sometimes with little relevance to the play) to entertain the audience. More natural-seeming playwrights use music as well. Perhaps a recording is played onstage, or characters sing together, as in August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone,* when a group of freed slaves erupts into a "Juba," or call-and-response song derived from African chants that had been sung on the plantation. This music is not simply adornment: it tells us something deep and profound about the characters' heritage and trauma.

Sometimes music underscores dramatic action but is not heard by the characters. This kind of music is a *score*, which is created and implemented by a sound designer. A score can do many things: it can punctuate the play's action, intensify its rising suspense and climaxes, or simply keep up the energy while one scene transitions into another. But no matter what, a score aims to move the audience to an ever-deepening engagement.

Of course, there are genres of theatre that depend entirely on music. The *musical* is the most obvious, and we will devote an entire chapter to that form later on. Similarly, some non-Western cultures have historically developed theatre and musical traditions together. The rough equivalent of Aristotle's *Poetics* in China is the *Yue Ji* ("On Music") written by Confucian disciples in the fifth to fourth century B.C.E. The Chinese performance scholar and artist William Sun calls Chinese theatre "a culture of music," and indeed, traditional Chinese theatre often blurs the line between musical and theatrical performance.

Spectacle Aristotle's sixth component, spectacle, encompasses the visual aspects of production: scenery, costumes, lighting, makeup, properties, and the overall look of the theatre and stage. Spectacle need not be over-the-top; the word simply refers to its original definition, "something seen." Although this point may seem obvious, it is crucial. Theatre is as much a visual experience as it is an aural, emotional, and intellectual one.

Sometimes spectacle is the most memorable part of a play, as with the chandelier that crashes to the ground at the end of the first act of *Phantom of the Opera* or the helicopter that descends in *Miss Saigon.* But spectacle can be subtle, too. A simple arrangement of bodies and objects onstage—the term used by theatre artists is *mise-en-scène,* which means literally "seen in the scene"—can be just as startling as an awesome display of pyrotechnics. Some of the most powerful examples of spectacle are no more than a group of people in an everyday environment. The end of *Hamilton,* arguably the most famous piece of theatre in the world today, is strikingly straightforward: the actors walk to the edge of the stage and look out over the audience as they sing the final lines. There are no special effects, no splashy multimedia. The "spectacle" on display is nothing more than performers on a stage, yet it is profoundly affecting—we are reminded that these historical figures are, at their core, just people, as flawed and complex as any of us.

The crucial question to ask with spectacle is not "how big or small is it?" but "does it enhance the other elements of drama?" When spectacle works—when it is in sync with all the other elements—it serves the story, rather than existing for its own sake.

Convention To those six Aristotelian components we can today add a seventh category: convention. Theatre conventions are, simply put, the agreements between audience and actor. Conventions are why audiences know that—for instance—when the stage lights fade out, the play (or act) is over. If a character walks onstage in the first seconds of a play and says, "This desert goes on for miles," we immediately understand that we are to accept the stage setting as a desert: we believe the character. Other common conventions of the Western stage over the centuries have included the following:

- When an actor turns directly away from the other actors and speaks to the audience, the other characters are presumed not to hear the actor. This is the convention of the *aside* (a line addressed directly to the audience, unheard by the other characters).
- When actors all leave the stage and then they or others reenter (particularly when the lights change), time has elapsed. And if one actor then says to another, "Welcome to Padua," we are now in Padua, even if in the previous scene was in Verona.
- When actors "freeze" and the lighting dims, time itself has stood still—the narrative has been paused. If one character continues to act while the others freeze, we are gaining access to the character's thoughts.

Conventions become most clearly defined when an audience witnesses theatre in another cultural setting. In the

According to one Chinese theatre convention, a man paddling with an oar signifies "boatman," "boat," and "water" alike. Here, multiple performers use this convention in *Dragon Boat Racing,* the Chinese dance-drama spectacular presented in 2016 at Lincoln Center in New York City. *©Slaven Vlasic/Getty Images*

wayang kulit shadow puppet theatre of Bali, for example, the play is over when the "tree of life" puppet, previously seen only in motion, comes to a standstill at the center of the stage. In the ancient noh drama of Japan, the audience realizes that words sung by chorus members are to be considered speeches spoken by the actors who are dancing, and the audience interprets gestures with a fan to indicate wind, rain, or the rising moon. In the Chinese xiqu, or traditional opera, a character entering the bare stage while holding a boat paddle is understood to be rowing across a river, and one entering with a whip is understood to be riding a horse.

Playwrights and directors have long enjoyed subverting theatrical conventions or inventing new ones. The ancient Greek playwright Euripides ended his tragedy *Medea* with a mise-en-scène that was unthinkable at the time: a murderous sorceress atop the *skene* (the small houselike structure at the rear of the stage)—the place usually reserved for the gods. In one swift gesture, the play lets us know that divine order has been ruined. More recently, Peter Shaffer's 1965 *Black Comedy*, which is set in a room during a complete blackout, employs a simple but effective convention: when the lights are off for the characters, the stage lights are actually on, and when the lights are on for the characters, the stage lights are off. In effect we, the audience, see them stumble around with perfect clarity and hear them speak calmly in the dark. Robert O'Hara's 2015 satire *Barbecue* employs two alternate casts, each with the same names and family relations, occupying the same public park. One cast is used for one scene, then the other for the next, then back to the first, and so on. The crucial difference is one cast is black and the other is white. The audience initially doesn't know what's going on: Are they the same characters? If they are different, why do they have the same names? We get our answer right before the intermission in a stunning revelation, but until then we are curious about what convention O'Hara is using. Indeed, there is no formal requirement for the establishment of theatrical conventions except that audiences must "agree" to suspend disbelief and accept them.

The seven components of every play—Aristotle's six plus the conventions that frame them—are the raw material of drama. Some plays emphasize one or more components; most great productions show artistry in all.

Balancing these aspects in theatrical presentations is one of the primary challenges facing the director, who may be called on to clarify and elaborate a theme, find the visual mode of presentation that best supports the action, develop and flesh out the characterizations to give strength and meaning to the plot, heighten a musical effect, or clarify the convention—the relationship between play and audience—that will maximize the play's artistic impact. As important as each of these components is to the theatrical experience, it is ultimately their combination and interaction, not their individual power, that are crucial to a production's success.

DRAMA'S TIMELINE

The *timeline* of dramaturgy focuses on the structure of experience: When are we held in suspense? When are we learning about the world of the play? When do we begin to breathe easy again? When do we know the play is over? We can divide the timeline into three major groupings: pre-play, play, and post-play. The play itself, of course, receives the most attention and includes additional elements of the timeline, including the exposition, conflict, climax, and denouement. However, the surrounding pre-play and post-play have been part of the overall theatrical experience from the theatre's earliest days and also deserve attention.

Pre-Play Pre-play begins with the attraction of an audience. Theatre has had this responsibility in every era, for there can be no "seeing place" without those who see.

How do plays get an audience to show up? They advertise. The procession is one of the oldest known ways of publicizing the theatre. The circus parade, which still takes place in some of the smaller towns of Europe and the United States, is a remnant of a once-universal form of advertisement for the performing arts that probably began well in advance of recorded history. The Greeks of ancient Athens opened their great dramatic festivals with a *proagon* (literally, "pre-action") in which both playwrights and actors were introduced at a huge public meeting and given a chance to speak about the plays they were to present on subsequent days. The Elizabethans flew flags atop their playhouses on performance days, enticing hundreds away from their commercial and religious activities. The lighted marquees of Broadway theatres around Times Square and of West End theatres in London are modern-day equivalents of those flags, signaling their entertainments to passersby. Today, posters, email blasts, Facebook posts, multicolor subscription brochures, media events, elaborate press releases, tweets, and, in New York, flashy television commercials summon patrons out of the comfort of their homes and into the theatre.

Once gathered at the theatre's door, the audience remains a collection of individuals preoccupied with their daily concerns. Now the theatre must transform its spectators into a community devoted to the concerns of the play. Ushers may lead them into the audience area, showing them to their seats and providing them with written programs that will prepare them for what they are about to see. Pre-show music or sound effects may be used to set a mood or tone, while stage lights may "warm" a curtain or illuminate the revealed stage and scenery with a romantic or eerie glow, creating the anticipation of dramatic actions about to take place. The 2015 musical *Natasha, Pierre & the Great Comet of 1812* welcomed its audience members with a pierogi (a Russian dumpling); by sharing a meal, those in attendance felt more intimately involved with the play and with each other. Sometimes there is activity onstage when the audience enters. Perhaps a few actors are engaged in quiet pre-show activity as incoming audience members observe the scene. Some playwrights deliberately begin to build the world of the play in the pre-play before the play proper has begun: Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love* features one character, "The Old Man," rocking in a chair onstage as everyone enters. The play hasn't begun yet, but we are drawn into its world.

Finally, in the moments before the play begins, there is usually an announcement for audience members to turn off their cell phones. Then the houselights dim, and (if all goes well) the audience is transported into the world of the play. As the familiar theatrical saying goes, "It's magic time."

Play In contrast to staged events such as performance art and stand-up comedy, a play normally contains a sequence of identifiable elements. Aristotle tells us that the plot of a drama has a beginning, a middle, and an end. This might sound obvious, but attention to how a play develops over time—how its sequence of events begins, builds, and concludes—is important to understanding how a play "works." Four fairly consistent features are routinely recognized in the orderly plot sequencing of a conventionally Aristotelian dramatic experience: exposition, conflict, climax, and denouement.

The Exposition. No important play has ever begun with a character dashing onstage and shouting, "The house is on fire!" Such a beginning could only confuse members of the audience, who would have no way of knowing what house is on fire or why they should care about it. Most plays, whatever their style or genre, begin with dialogue or action calculated to ease us, not shock

us, into the concerns of the characters with whom we are to spend the next two hours or so. Exposition is the background information the audience must have in order to understand what's going on in the action of a play. Sometimes the exposition is handled with little fanfare. In the "well-made plays" of the nineteenth century, a few characters—often servants (minor figures in the action to follow)—would discuss something that is about to happen and enlighten one another (and, of course, the audience) about certain details around which the plot will turn. Consider these lines from the opening scene of Henrik Ibsen's 1884 classic, *The Wild Duck*:

PETTERSEN, in livery, and JENSEN, the hired waiter, in black, are putting the study in order. From the dining room, the hum of conversation and laughter is heard.

PETTERSEN: Listen to them, Jensen; the old man's got to his feet—he's giving a toast to Mrs. Sorby.

JENSEN: (*pushing forward an armchair*) Do you think it's true, then, what they've been saying, that there's something going on between them?

PETTERSEN: God knows.

JENSEN: He used to be quite the ladies' man, I understand.

PETTERSEN: I suppose.

JENSEN: And he's giving this party in honor of his son, they say.

PETTERSEN: That's right. His son came home yesterday.

JENSEN: I never even knew old Werle had a son.

PETTERSEN: Oh, he has a son all right. But he's completely tied up at the Hoidal works. In all the years I've been here he's never come into town.

A WAITER: (*in the doorway of the other room*) Pettersen, there's an old fellow here . . .

PETTERSEN: (*mutters*) Damn. Who'd show up at this time of night?

After a few more lines, Pettersen, Jensen, and the waiter make their exits and are seen no more. Their function is purely expository—to pave the way for the principal characters. Their conversation is a contrivance intended simply to give us a framework for the action and impart information to the audience.

Sometimes plays can introduce themselves with startling simplicity. The noh theatre of Japan tends to begin with clear declarations by one character of his past and present circumstances. The play *Atsumori* begins with a priest who claims, "I am Kumagai no Naozane, a man of the country of Musashi [a famous samurai]. I have left my home and call myself the priest Rensei; this I have done because of my grief at the death of Atsumori, who fell in battle by my hand. Hence it comes that I am dressed in priestly guise." In a few lines, we are given a complex set of circumstances—the character addressing us killed someone and now is dressed as a priest. Similarly, the beginning of Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town*—a perennial favorite of community theatres and high school classrooms—starts with a character called "Stage Manager" walking onto a bare stage and telling us, "This play is called 'Our Town.' It was written by Thornton Wilder and produced by ____. In it you will see Mr. ____, Mr. ____, Mr. ____, Miss ____, Miss ____, Miss ____, and many others too numerous to mention. The name of our town is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, just over the line from Massachusetts; latitude 42 degrees, 40 minutes, longitude 70 degrees, 37 minutes." The blank spaces are to be filled in by the names of the actual producer and actors in the production. Here, as with *Atsumori,* we learn not only information about the play's plot but also its conventions: actors in both plays can address us directly. For *Our Town,* we learn that the play is aware that it is a play: it is not pretending to represent accurately any specific place, and the actors are presented as actors, not just as characters. Exposition is educational: it teaches us not only *what* we are about to watch but *how* we are to watch it.

The Conflict. *Now* is the time for the character to enter shouting, "The house is on fire!" Drama requires conflict; in fact, the word "drama," when used in daily life, implies a situation fraught with conflict. No one writes plays about characters who live every day in serenity; no one would ever choose to watch such a play. Conflict and confrontation are the mechanisms by which a situation becomes dramatic.

Why is this so? Why is conflict so theatrically interesting? Turning back to Aristotle, we can find reasons that have to do with plot, theme, and character. Plot can hold suspense only when it involves alternatives and choices: Macbeth, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* has strong reasons to murder the king and strong reasons not to. If he had only the former or only the latter, he would project no real conflict and we would not consider him such an interesting character. We are fascinated by such a character's actions largely in light of the actions he rejects and the stresses he has to endure in making his decisions. In other words, plot is about the "what if?" moments—the points in the action where another route could be taken, but isn't. In watching characters act, the audience must also watch the characters think, and a playwright gets the characters to think by putting them into conflict.

The playwright often introduces conflict early in a play, often by means of an "inciting incident" in which one character poses a conflict or confrontation either to

Drama requires conflict, and Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello* is filled with it: between father and daughter, soldiers and officers, and, fatally, husbands and wives. In the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2009 production directed by Kathryn Hunter, the tension simmers between Patrice Naiambana as Othello and Natalia Tena as Desdemona as he berates her in public while holding her like a child. *©Geraint Lewis/Alamy Stock Photo*

another character or to himself. For example, read this passage from our earlier example of *Macbeth*:

FIRST WITCH: All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

SECOND WITCH: All hail, Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

THIRD WITCH: All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!

BANQUO: Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear Things that do sound so fair?

In this scene, the inciting incident involves a witch predicting that Macbeth will be king. Macbeth's friend Banquo reacts with surprise at Macbeth "starting," or making a sudden movement. It seems as if Macbeth flinches at this possibility. But why? Perhaps he has already had this thought himself. Here, we should be hooked—we have learned enough about these characters to care, but mysteries remain that keep us engaged.

The Climax. Conflict cannot go on forever. In a play, as in life, when conflict becomes unbearable, something has to give. Every play culminates in some sort of dramatic release, like a kettle of water reaching a boiling point.

As we have seen, Aristotle describes that release, in tragedy, as the catharsis, a cleansing or purification. The catharsis, for Aristotle, releases the audience's pity and fear and thereby permits the fullest experience of tragic pleasure by washing away the terror that has been mounting steadily during the play's tragic course. The ultimate

example of catharsis in ancient Greek tragedy follows Oedipus gouging out his own eyes and recognizing his true self.

For most dramatic forms, however, the climax need not be so gruesome, and our release need not be pity or fear. A climax is simply the conflict of a play taken to its most extreme—the moment of maximum tension. At the climax, a continuation of the conflict becomes unbearable and some sort of change is mandated. Climaxes in modern plays do not, as a rule, involve death or disfiguration. Instead, climaxes inevitably contain elements of recognition and reversal, and usually the major conflicts of a play are resolved by one or more of these elements. William Gibson's *The Miracle Worker*, for example, reaches its climax when Helen Keller, a blind, deaf, mute, and uncontrollable child, finally says a word ("wawa," which we understand to mean "water") for the first time, and the audience experiences a catharsis of long-delayed joy.

The Denouement. The climax is followed by a resolution, or *denouement* (the word in French means "un-knotting"), in which a final action or speech, or even a single word or gesture, indicates that the passions aroused by the play's action are now stilled and the conflicts are over. The tenor of the denouement tends to change with the times. In the American theatre of the 1950s and 1960s, a sentimental and message-laden denouement was the rule: for instance, in Dore Schary's *Sunrise at Campobello*, a young Franklin Roosevelt, recently paralyzed from the waist down, heroically makes his way to a convention platform. Today, we tend to look with suspicion on tidy virtues and happy endings, and more ironic and ambiguous denouements prevail. The denouements of contemporary theatre, as a result, find it harder to let the audience "off the hook," favoring instead a lingering sense of unease. Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman,* written in 1964—a time of deep racial tension and animosity in America—ends with a white woman on a train stabbing a black man (whom she has been seducing for the play thus far) and then instructing the other passengers to remove his body. She then sits next to another black man, as if beginning a new seduction and a new inevitable murder. This ending purposefully does not leave us feeling resolved, but it does give us a sense of a conclusion.

But while a denouement may be indeterminate, it must still provide at least some lucidity concerning the problems raised by the play, some vision or metaphor of a deeper and more permanent understanding. Perhaps the final lines of Samuel Beckett's absurdist masterpiece *Waiting for Godot* best represent the denouement of the current age:

ESTRAGON: Well, shall we go?
VLADIMIR: Yes, let's go.
They do not move.

Post-Play The last staged element of a theatrical presentation is the *curtain call*, during which the actors bow and the audience applauds. The curtain call is not simply a time for the actors to receive congratulations from the audience. Indeed, the actor's deeply bowed head was originally an offer for his patron—the nobleman who had paid for the performance—to lop off that head with his sword if the actor had not provided satisfaction! The curtain call remains a time in which the actors show their respect for the audience that has been watching them. It is a crucial convention that liberates the audience from the world of the play. In the best theatre, the invisible communication of the curtain call is a powerful experience—and it becomes even more powerful when the entire audience leaps to its collective feet in a standing ovation. Such a response becomes a sort of audience participation for theatregoers, who physically express their enthusiasm not only to the performers but also to fellow audience members standing and cheering around them.

What follows the curtain call? The audience leaves, of course, but the individual audience members do not disappear. Through them the production enjoys an extended afterlife—both in talk and in print—in late-night discussions and debates at a restaurant or bar and probing conversations on the morning after. In the days following the curtain call, there may be published and online reviews and actor appearances on talk shows; years later, there may be scholarly articles and books. The afterlives of all the plays discussed in this book are, in a way, part of their post-production.

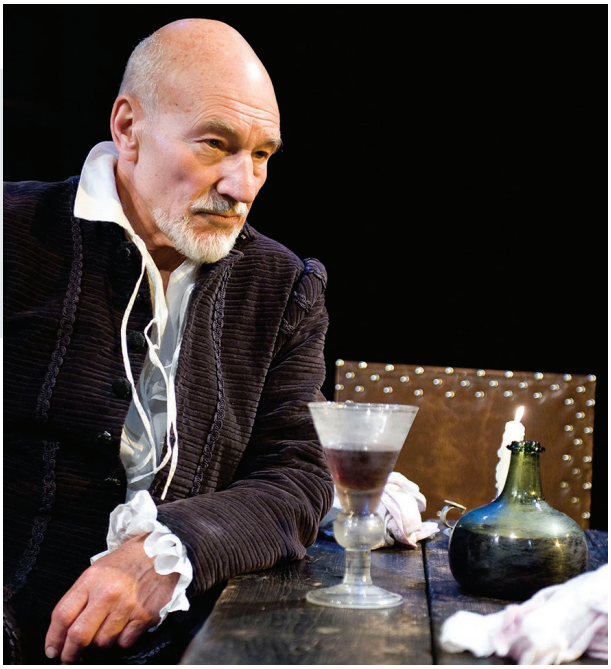
Both the post-show chat and the formally published analysis are examples of what we may call dramatic criticism, which is the audience's contribution to the theatre. Criticism is as ancient as Aristotle and as contemporary as the essays and lectures that are presented daily in newspapers, journals, books, and academies all over the world. However, criticism is not solely an expert enterprise; criticism—which combines analysis and evaluation—is everybody's job. We look further at this key aspect of the theatre's art in the chapter titled "The Audience."

Design Elements: *Spotlight Icon: ©McGraw-Hill Education; Theatrical Masks: ©Ingram Publishing/Alamy Stock Photo; Camera: ©Tatiana Popova/Shutterstock*

Chapter

3

The Actor



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She stands alone in the darkness and listens carefully. A few feet away, onstage, she sees her fellow actors awash under bright lights and speaking the lines she has heard so many times before. Soon—any moment now!—she will walk onstage. Her heart races as she tries to stay relaxed while feeling exhilarated by the sense of something about to engulf her.

The energy onstage is palpable: it is there in the eyes of the actors, the pace of the dialogue, the smell of the makeup, the sparkle of perspiration glittering in the lights, the bursts of audience laughter and applause.

She glances back. Backstage, there is energy, too. But this is a different energy. It is under the surface, restrained. Some of the other actors backstage bend their knees and roll their necks. Some gaze thoughtfully at the action of the play. Some stare at the walls, murmuring quietly to themselves. In one corner, a stage manager, his body hunched over a dimly lighted copy of the script, whispers commands into his headset.

Suddenly the onstage pace seems to quicken; the lines, all at once, take on a greater urgency and familiarity. It is almost her cue . . . she listens attentively . . . it is almost her cue . . . she takes a deep breath, a deeper breath . . . it is her cue! She bounds from the dimness into the dazzle and comes to life. She is onstage.

Acting is one of the world's most bewildering professions. On the one hand, it carries the potential for extraordinary rewards. The thrill of delivering a great performance, the roar of appreciation from an enraptured audience, the glory of getting "inside" a character—these are excitements and satisfactions that few careers can duplicate. An actor's rewards aren't purely artistic and intellectual, either: some become stars and make millions of dollars. The fame that can follow is legendary, even frightening: the private lives of the most universally admired actors become public property, the daily fare of television talk shows and Internet gossip.

On the other hand, the economic rewards are often paltry. The six- and seven-figure salaries of the stars bear little relation to the meager pay for which most actors work—if they're lucky enough to get paid at all. And although the stars billed "above the title" may be treated like celebrities or royalty and can be the most prominent aspect of a particular play, they are also, paradoxically, at the bottom of the pecking order. Actors take orders from directors, get bossed about by stage managers, and are hired and fired by producers; they are squeezed and fitted by costumers and wig dressers and poked and powdered by makeup artists. Being an actor offers the thrill of the spotlight, but it also offers the humility of knowing you are only a small part—albeit a very visible one—of the overall theatrical process. Because of its potential for sublimity, however, acting offers a tantalizing path for many people willing to risk its potentially less attractive qualities. As you are reading this, someone somewhere is deciding—with a mix of excitement and fear—to pursue acting as an occupation. Certainly no other profession entails such numbing uncertainties and sacrifices while offering such rich rewards.

Approaches to Acting

Acting is above all a craft. It is not simply a "gift" bestowed from the heavens—although historically it has been associated with divine connection. It takes work and practice. The craft of acting can be defined in two opposing ways. One way is that an actor creates a performance *externally,* first by imagining how his or her character should walk, talk, and behave, and then by imitating these imagined behaviors when performing the character. Another way is that acting is created *internally*, by concentrating not on imitating behavior but actually experiencing the life of the character—his or her emotions, memories, and

Actors are often celebrated for their virtuosity—their ability to embody a wide range of emotions, situations, and characters. Such skill was certainly on display in this celebrated 2017 production of Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes,* where Laura Linney (*left*) and Cynthia Nixon (*right*), pictured here with Michael McKean (*center*), alternated lead roles on different nights. *©Joan Marcus*

The Irish English actor Kenneth Branagh is best known in the United States for his films (*Hamlet, Henry V, Much Ado About Nothing, Othello, Thor, Cinderella*) and for his 2013–2014 starring role in *Macbeth* in New York City. Globally, he is deeply admired on the stage for his dramatic passion, clearly apparent here in his 2008 performance in the title role of Chekhov's *Ivanov* in London. *©Geraint Lewis/Alamy Stock Photo*

sensations—as if the actor really were the character, and not just performing.

For the sake of explanation, we will discuss an "external method" and an "internal method," even though there is no such thing as a *purely* internal or external approach to acting. However, there are techniques that emphasize one way over the other.

THE EXTERNAL METHOD

The external method, as the name suggests, starts from "outside" the character. When actors works externally, they will train their bodies intensively by seeking to master a wide variety of performance styles, such as singing, dancing, clowning, miming, and fencing. To take one example of an external technique, the director Anne Bogart has developed a method known as Viewpoints, adapted from a dance composition technique of the same name. Viewpoints consists of nine ways of thinking of time and space onstage: tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, repetition, space, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography. Actors trained in Viewpoints are practiced and attentive to the exact position of their body and how it relates to the other bodies that share their space. They will learn to be both "in the moment"—responding to their scene partners and the shifting circumstances onstage—and capable of thinking of how they fit into the wider stage picture at all times.

The renowned Japanese director and teacher Tadashi Suzuki—who actually founded a theatre company with Bogart in 1992—has also developed an external method of performing. Suzuki's actors spend hours striking and holding physically excruciating poses, stomping on the ground, and learning what he calls a "grammar of the feet." His approach, which draws from many global influences, is less focused on creating a psychological "character" onstage than on creating a compelling presence.

Even if aspiring actors do not subscribe to Bogart's or Suzuki's methods, they will need to focus on external qualities in their approach. The two primary external qualities that all actors need, regardless of their philosophy, are their voice and body.

Throughout history, the actor's voice has received tremendous attention. Greek tragic actors were awarded prizes for their vocal abilities, and many contemporary actors, such as Patrick Stewart, James Earl Jones, Rachel Weisz, Audra McDonald, and Meryl Streep, are celebrated for their stunning tones. Voices can be dizzyingly diverse: resonant, mellow, sharp, musical, stinging, poetic, seductive, compelling, lulling, or dominating—and sometimes all of these qualities in the same performance. A trained theatrical voice can articulate complex ideas rapidly and explain subtleties clearly and convincingly. It can rivet attention while conveying nuances, can both thunder with rage and flow with compassion, and can, in major moments, hold audiences absolutely spellbound.

Actors' use of their body—the capacity for movement—is the other fundamental element of external acting. Most of the best actors are strong and flexible; all are capable of great physical self-mastery. The effects that can be achieved through precise and subtle stage movement are as numerous as those that can be achieved through voice: the gifted and well-trained actor's arched eyebrow, toss of the head, flick of the wrist, whirl of the hem, or even wiggle of a finger can command electric attention. Actors' command of their body has led to many memorably powerful moments in the theatre, such as Helene Weigel's powerful chest-pounding when, as Mother Courage, she loses her son; Laurence Olivier's breathtaking upside-down fall as Coriolanus; and Edward James Olmos's swift

Many theatre companies today combine acting techniques and ensemble members from a variety of world traditions. The Denmark-based company Out of Balanz stages physically dynamic and collaborative works such as 2013's *Next Door,* pictured here. In this typically kinetic stage picture, Troels Hagen Findsen is held aloft by Pekka Räikkönen. *©Tony Nandi*

leap through a giant newspaper as El Pachuco. Entire traditions of acting depend fundamentally on learning specific bodily movement and conventions. Students of Chinese opera practice poses and facial expressions specific to the type of character they will eventually take on as their specialty. Japanese *kabuki* theatre similarly focuses on physical mastery in crafting characters; like Chinese opera, kabuki consists of a set of character types, each with its own specific regimen of positions and movements.

THE INTERNAL METHOD

In contrast to the external method, the internal method asks the actor to enter into the mind and emotional state of the character being played. Such an actor tries to "be" the character onstage, not just present the audience with a made-up imitation of an imagined individual. You have probably heard stories of actors becoming "lost" in roles to the extent that they insist on being called by their characters' names. These are exaggerated tales, but they carry a grain of truth: there are schools of acting philosophy that aim to replicate the character's inner circumstances exactly in the mind of the performer. In the United States, the internal method known simply as "the Method" was first developed by members of the Group Theatre in New York in 1931. The American tradition of realistic acting largely relies on the internal method that the Group Theatre—and later, from its ashes, the Actors Studio—created. This approach believes that theatrical performance must strive to replicate real life, and it must do so by delving into the biography and inner world of the character.

In developing their methods, the Group Theatre had been inspired by the work of the Russian acting theorist Konstantin Stanislavski (1863–1938). When Stanislavski and his Moscow Art Theatre visited the United States in 1924 and 1925, they astounded American audiences

No American actor in the past forty years has come close to equaling the achievement, both artistic and commercial, of Meryl Streep. Streep began in the theatre before crossing over into films. By 2015 she had received more Academy Award nominations (twenty) than any other performer, but Streep remains closely connected to the stage. She is shown here in 2006 taking a bow after playing in one of the most demanding roles in modern theatre, the title role of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*. *©Bruce Glikas/FilmMagic/Getty Images*

Edward James Olmos electrified audiences in the 1978 premiere of Luis Valdez's *Zoot Suit,* a seminal work of Latinx (a gender-inclusive way of referring to people of Latin American descent) drama. With his angular posture and unforgettable entrance—he slashes through a giant newspaper—Olmos demonstrated the power of physically embodying a role. Here, Olmos revises the role at a 50th anniversary celebration of the Center Theatre Group in Los Angeles, where *Zoot Suit* originally premiered. *©Rich Polk/Center Theatre Group/Getty Images*

with an intensely realistic and convincing acting style. Stanislavski described his own system as the actor "living the life of his or her character on stage" and many American actors eagerly took up this charge. The wider American public first encountered Stanislavski's acting philosophy through his 1936 book *An Actor Prepares,* which declares that "our prime task is . . . to create the inner life of the character." By "inner life" Stanislavski meant all the messy, unruly aspects of our personalities that we typically hide—or try to hide—from our outward appearances, such as anger, love, fear, and confusion. But how can actors show these internal parts of themselves onstage? If they overdo it, the performance can seem fake. If they hide their emotions, they can seem robotic and uninteresting. Stanislavski's ingenious solution was to suggest that actors base their performance on the pursuit of their character's task (in Russian, *zadacha,* which can also be translated as "problem" or "objective"). By concentrating on winning their character's task instead of simply being seen as great actors, Stanislavski discovered, actors can eliminate stage fright, be immersed in their character, and convincingly represent their character as a real and whole person rather than simply a fictional representation.

Stanislavski was not the first person to propose this strategy, but he was the first to turn it into an organized system. By focusing on motivations, he found a way to lend dignity and purpose to staged action. He declared: "Everything that happens onstage must occur for some