

Theatre The Lively Art

Tenth Edition



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Edwin Wilson | Alvin Goldfarb



Theatre: The Lively Art

TENTH EDITION

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THEATRE: THE LIVELY ART, TENTH EDITION

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To Elaine Goldfarb and to the memory of Catherine Wilson

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About the Authors

Edwin Wilson attended Vanderbilt University, the University of Edinburgh, and Yale University, where he received an MFA and the first Doctor of Fine Arts degree awarded by Yale. He has taught theatre at Vanderbilt, Yale, and, for over 30 years, at Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University. Wilson has produced plays on and off Broadway and served one season as the resident director of the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia. He was the Assistant to the Producer on the Broadway play *Big Fish, Little Fish* directed by John Gielgud, starring Jason Robards, and of the film *Lord of the Flies* directed by Peter Brook. On Broadway, he co-produced *Agatha Sue, I Love You* directed by George Abbott. He also produced a feature film, *The Nashville Sound*. He was the moderator of *Spotlight*, a television interview series on CUNY-TV and PBS, 1989-93, ninety-one half-hour interviews with outstanding actors, actresses, playwrights, directors and producers, broadcast on 200 PBS stations in the United States.

For twenty-two years he was the theatre critic of the *Wall Street Journal*. A long-time member of the New York Drama Critics Circle, he was president of the Circle for several years. He is on the board of the John Golden Fund and served a term as President of the Theatre Development Fund (TDF), whose Board he was on for twenty-three years. He has served a number of times on the Tony Nominating Committee and the Pulitzer Prize Drama Jury. He is also the author or co-author of two other widely used college theatre textbooks in the U.S. The 13th edition of his pioneer book, *The Theater Experience*, was published by McGraw-Hill. The 7th edition of the theatre history textbook, *Living Theatre* (co-authored with Alvin Goldfarb), published previously by McGraw Hill, has been published by W. W. Norton. He is also the editor of *Shaw on Shakespeare*, recently re-issued by Applause Books and a murder mystery, *The Patron Murders*, published by Prospecta Press.

Alvin Goldfarb is President Emeritus and Professor Emeritus of Western Illinois University. Dr. Goldfarb has also served as Provost, Dean of Fine Arts, and Chair of the Department of Theatre at Illinois State University. He holds a Ph.D. in theatre history from the City University of New York and a master's degree from Hunter College.

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Dr. Goldfarb has served as a member of the Illinois Arts Council and president of the Illinois Alliance for Arts Education. He has received service awards from the latter organization as well as from the American College Theatre Festival. Dr. Goldfarb also received an Alumni Achievement Award from the CUNY Graduate Center's Alumni Association, and another Alumni Award from Hunter College, CUNY.

Dr. Goldfarb currently serves as a member and treasurer of Chicago's Joseph Jefferson Theatre Awards Committee, which recognizes excellence in the Chicago theatre, as well as a board member of the Arts Alliance of Illinois.

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Connect: Enhancing the Theatre Experience



connect®

Several qualities set *Theatre: The Lively Art* apart from other introductory texts. A particularly important element is our emphasis on the audience. All students reading the book are potential theatre-goers, not just during their college years but throughout their lives. We have therefore attempted to make *Theatre: The Lively Art* an ideal one-volume text to prepare students as future audience members. It will give them a grasp of how theatre functions, of how it should be viewed and judged, and of the tradition behind any performance they may attend. In addition to serving as an ideal text for nonmajors, *Theatre: The Lively Art* will also prepare students who wish to continue studies in theatre, as majors, minors, or students from other disciplines who take advanced courses.

MASTERING CONCEPTS

Theatre is not only an art form; it is one of the performing arts. As a result, its quality is elusive because it exists only at the moment when a performance occurs. To study it in a book or classroom is to be one step removed from that immediate experience. This fact is uppermost in the minds of those who teach theatre in a classroom setting. At the same time, the theatre appreciation course can immeasurably enhance an audience's comprehension of theatre. The experience of seeing theatre can be many times more meaningful if audience members understand parts of the theatre, the creative artists and technicians who make it happen, the tradition and historical background from which theatre springs, and the genre.

When students successfully master concepts with McGraw-Hill's Connect, you spend more class time focusing on theatre as a performing art, fostering a greater appreciation for the course, and inspiring students to become life-long audience members. Connect helps students better understand and retain these basic concepts, and allow you to reach your student audience and bring the theatre experience to them. Connect is a highly reliable, easy-to-use homework and learning management solution that embeds learning science and award-winning adaptive tools to improve student results.

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Theatre: The Lively Art now offers two reading experiences for students and instructors: SmartBook[®] and eBook. Fueled by LearnSmart, SmartBook is the first and only adaptive reading experience currently available. SmartBook creates a personalized reading experience by highlighting the most impactful concepts a student needs to learn at that moment in time. The reading experience continuously adapts by 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. eBook provides a simple, elegant reading experience, available for offline reading.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TENTH EDITION

Chapters are again ordered logically to make studying as intuitive as possible. As in previous editions, *Theatre: The Lively Art* can be studied in any order the instructor prefers. We listened to instructors who asked us to improve the overall organization by streamlining some material for easier classroom use.

As in previous editions, we provide discussions of the unique nature of theatre as an art form and highlight the multicultural nature of theatre that today's students will experience. In addition, throughout this edition, we focus on the global



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nature of theatre to give students the groundwork for understanding the wide diversity of theatre today.

In Part 1, *Theatre in Today's World*, we review theatre in everyday life and the theatre audience. The chapters in this part provide a foundation for studying the elements of theatre in Parts 2 and 3.

In Part 2, *Creating Theatre: The Playwright*, we introduce students to the person or group creating a script, the dramatic structure, and dramatic characters. We then continue with dramatic genres and investigate point of view in a text as expressed in tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, and other genres.

In Part 3, *Creating Theatre: The Production*, we discuss the people and elements that make theatre possible: the actors, the director, the producer, and the designers who together bring the theatre to stunning life. Important too are the theatre spaces where a production occurs. Design and production techniques (in particular lighting, costume, and makeup) have been updated to include the latest advances in technology.

In Part 4, *Global Theatres: Past and Present*, we offer a survey of theatre history, beginning with Greek theatre and continuing to the present. Chapters 15 and 16 are devoted to theatre of the past one hundred years or so. The forces that came into being just a little more than a century ago—in realism and departures from realism, in acting techniques, in the emergence of the director, and in scene and lighting design—define theatre as it exists today. In these final chapters we cover the contemporary theatre scene around the world and the diverse theatres in the United States, including the LGBT, feminist, African American, Asian American, Native American, and Latino theatres.

FEATURES

Based on feedback from instructors and students, the new Tenth Edition of *Theatre: The Lively Art* offers both time-tested and newly revised text features that help students deepen their understanding and appreciation of the theatrical experience.

URLs to Online Plays Many of the plays referenced in the text that also appear online are highlighted in blue typeface when first mentioned in a chapter. Should you want to read one of these plays, you can refer to the list at the end of the book and find the URL. Titles are listed alphabetically.

Playing Your Part A revised and expanded set of critical thinking questions and experiential exercises has been added to each chapter as part of an extended pedagogical program. The feature is divided into two categories: *Playing Your Part: Experiencing Theatre* and *Playing Your Part: Thinking About Theatre*. These



PLAYING YOUR PART: EXPERIENCING THEATRE

1. Have you ever had to pick someone for a team or for a job? How did you go about making your choice? Is that similar to casting in the theatre? Why? Why not?
2. Have one of your classmates read a short speech from a play. Ask her or him to change the pace or rhythm of delivery. What terms or phrases did you use to make this request? Were your directions understood? How did the change in pace or rhythm affect the delivery of the speech and its impact on those listening?
3. Observe how one of your instructors interacts with the class through his or her movement. How does this movement affect the way in which the class material is delivered? Does your observation of this provide you any insight into the importance of stage blocking?
4. Ask if you can attend a technical rehearsal or dress rehearsal at your university theatre. What insights did you gain from attending those rehearsals?



PLAYING YOUR PART: THINKING ABOUT THEATRE

1. Imagine that while you are watching a production, one performer is overacting badly, to the point that he or she is quite unbelievable. Another performer is listless and has no energy. In each case, to what extent do you think this is the director's fault, and to what extent the performer's failure?
2. If you get bored or impatient when watching a performance, what do you think the director could have done in preparing the production to prevent this from happening?
3. Is it fair to say, as some critics do, when everything "clicks" in a production, that is, when the acting, the scenery and lighting, and the pace of the action all seem to be beautifully coordinated, that the director's hand is "invisible"?
4. If you have read a play this semester (or sometime in the past), what do you think the spine of that play is? What would your directorial concept be if you were directing a production of that play?

questions and exercises not only help students to think critically about what they have read in the chapter, but also help them to connect what they've read to their own experiences. Playing Your Part exercises can be used as homework assignments or to inspire classroom discussion. These sets of questions invite students to engage

in experiences relating to the theatre. They may ask students to attend a performance and write about their reactions to it, or to take on the role of playwright by imagining a play about their own lives. These creative activities help students feel the vitality and immediacy of the theatrical experience.

In Focus These boxes help students understand and compare different aspects of theatre, whether in the United States or around the world. Some highlight specific examples of global influence on theatre. Artists discussed include Peter Brook, Josef Svoboda, Julie Taymor, Bertolt Brecht, and Thornton Wilder. Boxes on legendary theatre artists Augusto Boal, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Tadashi Suzuki are also included.

Other In Focus boxes discuss the audience, the playwright, the actor, and the director, each focusing on a unique issue in the contemporary theatre to engage students in discussion and debate.

And some boxes explore the close relationship between theatre and other forms of popular entertainment through the ages, from the mimes and jugglers of ancient Rome to the circuses and vaudeville of the nineteenth century to the rock concerts and theme parks of today.

We have also added new In Focus boxes in every chapter to cover technological developments in theatre (such as discussing technology and the actor) and key issues affecting the contemporary theatre (such as audience etiquette as well as color blind and nontraditional casting).

In addition all of the theatre history chapters now also have new In Focus boxes that help students see the continuing impact of the past on the contemporary theatre. Two examples are the ongoing tradition of theatre festivals and their relationship to the Greek theatre festivals and contemporary religious drama and its relationship to the Middle Ages.

Timelines Timelines are included for each period and country addressed. These timelines have been markedly improved from those in previous editions, with entries much easier to read than before. Each

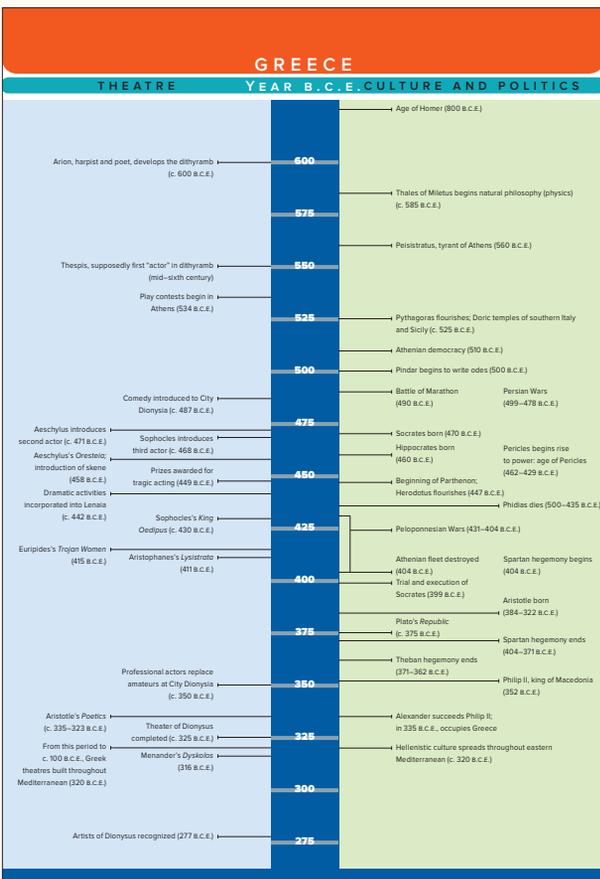
IN FOCUS: QUESTIONING THE PLAYWRIGHT'S ROLE

Some contemporary commentators have questioned what they refer to as the "centrality" of the playwright and the play. These critics point out that there have been companies whose performers or directors, sometimes with the assistance of audiences, improvise presentations: They create a presentation while actually performing it. There have also been times when texts were developed by performers or by a director who assembled material from various sources. Some theorists argue, therefore, that an "authorless" theatre exists: theatre in which performers create their own works, sometimes using a traditional text only as a jumping-off point.

Theorists who question the centrality of the text also argue that the playwright's importance has been overstated—that a play is simply a suggestion or starting point and that the artists who create a stage presentation are its true "authors." In addition, they hold that each audience member may create his or her own "reading" of a production; in this sense, the spectator is the "author," and any discussion of a play's theme or meaning is inappropriate. It should be pointed out that this argument seems largely a question of semantics.

If a theatre piece is created by a group of performers or by a director, then these people are in effect operating as playwrights. The playwright's function has not been eliminated; it is simply being carried out by someone else.

As for the matter of the "centrality" of the playwright, this argument, too, does not eliminate the necessity of what we are calling the blueprint that every theatre event requires. Whether the blueprint is a text, a script, an idea, a scenario, an improvisation, or anything similar, it is an indispensable element in the process of creating a theatre production. The work of the playwright or other "authors" need not be "central" or predominant to be essential and irreplaceable. Also, the fact remains that throughout the history of both Western and Eastern theatre, the significant role of the playwright has been widely accepted. Whether it is a dramatist like Sophocles, Shakespeare, or Ibsen in the West, or Chikamatsu—an eighteenth-century Japanese dramatist—in the East, both their own contemporaries and later generations have seen their dramatic texts as foundations on which productions are based.



timeline shows landmark events and accomplishments in the social and political arenas on one side and significant theatre events on the other.

Experiencing Theatre History We present in these boxes narratives of actual events in theatre history, taking the readers back in time so they have a sense of being in the audience at a performance of, say, *Antigone* in Athens in 441 B.C.E., or at the premier of *Hamlet* at the Globe Theatre in London around 1600.

Writing Style A sense of immediacy and personalization has been a goal in our writing style. We have attempted to write *Theatre: The Lively Art* in the most readable language possible. The book contains a wealth of information presented in a manner that makes it vivid and alive.

Production Photos As always, the vast majority of the photos in the book are not only in full color but are generously sized to help students see and appreciate the dynamic and dramatic world of the theatre. Also, a number of global theatre productions have been included in this edition. The illustrations we've chosen—both photographs and line drawings—explain and enhance the material in the text.

Photo Essays Students are placed in the audiences of important productions in these pictorial essays to bring to life key elements in the text. These essays provide context for theatre-viewing experiences, while highlighting outstanding performances and designs.

Experiencing Theatre History

ANTIGONE

Athens, 441 B.C.E. The year is 441 B.C.E. It is a morning in late March in Athens, Greece, and the citizens of Athens are up early, making their way to the Theatre of Dionysus, an open-air theatre on the south side of the Acropolis, the highest hill in Athens. On the Acropolis are several temples, including the Parthenon, a magnificent new temple dedicated to the goddess Athena, which is under construction at this very time.

The Theatre of Dionysus has semicircular seating built into the slope of the hill on the side of the Acropolis. At the foot of the seating area is a flat, circular space—the orchestra—where the actors will perform. Behind the orchestra a temporary stage house has been built,

Dionysia festival, an annual series of events lasting several days. During this festival, all business in Athens—both commercial and governmental—comes to a halt. On the day before the plays, there was a parade through the city, which ended near the theatre at a temple dedicated to the god Dionysus, for whom the festival is named. There, a religious observance was held at the altar.

Today is one of three days of the festival devoted mainly to tragedies. On these days, one playwright will present three tragedies and a satyr play. The three tragedies are sometimes linked to form one long play, called a *trilogy*; but sometimes they are three separate pieces—as they are today.

of a woman, appear in the playing area: They represent Antigone and her sister, Ismene. Antigone tells Ismene that she means to defy their uncle, the king, and give their brother Polynices an honorable burial. Ismene, unlike Antigone, is timid and frightened; she argues that women are too weak to stand up to a king. Besides, Ismene points out, Antigone will be put to death if she is caught. Antigone argues, however, that she will not be subservient to a man, even the king.

When the two female characters leave the stage, a chorus of fifteen men enters. These men represent the elders of the city, and throughout the play—in passages that are sung and danced—they will fulfill several

photo essay

Modern Domestic Drama



Serious drama in America came of age in the mid-twentieth century, with plays by Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and Lillian Hellman, among others. Though all four experimented with nonrealistic dramatic devices, much of their strongest work was realistic domestic drama. Included here are examples in photographs from recent productions.

Long Day's Journey Into Night by Eugene O'Neill with Paul Nicholls as the younger son, Edmund, Jessica Lange as Mary Tyrone, and Paul Rudd as James Tyrone, Jr. (Rosa Heller/Corbis Entertainment/Getty Images)



Gillian Anderson as Blanche Dubois and Vanessa Kirby as her sister Stella in Tennessee Williams' *A Strife for Justice* (National Theatre) in a production at the Young Vic in London, directed by Benedict Andrews. (Rosa Heller/Corbis Entertainment/Getty Images)



Lee Aaron Rosen as Chris Keller, Michael Tisdale as George Deever, and Diane Drew as Ann Deever in *All My Sons*, by Arthur Miller, directed by David Eblenson at the Huntington Theatre Company. (R. Charles Erickson)



Seth Numrich, left, and Danny Burstein in a recent Broadway revival of *Boys* by Clifford Odets, directed by Bartlett Shier. (Rosa Heller/The New York Times/Warner)

CHAPTER-BY-CHAPTER CHANGES

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

Chapter 1: Theatre Is Everywhere

- Updated examples of the relationship between theatre and popular entertainments. A new discussion of the theatrical qualities of cosplay.

Chapter 2: The Audience

- New and expanded discussion on “where and how we see theatre.” New and expanded discussion of participatory and immersive theatre as well as the history of theatre etiquette.

Chapter 3: Creating the Dramatic Script

- Updated the In Focus box on Writing for Theatre, Film, and Television.

Chapter 4: Theatrical Genres

- New In Focus box on Additional Forms and the Debate over Categorization.

Chapter 5: Acting for the Stage

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

Chapter 6: The Director and the Producer

- Expanded discussion of the responsibilities of the stage manager and the casting director.
- New In Focus box on Color Blind and Nontraditional Casting.

Chapter 7: Theatre Spaces

- Description of the transformation of the Broadway Imperial Theatre for the musical *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812* as an example of how space is a key element of a production.
- The discussion of stage direction has been moved to this chapter from “Scenery” to help students better understand the proscenium theatre.

Chapter 8: Scenery

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

Chapter 9: Stage Costumes

- New In Focus box on Technology and Costume Design.

Chapter 10: Lighting and Sound

- New In Focus box on Rock Concert and Theatre Lighting.
- New discussion of Assistive Listening Devices for hearing impaired audience members under the Sound Design discussion.

Chapters 11 through 16: Today’s Diverse Global Theatre

- Updated coverage in many of the history chapters, particularly citing recent discoveries (such as the excavation of the Curtain in the English Renaissance section).

- Updated examples in the final two chapters, such as references to *Fun Home* and *Hamilton* in the review of musical theatre and multicultural theatre.
- Discussion of additional multicultural theatres and artists in the final chapter.
- In Focus boxes in each chapter that help the students understand the continuing influence of theatre history on our theatre.
- Questions on how to evaluate a production of a historic play as well as how to evaluate a production of a new or contemporary play.

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Theatre: The Lively Art

PART 1

Theatre in Today's World

THE AUDIENCE SALUTES THE ARTISTS

The essence of theatre is a live audience in the presence of actors performing a dramatic script. Today, there is more live theatre available to audiences than perhaps at any time in history, with a wide variety of theatre sites and an impressive variety of the types of theatre offered. Central to the theatre experience is the interaction between audience members and live performers. Here we see the audience giving a standing ovation as cast members take their curtain call. (©Eddie Linssen/Alamy Stock Photo)



- 1 Theatre Is Everywhere
- 2 The Audience







THEATRE IS EVERYWHERE

As you begin your introductory theatre course, some of you may be asking: Why should I study theatre? For those of you who are theatre majors, you could be asking: Why am I studying theatre? I just want to learn how to be an actor, director, playwright, designer, or to work in production. The answer is knowledge of the basics of theatre is essential to anyone who wishes to pursue a theatre career. For those of you who are not majoring in the subject, this is perhaps an elective for your general education. For you, it should be pointed out that having a general understanding of theatre and its history is important to anyone who has never before gone to live theatre as well as someone who already enjoys attending the theatre and wishes to enhance that experience, an experience that will be with you the rest of your life.

In our textbook we will explain the elements that make up live theatre—acting, directing, design, playwrighting, as well as briefly survey its history—but before we turn to specifics we should be aware of two significant facts. One is the longevity and endurance of theatre, and the other is its widespread popularity, the fact that despite the pervasive competition of electronic, digital, and other forms of dramatic entertainment, there is today in the United States more widespread engagement in live theatre than perhaps at any time in its history. To begin with let us explain what we mean by the term “live theatre,” and then turn to how various competing media and popular entertainments have borrowed from it and challenged it in the last 100 years.

THEATRE TODAY

Prior to the modern period, for more than 2,000 years in the West and 1,500 years in Asia, the only way audiences could see theatre of any kind was to attend a live performance. Spectators left their homes and went to a space where a theatrical

◀ THE PERVASIVENESS OF THEATRE

Symbolic of the far reach of theatre today is the performance of this production of Fous de Bassin, created by the French company Ilotopie, on the water canals around the Puerto Madero neighborhood as part of the opening of the IX Buenos Aires' International Festival in Argentina in 2013. (©Natacha Pisarenko/AP Images)

event was taking place where they joined others to watch a production. If people wanted to see a tragedy, with kings and queens, heroes and villains, or a comedy making fun of human foibles, they would have to become audience members to watch a live performance.

Then, after all those centuries, at the beginning of the twentieth century, everything began to change. In rapid succession a series of technological innovations offered alternative ways to hear and observe drama. First, there was radio, and then silent film, and after that, movies with sound. Black-and-white film soon gave way to movies in color and not much later, film was joined by television, first in black and white and after that in color. Film and television now also use 3D technology as well as computerization to create amazingly realistic effects. Today, the computer and a series of hand-held electronic devices, including smartphones and tablets, allow viewers to watch films, television shows, and digitized performances anywhere. With all of these inventions, arriving in quick succession, viewing drama has become much more accessible and much less expensive.

With the development first of radio and silent film, there were predictions that such inventions would sound the death knell of live theatre. Surely, it was argued, with the advent of sound film and television, especially when color came in, live theatre was doomed. Consider what had happened to both film and television: talking pictures eliminated silent film, just as later, color television obliterated black-and-white TV. It seemed likely, therefore, that drama on film and television, and even more, on computers and other digital devices, might well eradicate live theatre.

The term for live theatre that is not observed through an electronic medium is *nonmediated theatre*. Contrary to the predictions, nonmediated theatre, or *live theatre*, has not only survived but has thrived. In fact, today it is more vibrant, more widespread, and more accessible than at almost any time in history.

Nonmediated or live theatre Theatre that is not observed through an electronic medium.

The Unique Quality of Theatre

In the face of the formidable competition that has arisen from all forms of electronic media, why do we continue to go to the theatre? There are a number of reasons, but the most important single reason can be found in the title of this book. We call theatre the *lively art* not only because it is exciting, suspenseful, and amusing, but also because it is alive in a way that makes it different from every other form of dramatic presentation. It is this live quality of theatre that makes it so durable and so indispensable.

The special nature of theatre becomes more apparent when we contrast the experience of seeing a drama in a theatre with seeing a drama on film or television. In many ways the dramas presented are alike. Both offer a story told in dramatic form—an enactment of scenes by performers who speak and act as if they are the people they represent—and film and television can give us many of the same feelings and experiences that we have when watching a theatre performance. We can learn a great deal about theatre from watching a play on film or television, and the accessibility of film and television means that they have a crucial role in our overall exposure to the depiction of dramatic events and dramatic characters.

Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between the two experiences, and we become aware of that difference when we contrast theatre with movies. This contrast does not have to do with technical matters, such as the way films

can show outdoor shots made from helicopters, cut instantaneously from one scene to another, or create interplanetary wars or cataclysmic events by using computer-generated special effects. The most significant difference between films and theatre is the *relationship between the performer and the audience*. The experience of being in the presence of the performer is more important to theatre than anything else. No matter how closely a film follows the story of a play, no matter how involved we are with the people on the screen, we are always in the presence of an *image*, never a living person.

We all know the difference between an image of someone and the flesh-and-blood reality. How often do we rehearse a speech we plan to make to someone we love, or fear: We run through the scene in our mind, picturing ourselves talking to the other person—declaring our love, asking for help, asking the boss for a raise. Sometimes we communicate with them via text messages, imagining them in our mind. But when we meet the person face-to-face, it is not the same. We freeze and find ourselves unable to speak; or perhaps our words gush forth incoherently. Seldom does the encounter take place as we planned.

Like films, television seems very close to theatre; sometimes it seems even closer than film. Television programs sometimes begin with words such as “This program comes to you live from Burbank, California.” Recent televised musicals have had titles such as *Hairspray Live!* But the word *live* must be qualified. Before television, *live* in the entertainment world meant “in person”: not only was the event taking place at that moment; it was taking place in the physical *presence* of the spectators. Usually, the term *live television* still means that an event is taking place at this moment, but “live” television does *not* take place in the presence of all of the viewers. In fact, even if there is a live studio audience, it is generally far removed from the vast majority of the viewing audience, possibly half a world away. In television, like film, we see an image—in the case of TV, on a screen—and we are free to look or not to look, or even to leave the room.

Our fascination with being in the presence of a person is difficult to explain but not difficult to verify, as the popularity of rock stars attests. No matter how often we as fans have seen a favorite star in the movies or heard a rock singer on a CD, computer, tablet, smartphone, or other digital device, we will go to any lengths to see the star in person. In the same way, at one time or another, each of us has braved bad weather and shoving crowds to see celebrities at a parade or a political rally. The same pull of personal contact draws us to the theatre.

At the heart of the theatre experience, therefore, is the performer–audience relationship—the immediate, personal exchange whose chemistry and magic give theatre its special quality. During a stage performance the actresses and actors can hear laughter, can sense silence, and can feel tension. In short, the audience itself can affect, and in subtle ways change, the performance. At the same time, as members of the audience we watch the performers closely, consciously or unconsciously asking ourselves questions: Are the performers convincing in their roles? Have they learned their parts well? Are they talented? Will they do something surprising? Will they make a mistake? At each moment, in every stage performance, we are looking for answers to questions like these. The performers are alive—and so is the very air itself—with the electricity of expectation. It is for this reason that we speak of theatre as the lively art. It is for this reason, as well as a number of others, that we study theatre as an art form.



THE AUDIENCE APPLAUDS

The audience is an integral, indispensable part of any theatre performance. Here, the audience watches a performance of a classical theatre piece in the outdoor theatre of Regents Park in London, England. (©Eric Nathan/VisitBritain/Getty Images)

In the next chapter, we will examine in detail the dynamic of the actor–audience relationship. Before we do so, however, other qualities of live theatre are worth exploring. One, as we’ve suggested, is the astonishing popularity of live theatre in the face of the competition it faces. Another is the amazing way in which theatre permeates every aspect of our lives, in ways of which we are often not even aware.

The Range and Accessibility of Theatre

One measure of the amazing health of live theatre today is the astounding range of opportunities we have of attending theatre, with locations, not only in the United States but throughout the world, presenting a greater variety of theatre offerings perhaps than ever before. For a long time Broadway in New York City was the fountainhead of live theatre in the United States. Though it is still thriving, and Broadway shows, particularly popular musicals, regularly tour to major and mid-size cities throughout America, theatre that originates on Broadway is not as predominant as it once was. Performing arts complexes in all parts of the country that continue to present productions of Broadway shows, in addition, often have other spaces which feature different types of live theatre. These might include 1,000-seat, 500-seat, or 200-seat theatres that offer new plays, revivals, intimate musicals, and other kinds of dramatic entertainment.

As we shall see, in New York, as in other cities throughout the United States and the world, there are also smaller spaces and companies that focus on more cutting edge dramas or experimental works. In addition, we shall also discuss the many theatre companies that focus on underrepresented groups.

At the same time, during the last half-century there has been a burgeoning of what are known as **regional theatres**: permanent, professional, nonprofit theatres that offer a season of first-class productions to their audiences each year. Their association, the League of Resident Theatres, lists a total of 74 such theatres scattered across the country. Added to the above are approximately 120 Shakespeare theatres found in virtually every state in the United States that feature, especially in the summer months, high-quality productions of Shakespeare and the classics as well as modern plays.

Another important component of today’s theatre landscape is the many college and university theatres found in every one of the fifty states, as well as Canada and elsewhere. Many colleges have not one but perhaps two or three theatre spaces in which students and guest artists perform. There might be, for instance, a 500- or 600-seat theatre, a smaller 200-seat theatre with a different configuration, and a 100-seat “black box” for more experimental or intimate productions.

Finally, in every corner of the United States, there are an astonishing 7,000 so-called **community theatres**. These are semiprofessional and experienced amateur groups who present a series of plays each year that appeal to their audiences. It might surprise many of us to learn that these several thousand theatres present roughly 46,000 productions each year to audiences that number in the millions. Obviously, taken together, the total number of theatre events presented each year in the United States is a staggering, almost unbelievable figure.

It is not, however, just the vast range and number of annual productions that is surprising, it is the diversity of offerings. First, there is the rich mixture of traditional theatre from the past with the latest theatre offerings of today. Theatre from the past begins with the Greek theatre, the foundation of all Western theatre, and moves through Shakespeare in the Elizabethan era, the Spanish playwright

Regional theatres

Permanent, professional, nonprofit theatres offering first-class productions to their audiences.

Community theatres

Semiprofessional and experienced amateur groups that present plays that appeal to their specific audiences.