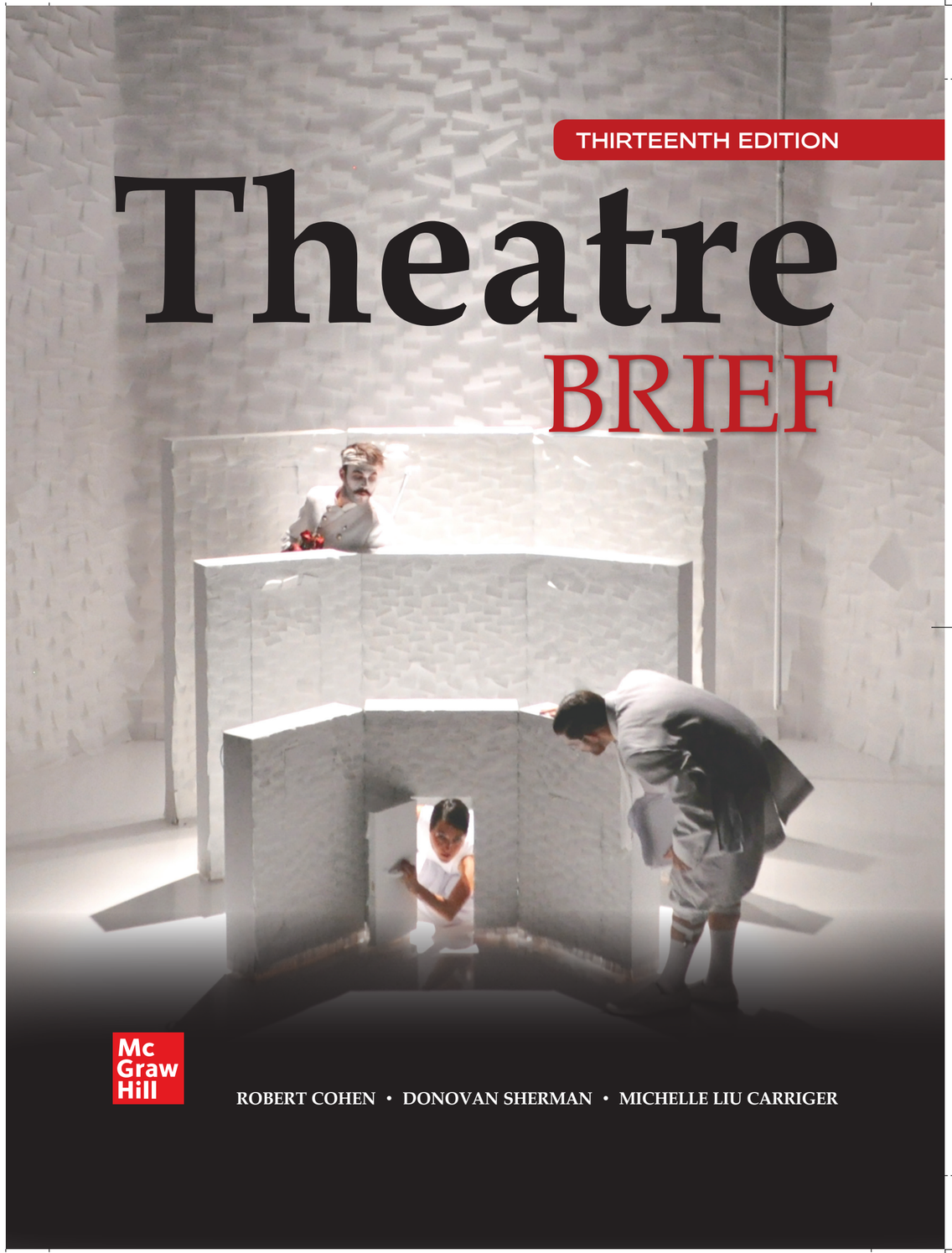
ISBN 978-1-264-30032-7
MHID 1-264-30032-8
EAN 9 781264 300327 90000
mheducation.com/highered

THIRTEENTH EDITION

Theatre BRIEF

COHEN • SHERMAN • CARRIGER

Mc Graw Hill



Theatre Brief

Thirteenth Edition

Theatre Brief

Thirteenth Edition

Robert Cohen

Claire Trevor Professor of Drama
University of California, Irvine

Donovan Sherman

Seton Hall University

Michelle Liu Carriger

University of California, Los Angeles

Mc Graw Hill

THEATRE BRIEF, THIRTEENTH EDITION

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 LWI 27 26 25 24 23 22

ISBN 978-1-264-30032-7 (bound edition)
MHID 1-264-30032-8 (bound edition)
ISBN 978-1-265-64930-2 (loose-leaf edition)
MHID 1-265-64930-8 (loose-leaf edition)

Portfolio Manager: *Sarah Remington*
Product Developer: *Elisa Odoardi*
Marketing Manager: *Nancy Baudean*
Content Project Manager: *Lisa Bruflodt*
Buyer: *Laura Fuller*
Designer: *Aptara®, Inc.*
Content Licensing Specialist: *Brianna Kirschbaum*
Cover Image: *Used by permission of Theater Mitu and actors Julianna Bloodgood, Justin Nestor, and Corey Sullivan*
Compositor: *Aptara®, Inc.*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Cohen, Robert, 1938- author. | Sherman, Donovan, author. | Carriger, Michelle Liu, author.
Title: Theatre brief / Robert Cohen, Donovan Sherman, Michelle Liu Carriger.
Other titles: Theater brief
Description: Thirteenth edition. | New York, NY : McGraw Hill Education, [2022] | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Audience: Ages 18+ | Audience: Grades 10-12
Identifiers: LCCN 2021049786 (print) | LCCN 2021049787 (ebook) | ISBN 9781264300327 (hardcover ; acid-free paper) | ISBN 9781265649302 (spiral bound) | ISBN 9781265629427 (ebook) | ISBN 9781265650698 (ebook other)
Subjects: LCSH: Theater.
Classification: LCC PN2101 .C632 2022 (print) | LCC PN2101 (ebook) | DDC 792–dc23/eng/20211018
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021049786
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021049787

mheducation.com/highered

Preface

The new edition of *Theatre Brief* welcomes on board a new co-author, Michelle Liu Carriger, and marks a farewell of sorts for original author Robert Cohen, who has retired from active authorship but whose valuable contributions remain in the text from previous editions. In this edition, the authors have brought a stronger emphasis on international and multicultural examples to all chapters of the book, as well as a major change, seen throughout the text, that alters the chapter titles from the names of individuals ("The Playwright," "The Director") to activities ("Playwriting," "Directing"). This alteration is not merely cosmetic, but helps to structure a more fluid understanding of the shifting and interdisciplinary nature of contemporary theatre-making.

While *Theatre Brief* celebrates collaboration, it also gives its readers in-depth descriptions of specific job functions and various aspects of a play's production from beginning to end. Through its coverage of design, acting, playwriting, and directing, the textbook offers a behind-the-scenes look at professional theatre artists performing their craft. The Spotlight interview features that appear in multiple chapters include interviews with well-known figures in the field. Conducted personally by the authors, they provide readers with firsthand accounts of what it's like to work in theatre today.

The text has also been updated to reflect the latest plays throughout the world, including major productions on Broadway, in London's West End, and throughout other international locations, plus more on the latest trends in theatre production, including social and political issues and the fallout from global pandemic.

Finally, many of our chapters have a new feature, "Why Study Theatre?" Each of these items connects the chapter's topic to a possible future career—"Why Study Playwriting" looks at marketing, for instance—to help make the study of theatre accessible and appealing to a wide array of college majors.

In addition to these general additions, the 13th edition includes the following content changes:

Chapter 1: A new Spotlight feature, "Why Study Theatre?" that focuses on different professional skills gained from studying theatre.

Chapter 2: A new structure to the chapter that articulates two major ways of understanding plays as texts and as performance enactments; extensive updating that decenters Aristotelian and Western assumptions about dramatic text with significantly more international context.

Chapter 3: A new structure that examines the topics of "awareness" and "control"; a spotlight on the Method style of acting.

Chapter 4: New excerpts from a broad array of international plays, many recent; new profiles of the playwrights Jackie Sibblies Drury, Jeremy O. Harris, Lauren Gunderson, Quiara Alegría Hudes; "Why Study Playwriting" feature that focuses on careers in marketing.

Chapter 5: New organization, new sections on theatrical design beyond theatre spaces; new interview with scenic designer Clint Ramos; "Why Study Design" feature that focuses on engineering and technology.

Chapter 6: A new interview with acclaimed director Robert O'Hara; new examples from contemporary international productions; a focus on nontraditional directorial processes such as devised theatre.

Chapter 7: A complete overhaul of the chapter, removing the old East-West dichotomy, focusing on understanding the distinctions between "history" and "tradition" through attention to performance and adding additional coverage of Central American and African traditions; "Why Study Traditional Theatre" feature that discusses anthropology.

Chapter 8: New coverage of different types of stylized theatre: Socialist realism (with the case study of Chen Yun's *The Young Generation*), Theatre of the Ridiculous (Charles Ludlam's *Bluebeard*), the Black

Arts Movement (Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*), postcolonial drama (*Dilemma of a Ghost* by Ama Ata Aidoo), and experimental realism (María Irene Fornés's *Fefu and Her Friends*).

Chapter 9: New features on the rise of "alternative cabaret" and the Takarazuka Revue.

Chapter 10: An entirely new chapter that examines political and aesthetic facets of contemporary theatre, with discussion of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on theatre but also on the many trends already underway. For politics, the chapter focuses on anti-racism, gender equality, efforts to decolonize the dramatic canon, and the acceptance of different body types and abilities; for aesthetics, virtual theatre, immersive theatre, and the incorporation of new media forms like augmented reality games (ARGs). In addition, the chapter now contains a section on "The Audience" (previously a standalone chapter) that considers the ethical and artistic responsibilities of critically examining the theatre. A new interview with the theatre company 600 Highwaymen features an interview with its members, Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone.

Mastering Concepts

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 13th edition of *Theatre Brief* in SmartBook to get all-digital access to all seventeen 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.

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.

Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful for the many people who helped us revise this edition. The authors would like to thank our brilliant new interviewees, Clint Ramos, Robert O'Hara, and Abigail Browde and Michael Silverstone of 600 Highwaymen. Special mention is due to Marilyn Lintel,

assistant to Mr. Ramos, and Nicholas Polonio, assistant to Mr. O'Hara. Rebecca Johannsen offered invaluable information about intimacy direction; Melissa Teoh shared firsthand accounts of vibrant theatre happening in Singapore and Malaysia; Siyuan Liu gave us guidance on Chinese Socialist Realism; and Lap Chi Chu provided information about the latest in lighting design developments as well as a light plot image of his own. We remain deeply grateful to Lorna Cohen.

The team at McGraw Hill Higher Education has guided the creation of this edition with care and thoughtfulness. Emily Tietz, as ever, proved resourceful and imaginative in researching photos. We welcomed a new team, including Tracy Grenier and Elisa Odoardi, who helped steer the new edition's production.

Finally, we extend our utter gratitude to Robert Cohen, the guiding light of this book, whose contributions to the text and to theatre as a whole remain incalculable.

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 *The Philosopher's Toothache: Embodies Stoicism in Early Modern English Drama* (Northwestern University Press, 2021) and *Second Death: Theatricalities of the Soul in Shakespeare's Drama* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 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.* He has also co-edited many projects, including a special issue of *The Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* titled "Performance Beyond Drama" and the collection *Shakespeare and Virtue: A Handbook* (Cambridge University Press, 2022). 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. Sherman 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.

MICHELLE LIU CARRIGER is an assistant professor of Theater and Performance Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where she teaches classes on global theatre history and contemporary issues of diversity and performance. As a scholar, Carriger has published award-winning articles on cultural appropriation and clothing and nineteenth-century cross-dressing scandals in *TRI: Theatre Research International* and *TDR: The Drama Review*. Her first book, *Theatricality of the Closet: Clothing Controversies in 19th Century Britain and Japan* is forthcoming from Northwestern University Press (Fall 2022) and she is the editor of the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism.* Additional topics of teaching and research include the Japanese Way of Tea ("tea ceremony"), cheerleaders in twenty-first century drama, historical reenactment, Japanese youth street fashion, performance theory and theatricality, and pedagogy. Her pre-academia theatre work primarily consisted of backstage work like building sets and costumes, stage managing, and running crew. She completed a Ph.D. at Brown University and a Master's Degree at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where she also worked with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival as a publicity assistant, a casting assistant, and an assistant director.

Brief Contents

Preface v
Introduction 1

Chapter 1 What Is Theatre? 6
Chapter 2 What Is a Play? 20
Chapter 3 Acting 36
Chapter 4 Playwriting 55
Chapter 5 Design and Technology 82
Chapter 6 Directing 139
Chapter 7 Theatre Traditions and Histories 181
Chapter 8 The Modern Theatre 209
Chapter 9 Musical Theatre 235
Chapter 10 Theatre Today 251

Glossary G-1
Selected Bibliography B-1
Index I-1

Chapter 11 The Ancients
Chapter 12 The Middle Ages
Chapter 13 The Renaissance
Chapter 14 The Theatre of Asia
Chapter 15 The Royal Era
Chapter 16 The Modern Theatre: Realism
Chapter 17 The Modern Theatre: Antirealism
Appendix: Enjoy the Play!

Contents

Preface v

Introduction 1

Chapter 1 **What Is Theatre? 6**

SPOTLIGHT: **Why Study Theatre? 7**

The Theatre Building 8

The Theatre Company 10

The Occupation of Theatre 10

Work 11

Art 13

Impersonation 13

Performance 13

Live Performance 16

Scripted and Rehearsed Performance 17

SPOTLIGHT: **Film Stars on Stage Acting 18**

Chapter 2 **What Is a Play? 20**

The Play: Event and Text 20

Drama: Recipe and Receipt 21

Dramaturgy: The Conventions and Construction of Play-Texts 21

Convention 21

SPOTLIGHT: **Closet Drama 22**

Duration 24

Genre 25

Tragedy 26

Comedy 27

Other Genres 27

Aristotle's Dramaturgy 28

Plot 28

Character 29

Thought 29

Diction 29

Music 30

Spectacle 31

Plays in Performance: A Timeline 31
Pre-Play 31
Play 31
The Exposition 32
The Conflict 32
The Climax 33
The Denouement 34
Post-Play 34

Chapter 3 **Acting 36**

SPOTLIGHT: **Why Study Acting? 38**

Approaches to Acting 40
Awareness 41
Control 41
Presence and the Paradox of Acting 42

SPOTLIGHT: **The Method 44**

STAGECRAFT: **Basic Acting Exercises 46**

Becoming an Actor 47
Creating a Character 47
The Actor's Discipline 49
The Actor's Routine 49
Audition 49
Rehearsal 50

PHOTO ESSAY: **Actor Sir Patrick Stewart 51**

Performance 54

Chapter 4 **Playwriting 55**

Playwriting as Event Writing 55

SPOTLIGHT: **Why Study Playwriting? 56**

The Qualities of a Play 59
Credibility and Intrigue 59
Speakability, Stageability, and Flow 61
Richness 63
Depth of Characterization 63
Gravity and Pertinence 65
Compression and Economy 66
Celebration 66

A Play's Origins 67
Dialogue 68
Conflict 69
A Sampling of Current American Playwrights 71
Young Jean Lee 71
Jackie Sibblies Drury 72
Quiara Alegría Hudes 74
Jeremy O. Harris 76
Lauren Gunderson 77
PHOTO ESSAY: **Playwright Young Jean Lee 78**

Chapter 5 **Design and Technology 82**

Theatre Architecture and Revolving Design 83
Theatre Architecture 83
Revolving Design for Individual Productions 86
SPOTLIGHT: **Henslowe's Diary 91**
Scenery 92
Scenic Materials 92
The Scenic Designer at Work 95
STAGECRAFT: **Quince's "Significant" Moon 95**
PHOTO ESSAY: **Scenic Designer Clint Ramos 96**
Lighting 99
Contemporary Lighting Design 100
The Lighting Designer at Work 103
PHOTO ESSAY: **Lighting Designer Don Holder 106**
Costumes 110
The Functions of Costume 110
The Costume Designer at Work 113
PHOTO ESSAY: **Costume Designer Catherine Zuber 114**
Makeup 118
STAGECRAFT: **The Makeup Kit 121**
Sound Design 121
PHOTO ESSAY: **Sound Designer Scott Lehrer 122**

Theatrical Technologies and Special Effects 126
Puppets 126
Projections 127
Special Effects 127

STAGECRAFT: **Why Study Design? 130**

The Technical Production Team 131

PHOTO ESSAY: **Broadway Stage Manager Lisa Iacucci 132**

Scenography and Theatrical Design Beyond the Theatre 135

Chapter 6 **Directing 139**

A Historical Overview of Directing in the West 139
Teacher-Directors 140
Directors of Realism 141
Directors of Antirealism 141
Global Directors 142

PHOTO ESSAY: **Director Robert O'Hara 144**

The Directing Process: Step by Step 147
The Pre-Preparation Period 147
The Preparation Period 148
Conceptualizing the Production 149
The Core Concept 149
The High Concept 150

STAGECRAFT: **Dramaturgy 152**

Implementation Period 152
Selecting the Team 153
Collaborating 153
Casting the Actors 154

SPOTLIGHT: **Diversity and Casting 157**

Rehearsals 158

PHOTO ESSAY: **Casting Director James Calleri 159**

Staging 161
Collaborating with the Actors 165

STAGECRAFT: **"This Is How It's Done!" 165**

Pacing 166
Coordinating 166
Ensemble-made Theatre: An Alternative Approach 167
The Training of a Director 168

PHOTO ESSAY: ***The Tempest*** **169**

Chapter 7 **Theatre Traditions and Histories 181**

Ritual and the Search for the Origins of Theatre 185

SPOTLIGHT: **Why Study Tradition? 186**

Traditional Theatres Around the World 192
Theatre Tradition vs Historical Texts 201

SPOTLIGHT: **Did Shakespeare Write Shakespeare? 206**

Chapter 8 **The Modern Theatre 209**

Global Modern Drama 210
Realism 212
A Laboratory 212
Pioneers of Realism 213
Naturalism 214

SPOTLIGHT: **Interview with Oskar Eustis 216**

Antirealism 219
The Symbolist Rebellion 219
The Era of Isms 220
Stylized Theatre 221
Expressionism: Machinal *222*
Socialist Realism: The Young Generation *223*
Theatre of the Ridiculous: Bluebeard *225*
Theatre of the Absurd: Waiting for Godot *226*
Theatre of Alienation: The Good Person of Szechuan *228*

Black Arts Movement: Funnyhouse of a Negro *230*
Experimental Realism: Fefu and Her Friends *231*
Postcolonial Drama: The Dilemma of a Ghost *233*

Chapter 9 **Musical Theatre 235**

The Role of Music in Theatre History 235

SPOTLIGHT: **Takarazuka Musical Revue 237**

The Broadway Musical 238
Musical Comedy 238
A Golden Age 239
The Contemporary Musical 241
The Emergence of Choreographer-Directors 241
Stephen Sondheim 243
Black Musicals 243
The Disney giant 245
England and France 246
Musicals of the Twenty-First Century 248

SPOTLIGHT: **Cabaret 248**

Chapter 10 **Theatre Today 251**

Theatre Today: Politics 252
We See You, White American Theatre 254
#Metoo 255
Decolonizing the Dramatic Canon 257
Bodies in the Theatre 259

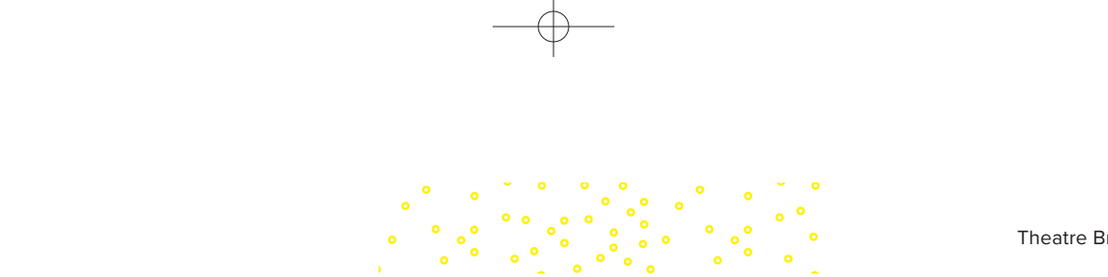
PHOTO ESSAY: **Theatre in the Borderlands 262**

Theatre Today: Aesthetics 262
New Forms of Theatre 262
Theatre and Liveness 266

SPOTLIGHT: **Interview with 600 Highwaymen 276**

The Audience 280

Glossary G-1
Selected Bibliography B-1
Index I-1



create
create.mheducation.com

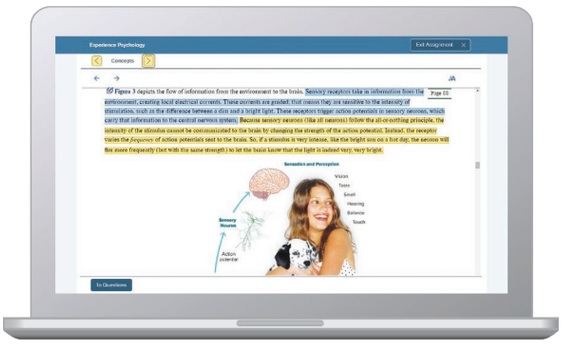
Chapter 11 The Ancients
Chapter 12 The Middle Ages
Chapter 13 The Renaissance
Chapter 14 The Theatre of Asia
Chapter 15 The Royal Era
Chapter 16 The Modern Theatre: Realism
Chapter 17 The Modern Theatre: Antirealism
Appendix: Enjoy the Play!

Instructors: Student Success Starts with You

Tools to enhance your unique voice

Want to build your own course? No problem. Prefer to use an OLC-aligned, prebuilt course? Easy. Want to make changes throughout the semester? Sure. And you'll save time with Connect's auto-grading too.

65%
Less Time Grading



Laptop: McGraw Hill; Woman/dog: George Doyle/Getty Images

Study made personal

Incorporate adaptive study resources like SmartBook® 2.0 into your course and help your students be better prepared in less time. Learn more about the powerful personalized learning experience available in SmartBook 2.0 at **www.mheducation.com/highered/connect/smartbook**

Affordable solutions, added value

Make technology work for you with LMS integration for single sign-on access, mobile access to the digital textbook, and reports to quickly show you how each of your students is doing. And with our Inclusive Access program you can provide all these tools at a discount to your students. Ask your McGraw Hill representative for more information.

Padlock: Jobalou/Getty Images

Solutions for your challenges

A product isn't a solution. Real solutions are affordable, reliable, and come with training and ongoing support when you need it and how you want it. Visit **www.supportateverystep.com** for videos and resources both you and your students can use throughout the semester.

Checkmark: Jobalou/Getty Images

SUPPORT AT every step

Students: Get Learning that Fits You

Effective tools for efficient studying

Connect is designed to help you be more productive with simple, flexible, intuitive tools that maximize your study time and meet your individual learning needs. Get learning that works for you with Connect.

Study anytime, anywhere

Download the free ReadAnywhere app and access your online eBook, SmartBook 2.0, or Adaptive Learning Assignments when it's convenient, even if you're offline. And since the app automatically syncs with your Connect account, all of your work is available every time you open it. Find out more at **www.mheducation.com/readanywhere**

"I really liked this app—it made it easy to study when you don't have your textbook in front of you."

- Jordan Cunningham,
  Eastern Washington University

Calendar: owattaphotos/Getty Images

Everything you need in one place

Your Connect course has everything you need—whether reading on your digital eBook or completing assignments for class, Connect makes it easy to get your work done.

Learning for everyone

McGraw Hill works directly with Accessibility Services Departments and faculty to meet the learning needs of all students. Please contact your Accessibility Services Office and ask them to email accessibility@mheducation.com, or visit **www.mheducation.com/about/accessibility** for more information.

Top: Jenner Images/Getty Images, Left: Hero Images/Getty Images, Right: Hero Images/Getty Images

Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux Pictures

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 Montclair; 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, 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. 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 to them.

The theatre can often be a celebration and critique of itself. David Henry Hwang and Jeanine Tesori's musical *Soft Power*, a satire of American attitudes toward Asians and Asian-Americans, celebrates and subverts popular theatrical tropes. Pictured here is a hallucinatory dream sequence in the 2019 production at the Public Theatre. *Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux Pictures*

They have 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

The multitalented Phoebe Waller-Bridge reached fame as the star and creator of the TV show *Fleabag*, which began as a solo theatre performance. Waller-Bridge returned to the stage to remount the original *Fleabag* in 2019 for a run in New York City that sold out nearly instantaneously. *Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux Pictures*

The brilliant theatre artist Aleshea Harris has created works that draw from ritualistic practice and other performance forms. Here, in collaboration with the French director Arnaud Meunier, actors from both The School of the Comedy of Saint-Etienne and CalArts in Los Angeles perform in her work ***FORE!*** *Jean-Philippe Ksiazek/AFP/Getty Images*

whether the festival's prize should go to this work, or 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 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 on-stage 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.

One of the most iconic—perhaps *the* most iconic—images in the theatre is of the melancholy Prince Hamlet, from William Shakespeare's play of the same name, gazing at the skull of his former jester, Yorick. Ruth Negga, above, takes on this formidable role at St. Ann's Warehouse, in Brooklyn, New York, in 2020. *Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux Pictures*

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?

Lisa Maree Williams/Stringer/Getty Images

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. And sometimes the separation of actor and audience is more conceptual than physical, as with virtual theatre transmitted into a computer or smartphone. 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 perspective 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 from everyday existence. Even if the play attempts to emulate real 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 (the creation of performance and audience) can occur in a theatre (a place). It could also exist elsewhere, though. In this book, we will examine theatre that takes place in streets, in homes, in abandoned weapons factories, online, 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 both in your professional and personal life.

This thought might give you pause. You might think, "Isn't theatre an obscure occupation?" It is actually 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 occupational skills. And you do not even need to work in theatre to capitalize on your theatre studies. The abilities learned in working in the theatre 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, persuade people of your ideas, and 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.

Throughout this book, we will offer different examples of fields (such as psychology, anthropology, and history) that have connections to the stage. As a result, we hope to speak to you regardless of your own interests. It's fine if you don't want to work in theatre. But we guarantee that whatever your path is, you will benefit from learning about theatre.

In addition to a theatre building, there's yet another way we can use the word *theatre*: the collection of artists who create a theatrical work. 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 Theatre, we refer to (1) the actual building in Minneapolis called the Guthrie Theatre; (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 people 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

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

This stage, in the Itsukushima Shinto Shrine, on Miyajima Island, in Japan, is as spare and elegant as *noh*, the Japanese theatre form that is performed there. *Joymsk140/Shutterstock*

probably no more than a circle of bare earth where performers chanted and danced before a hillside of seated spectators. Japanese *kabuki* theatre began on open riverbanks. 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 oftentimes interact—with the audience.

Theatre buildings can 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. Chinese opera boasted grand tea house theatre spaces in major cities while imperial palaces often have multitiered private stages and box audience seating. Grand, freestanding Elizabethan theatres dominate the London skyline in illustrated sixteenth-century pictorial maps of the city. Opulent theatres were built throughout Europe and in the major cities of the United States in the eighteenth 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 vast Park Avenue Armory, in New York City, has become a favorite location for daring theatrical experiments, such as "anthropodino," an interactive sculpture by Ernesto Neto, shown here at its 2009 installation. *Mary Altaffer/AP Images*

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 countryside 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 great actor-writer Molière cofounded the Illustre Théâtre and later established the appropriately named Troupe de Molière. The Commedia dell'Arte troupe *I Gelosi* (The Jealous) were sought after for performances all over sixteenth-century Europe, driven especially by the celebrity of Isabella Andreini, who could sing, dance, and execute comedy in multiple languages, and who published poetry and plays as well. 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 perform live, in front of people. 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 of 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 play to provide it with a unified vision by coordinating all of its components and supervising its rehearsals.

Acting comprises the most visible of theatrical work, in which performers appear 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, wigmakers, 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 a production 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 may 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; Bertolt Brecht revolutionized both playwriting and acting when writing and directing his plays in Berlin after World War II; Danai Guirira has acted onstage and in major Hollywood blockbusters while also writing critically praised plays like *Eclipsed*; 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 in the West 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 or something 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 sports, which are open-ended, theatre performances have preordained conclusions. The Patriots may not win the Super Bowl next year, but Alexander Hamilton will definitely get shot at the end of *Hamilton*. The work of the theatre consists in keeping us invested in Hamilton while he is alive so that his death is moving and even surprising. We know he will be shot—in fact, it is announced in the opening song—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.

One of the most cherished qualities of theatre is spontaneity—and what's more spontaneous than a play that's made up on the spot? *Freestyle Love Supreme*, an evening of improvised hip-hop by a collective of the same name, found itself on Broadway in 2019 to audiences thrilled by their antics—and no doubt by a chance to see the group's most famous member, playwright and actor Lin-Manuel Miranda. *Jeenah Moon/The New York Times/Redux Pictures*

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 dance with excitement, or a poem that expresses familiar emotions, like love or sadness, in new ways. We are drawn to works like these because they lend meaning to our lives. We might find similar values in religion as well, but art can be 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 TikTok, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat are in the business of turning us from people into characters. We talk about this phenomenon more in the chapter "Theatre Today.") TV fans fill 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. It is confusing because the medium of an actor is their body and self: when we see them perform, we register who they "really" are and who they are playing, and these two thought processes can easily blur together. (We will discuss how acting can resemble reality more in the chapter "Acting.")

Different cultures have developed various techniques for separating reality and the stage. One of the most enduring ways of distinguishing character from actor is the mask. In ancient Greece, when an actor first stepped out of the chorus and placed an unpainted mask over his face, he signaled that the lines he was about to speak were "in character." 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.

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 *khon* dance-dramas of Thailand, the noh drama of Japan, and the *commedia dell'arte* of Italy. Masks can serve as connections to these older traditions. For the centuries-old Mayan drama *Rabinal Achí,* still performed annually in Guatemala, the masks signify characters but also cultural archetypes that connect present-day participants to their pasts. 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. And many actor training programs utilize "mask work," which consists of performing with neutral or expressive masks that liberate the body and imagination to explore new possibilities. In the past few decades, aspiring actors in the United States have taken classes that use Balinese *topeng* masks to work on honing their physical expressivity. And the mask can often represent the theatre itself. 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? The root of performance is "parfourmir," old French to "carry out an action." In English today, performance is used in this way in "performance reviews" for corporate employees and "high-performance vehicles." In this text, we will define performance as 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.

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. *Marc Dozier/Corbis Documentary/Getty Images*

All theatre is performance, but not all performance is theatre. What counts as performance is quite broad. One way of defining performance by thinking about perspective instead of an actual set of activities. In other words, if we took a more critical perspective, we might view a baseball game as a performance, rather than as something else (a cultural institution, an expression of local pride, a way to unwind, and so forth). The same goes for other activities not typically thought of as "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.

At times presentational and representational styles can merge, as with the play *Natives Go Wild*, by Rhonda Roberts, which tells the story of indigenous performers exploited by P. T. Barnum for his circus. Pictured here is Waangenga Blanco, foreground, and ensemble from the 2019 production at the Sydney Opera House. *Lisa Maree Williams/Stringer/Getty Images*

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 throughout history have employed these techniques and a variety of other presentational methods, including asides to the audience, soliloquies, direct address, and curtain calls. Sometimes the entire structure of a play replicates the form of a presentational performance, as with Bruce Springsteen's *Springsteen on Broadway* or Lucas Hnath's *The Christians*, which takes the form of a church service.

Representational performance, however, is the more typical mode of drama today. 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 investment of meaning—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

The German theatre artist Bertolt Brecht has had an incalculable influence on the theatre; various trademarks of his innovations can be seen in this image from a production of his *The Good Person of Szechuan* at Schaubuehne Berlin in 2017: direct address to the audience; no attempts at realism; and exposed theatre technology. *Stefanie Loos/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock*

have actors behave onstage exactly as people do in real life, in settings made as lifelike as possible. The innovative French director Andre Antoine, to take a memorable example, used real sides of beef in his 1888 production of Fernand Icres's play *The Butchers.* (For more on realism, see our chapter on "The Modern Theatre.") 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.

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.

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, 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 each other's 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, and arrive at different conclusions. Either way, they respond *together*; they become a community. While fans of TV shows and movies might exchange opinions online, or live-tweet from separate locations, 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 thrill 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 in turn create an electrifying 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 usually 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. Sometimes aspects of a play are improvised, or made up on the spot. But improvisation still depends on structure and rehearsal; its freedom arises because so many other elements (the trust among actors, the sense of an overall narrative) have been clearly established.

Mostly, though, plays depend on scripts. Professional theatrical productions typically appear 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 parents 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." As we will discuss in the next chapter, the script is both the record the play leaves behind after the audience has gone home and the prompt for the performance to occur again—the recipe and the receipt.

Published scripts are often an imperfect record. They may carry over material left out of the actual production, or they include new material the author thought of after the production was over. Kabuki play texts are hours long if performed as printed; in practice, during the height of kabuki in the eighteenth century, the troupes freely added and subtracted scenes based on what audiences reacted best to, day after day. 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.

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.

Spotlight

Film Stars on Stage Acting

The 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, Tom Hiddleston, Adam Driver, Emma Stone, Michael Shannon, Lupita Nyong'o, John Lithgow, Michael Cera, Lucas Hedges, Michelle Williams, Amy Schumer, Daniel Radcliffe, Samuel L. Jackson, Scarlett Johannson, Andrew Garfield, Jude Law, 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 Denzel Washington, Neil Patrick Harris, Katie Holmes, Cate Blanchett, Paul Dano, Ben Affleck, Keri Russell, Jeff Daniels, Matthew Broderick, Marisa Tomei, Anne Hathaway, Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellen, 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:

Theatre is the foundation for me. That's how I started. I believe that's where you really learn how to act. It's alive. It's a living thing. And you get an energy from the people.

—DENZEL WASHINGTON

The great thing about [theatre] is it's never the same twice, because the audience changes the chemistry. And that's the great joy of doing theatre, is that you keep chasing down new shades of the truth, especially with a great piece of writing. It'll only be over when it's over.

—TOM HIDDLESTON

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

[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.

The film star Marisa Tomei received raves for her theatrical turn as Serafina, a seamstress whose life becomes untethered when her husband dies, in the 2019 Broadway revival of Tennessee Williams's *The Rose Tattoo*. *Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux Pictures*

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 sometimes this rule is broken. 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; Theatrical Masks: Ingram Publishing/Alamy Stock Photo; Camera: Tatiana Popova/Shutterstock*

Chapter

2

What Is a Play?

Jeff Lorch Photography

The Play: Event and Text

"Play" is a deceptively simple sounding word. It conjures up many meanings at once: child's play, fun, imaginative make-believe, or a sequence of action carried out in sports, like a "double play" in baseball. In addition to these, there is the theatre's typical understanding of a "play," which means one discrete performance of a single text. In the theatre, we use "play" to mean both the performance event and the text that is performed; you can both go to a play and read a play, but you rarely are talking about exactly the same kind of thing in those two instances. In this chapter, then, there are two main answers to the question "What is a play?" We're concerned with both the *event* of the play (we might think of the performed play as the basic unit of modern theatre) and the play as a *text*.

To start with the play-event: it is a performance, a doing that happens in time and at a specific place, and is, to some extent, ephemeral. Play-events are often repeated, sometimes seemingly endlessly, created through a repetitive process of rehearsal, and frequently reuse certain popular or historical texts. But they are also unique occurrences. Unlike a movie, which can be endlessly proliferated through digital means and is virtually the same in each copy, the play-event is reenacted over and over again, resulting in a one-time event each time, no matter how almost-the-same the appearance might be. For most people, this unrepeatability is a key aspect of going to a play. Audiences expect the performance they attend to be *live*, to be subtly (or sometimes wildly) different than the same show on the previous night. They expect this production of the play-text to be different than the production of the same text they saw a few years ago.

Of course, many other types of live events happen that are not called *plays* or *theatre* (although, as mentioned in What Is Theatre?, they might be thought of as various types of *performance*). To narrow down live theatre performance to a typical *play,* we can look to the second understanding of "play," the play-text; these texts are often called *drama*. Drama is a type of literature usually written in dialogue (i.e., for multiple voices, demarcated by speakers designated as speakers of lines) that functions as both a "recipe" and a "receipt" for an enactment with bodies in physical space. It is a recipe because it provides a plan for creating a play in the future, and it is a receipt because it can be a recording of an event that has already happened.

DRAMA: RECIPE AND RECEIPT

The word "drama" is etymologically derived from the Greek word *dran*, meaning "something done." Thinking of drama as "something done" (or "to be done") helps to reinforce this notion of the play-text as a recipe. A recipe is a document in and of itself, but it is also in some sense incomplete without being executed and made real through carrying out the actions contained in its text. Interestingly, an archaic form of the English word "recipe" was *receipt.* Although receipts and recipes have very different meanings in modern usage, their shared roots may also illuminate a quirk of many play-texts. While drama serves as the blueprint or recipe for a new play performance, it also can serve as a *receipt*, that is, the evidence of a prior enactment. For example, about half the plays of William Shakespeare, the most famous English-language playwright, were never published during their author's lifetime—rather, eighteen of his plays were first typeset and published seven years after his death with the cooperation of Shakespeare's old colleagues, fellow actors, and producers. This means that those plays only exist today as collectively remembered and documented traces of their live performances. While the playwright must have written down his words to share with the actors of the company, no fully handwritten script or plot or part (all terms for the different play-text pieces used to create the play performance in Shakespeare's era) survives of any Shakespeare play.

Similarly, of the hundreds of play titles known from ancient Athens, only thirty-two complete tragedies and eleven complete comedies have survived; most of these plays survived in textbooks of ancient Greek writings in northern Africa and in Islamic centers of learning in the Near East and Spain before being "rediscovered" by late-medieval and Renaissance-era Europeans. Many of our older play texts may therefore be more akin to *receipts,* documenting the textual and physical aspects of the performed play, rather than what developed after Shakespeare's age: a system wherein a playwright writes a detailed recipe text in expectation of its being "brought to life" or realized on a stage in place and time. There are two important things to remember about plays as recipes, receipts, and performances. First is that play-texts are not the same as play-performances, although they usually have a very close relationship. Second is that part of the way the play-text is different from the play-performance is based on *temporality* (time): the play-text as recipe exists before the performance, while the play-text as receipt comes "after" a play-performance, remaining as a trace of prior performance. Even more complicated, some play-texts may not be intended for enactment (see "Closet Drama" sidebar) and many receipt play-texts later serve as recipes for new performances, as in the case of Shakespeare's published plays. Also important to realize is that the idea of the play-text as a prerequisite for the enactment of a play-performance is an idea with a very short history and very limited applicability in geographical space. That is, while the play-recipe as the necessary blueprint to create a play-performance is a standard of modern and contemporary theatre across the world today, for the longer history of European-style theatre and in many, if not most, other world traditions of theatre, this relation of play-text as a recipe for a subsequent play-performance was not the case.

Dramaturgy: The Conventions and Construction of Play-Texts

A play is action, but it is *patterned* action. Dramaturgy is the art and science of creating meaningful patterns in stage action. It is created from two Greek words: *drama*, which we've already discussed, and *ergos,* which means "worker." So dramaturgy is the work of compiling or creating drama.

One way to think of this process of creating a play (destined both for textual life and performance life) is as a complicated mix of enough repeated elements of drama so that the play created is recognizable as a play *and* enough novelty that audience's will enjoy seeing or reading it. We can therefore use the concept of dramaturgy to think through the typical defining elements of a play. Let's first examine dramaturgy in terms of the play-event, and then of the play-text.

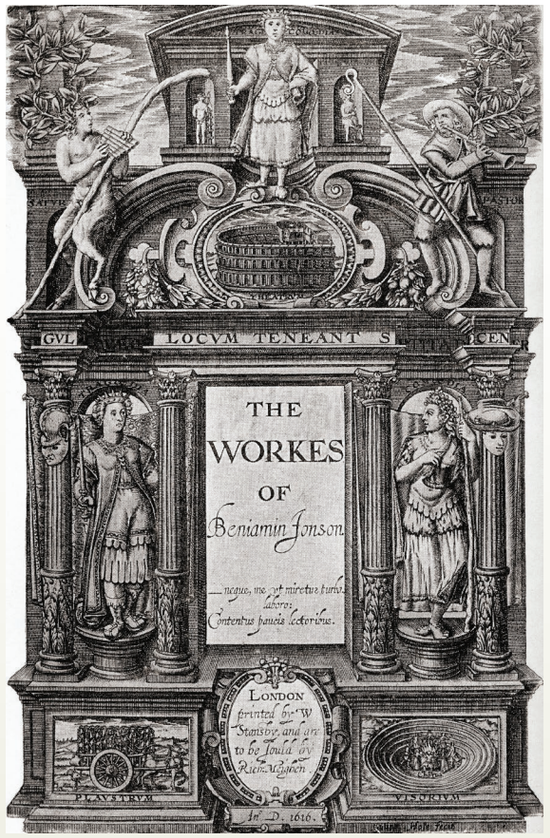
CONVENTION

One way that play-events can be categorized is according to *conventions.* Conventions are the repeated elements of a play (or other repeated texts and performances) that come to define our experience of the play, text, performance, or indeed all kinds of cultural encounters. Conventions are a sort of group agreement about some basics of how something will unfold. For example, it is the convention in a U.S. grocery store that customers will line up patiently at different registers and pay for their purchases. Someone who tries to leave the store without following this convention or jump the line without waiting their turn will not only be pursued by law enforcement, but they will also be socially disapproved by all the people who were following the grocery store convention. In the twenty-first century, theatre building conventions include audiences who sit quietly during the performance in the dark

Spotlight

Closet Drama

At the end of Aristotle's *Poetics*, the philosopher admits that drama is still effective even if it isn't acted at all—it can simply be read. There is a long tradition of plays meant only to be read aloud, rather than used as a pretext to put on a production. Seneca, the Roman dramatist, philosopher, and political thinker, wrote several plays like this; these so-called "closet dramas" feature scenes of extreme violence that were not meant to be performed. (The "closet" here is an older meaning of the English word, which was a small room, usually off a grand bedroom, where the occupant stored their treasured possessions and might also spend time alone reading, praying, or thinking. Thus, a closet drama is drama meant to be consumed by an individual alone in a private space.) When dramatists of Shakespeare's day began translating Seneca's works, they wrote plays in a Senecan style—but these plays were meant to be performances. As a result, those bloody scenes that had only been read became a reality, as in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* or Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. Reading plays aloud continued to be popular, however. Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* features a scene of an aristocratic family reading drama together as a leisure activity, for instance. And most students encounter plays as texts first and foremost. Reading them aloud is still a great way to understand the language—we recommend you do so with your friends!



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

while performers act in the light. This is actually a very recent convention, however. Audiences as recently as 150 years ago were much more likely to be sitting in auditoriums that were about as bright as the stage, since the state of electric lighting did not yet allow darkened rooms with directed lights. Many other theatre forms around the world have no conventions around audience silence or sitting still; it is perfectly normal for a spectator to get up and leave temporarily, eat food, and chat. A person who tries this in a Broadway theatre in the twenty-first century would most certainly be subject to as much disapproval as the person who tries to leave the grocery store without paying.

There are conventions of both play-performance and play-text and of course many conventions that are shared between both text and performance. Performance 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. (Of course, verbal lines employing these conventions will also appear in the written play-text, as the playwright imagines how their ideas will be staged.) 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).

Scott Shepherd (center) as Nick in "Gatz," a seven-hour-long production dramatizing every word of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*. "Gatz" was created by the experimental theatre company Elevator Repair Service in 2010. *Sara Krulwich/The New York Times/Redux Pictures*

- 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.

Because conventions are socially and culturally specific norms, they are sometimes easiest to recognize when an audience witnesses theatre in an unfamiliar cultural setting. In the *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 *noh* theatre 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,

Queer cabaret performer, playwright, and musician Taylor Mac created the *24-Decade History of Popular Music* which allots one hour of performance to songs from each decade of American history from 1776 to 2016, the year all twenty-four hours were performed consecutively for by Mac for an audience at St. Ann's Warehouse in Brooklyn, New York, on October 8–9, 2016. *Dave Kotinsky/Stringer/Getty Images*

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*

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 be able to recognize the new norm that is being presented and understand how the playwright is using it to convey meaning.

DURATION

Another way of categorizing plays as events is their duration. 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. Playwrights like Samuel Beckett, F. T. Marinetti and other early twentieth-century Futurists, Suzan-Lori Parks, and the theatre collective *The Neo-Futurists* have all worked in the realm of super short plays, of just one or two minutes. There are exceptionally long plays as well. *The Peony Pavilion,* a celebrated example of the traditional Chinese theatre known as *kunqu,* consists of fifty-five scenes and can last up to three days. Many south and southeast Asian traditional theatres feature shows that last for many days, like the classical Indian dance-theatre *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.

Some recent productions in Europe and the United States have also experimented with breaking the convention of the two-hour play. 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 24-hour-long musical cabaret 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.)

GENRE

Turning to dramaturgy in terms of the play-text, *genre* provides a dramatic frame within which to apply or recognize different conventions. 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, biopics, documentaries—there are different genres of plays. Notice that in this short list of film genres, some denote content (the story is set in a specific time and place: the American West of the nineteenth century in the western). Others however are based on

The Play That Goes Wrong (here in a production at the St. Pauli Theatre) is a new play that premiered in 2012 and won an Olivier Award for Best New Comedy in 2015. However, the script draws on much older traditions of farcical humor and metatheatrical staging to tell the comical story of an inept company of actors trying to perform a murder mystery on a set that falls to pieces. *Markus Scholz/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images*

aspects of the film's status as a film (is it "fictional" or "nonfictional"?).

Two main dramatic genres, which are shared between twenty-first century theatre and the ancient Greeks, are tragedy and comedy. (There are other Greek genres, such as the satyr play, which did *not* continue to be relevant across the centuries!)

Tragedy A *tragedy* is a profoundly serious play that almost 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.

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.

Although tragic narratives are found all over the world, the exact parameters of tragedy are always shifting. 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, Willy Loman (that is, "low man"), who faces not gods but faceless bureaucrats, insensitive children, and an impersonal capitalistic system. Miller's Willy Loman was radical as a tragic hero because he represented an expansion of what types of people could be *great* enough to be positioned as a hero. The expansion of human greatness to characters beyond kings and nobles to include women, people of color, and all kinds of humans is a burning topic in theatre today. Tragedy's ability to set an individual character up as a hero, and query who merits the designation, makes this old genre into a new

Wendell Pierce, Sope Dirisu, and Natey Jones in *Death of a Salesman* at the Piccadilly Theatre in London. While the original productions of *Death of a Salesman* featured all white casts, new and different meanings of the text might be activated by changing demographic features of the actors. *ZUMA Press Inc/Alamy Stock Photo*

vehicle for those play-makers who are interested in exploring the frailty, freedom, self-sacrifice, and heroism of all kinds of people.

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 tend to be about ordinary life rather than larger-than-life heroes, they may feel less "universal" than the lofty themes of tragedy. Or perhaps it is because funniness is so often contingent on shared knowledge between comedian and audience to "get" the jokes, it can be more difficult to translate comedy across time and cultural space. Nevertheless, some comedies (particularly those of Shakespeare and Molière) are considered true masterpieces of human observation. Comedy's 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 push a sense of urgent connection to the real world or current events. One exciting subgenre of docudrama consists of a solo performer who impersonates many different individuals from interviews. Anna Deavere Smith, Dael Orlandersmith, and Sarah Jones are some of the most important writers and performers of this style, which often takes on urgent contemporary issues, such as Orlandersmith's *Until the Flood*, about police brutality and the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri, in the aftermath of the fatal shooting of eighteen-year-old Michael Brown by a white policeman.

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 and yet we may recognize many of the hallmarks of melodrama in popular television genres like the "teen soap" which balance over-the-top drama (meaning unrealistically exciting or serious events and actions) with deep emotional engagement with the characters. 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 *Tanztheater* (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 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. The use of genre classification is less about the importance of categorization than to help us see how the pleasure of consuming theatre comes from both the recognition of familiar conventions and novelty of the unexpected within our familiar narratives and devices.

ARISTOTLE'S DRAMATURGY

Genre is one way to distinguish and organize types of play-texts, but other critics, theorists, and playwrights have been interested in trying to articulate the elements that make up an individual play as well. This is what Aristotle's *Poetics* does. Although Aristotle spoke of tragedy in particular, his breakdown of dramatic elements has been influential to nearly all drama since. (A second part of the *Poetics* about comedy is mentioned in this work, but if it was ever completed, it is now lost.) First, Aristotle provided a definition of a (tragic) play that became virtually the most influential statement on the development of theatre in Europe from the Renaissance through to modern times. "A tragedy is an imitation [*mimesis*] of an action–that is, it is serious and purposeful, having magnitude, uttered in heightened language, carried out by action rather than narration, and through this method carrying out the purgation (catharsis) of pity and fear." This dense description touches on what the play text contains (an action), how the play should be performed (in elevated language and action rather than narration), and what the social effect should be (the purgation of pity and fear). Although in later centuries many playmakers would revere Aristotle's work as a prescription (or recipe) for how to make drama, it's also possible that Aristotle was not attempting to dictate the future of playmaking, but rather descriptively capture the contours of his contemporary theatre.

The *Poetics* describes six components of a play text: plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle—in that order of importance.

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.

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.

It is a common habit of thought to attribute the "ideas" of the play to the author, speculating on their intentions; but looking at how popular interpretations of the thought of a play change over time reveals that much of how a play is understood has to do with cultural context as with any one person's thoughts. For example, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* features a complex portrayal of a Jewish character in an anti-Semitic environment; such a character 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, but the play arguably took on even more relevance in a recent production in Uganda, a country that has outlawed homosexuality. Themes are very often invoked as the "why" for doing theatre at all–they are the larger, animating ideas that connect (or, indeed, alienate) an individual play text with its audience.

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.

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*

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. Indeed, most world cultures have historically developed theatre and musical traditions together, including European opera, West African griot epic recitation, Japanese noh and *kabuki*, and many varieties of Chinese opera. The Chinese performance scholar and artist William Sun calls Chinese theatre "a culture of music" and 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.

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.

Plays in Performance: A Timeline

Now we will return to a consideration of the play as a performance to combine some dramaturgical considerations of the text with how texts are parlayed into a real-life undertaking that unfolds in time. 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 requires consideration of both performance elements and the text being enacted. 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 and kabuki theatre streets in Edo period Japan were filled with posters and block-printed advertisements touting thrilling scenes and massive marquees with the most popular actors' names written in the biggest letters. The lighted marquees of Broadway theatres around Times Square and of West End theatres in London are modern-day equivalents of these time-honored practices, enticing passers-by with famous performers' and playwrights' names. Today, posters, email blasts, Facebook posts, multicolor subscription brochures, media events, elaborate press releases, tweets, and YouTube trailers 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 pirozhki (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)—might 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*:

PETTERSON, 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 provide the information the audience needs to follow the story.

The well-made play requires its exposition to be carried out without disturbing the realistic illusion that everything on stage might plausibly really be happening in some private household. A greater proportion of world theatres over history do not employ "realistic" illusion, but rather acknowledge that the audience and performers are coexisting in a theatrical production in real time. 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 *metatheatrical*: it 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 thrives on conflict; in fact, the word "drama," when used in daily life, implies a situation fraught with conflict and extra-large emotions. It is very difficult to entice an audience to watch plays about characters who live every day in serenity. Conflict and confrontation are the typical mechanisms by which a situation becomes dramatic.

Plots build suspense when they involve alternatives and choices: Macbeth, in Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* has strong reasons to murder the king and strong reasons not