

Theatre Histories:

An Introduction

Second Edition

**Phillip B. Zarrilli,
Bruce McConachie,
Gary Jay Williams, and
Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei**

General Editor: Gary Jay Williams



Theatre Histories

This new edition of the innovative and widely acclaimed *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* offers overviews of theatre and drama in many world cultures and periods together with case studies demonstrating the methods and interpretive approaches used by today's theatre historians.

Completely revised and renewed in color, enhancements and new material include:

- A full-color text design with added timelines to each opening section
- A wealth of new color illustrations to help convey the vitality of performances described
- New case studies on African, Asian and Western subjects
- A new chapter on modernism, and updated and expanded chapters and part introductions
- Fuller definitions of terms and concepts throughout in a new glossary.
- A re-designed support website offering links to new audio-visual resources, expanded bibliographies, approaches to teaching theatre and performance history, discussion questions relating to case studies and an online glossary.

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*Phillip B. Zarrilli, Bruce McConachie,
Gary Jay Williams, and
Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei*

General Editor: Gary Jay Williams

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A history of this scope is possible in great part, of course, because of the specialized works of many dedicated scholars. We are indebted to them; we have drawn on them often and happily. Their works are cited in this text and in the extended bibliographies on our website.

Many of our colleagues have been especially supportive. Tobin Nellhaus's insights into the importance of major new communication technologies for theatre history helped us shape the periodization of our book. We especially wish to thank for their advice and encouragement Claire Conceison, Dave Escoffery, Faye C. Fei, Richard Hornby, David Jortner, Marianne McDonald, David Mayer, Paul Murphy, Stuart Sillars, Julia Walker, Andrew Weintraub, E.J. Westlake, S.E. Wilmer, W.B. Worthen, and Jiayun Zhuang. Simon Williams was initially involved in this project and provided valuable contributions at an early stage. We have listened to, and benefited from the external reviewers of our work, including our critics;

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Routledge would like to thank all those archives and individuals who have given permission to reproduce images in this textbook. In a few rare cases, we were unable, despite the utmost efforts, to locate owners of materials. For this we apologize and will make any corrections in the next reprint if contacted.

Phillip B. Zarrilli
Bruce McConachie
Gary Jay Williams
Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei

Preface: Interpreting performances and cultures

A first mapping: About this book in its second edition

With *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* we set out to rethink the ways in which a theatre history text might be written, and the response to the first edition has been gratifying. In this, our second edition, we offer many refinements, additions, and new features, often in response to input from our readers. Among them are the following.

- Routledge's new design visually integrates this text's innovative features, such as the case studies. We have added timelines and a glossary of terms. We offer many color illustrations to help convey the vitality of the performances we describe.
- We have added new case studies – on African, Asian and Western subjects.
- We offer a new chapter on modernism, and we have updated and expanded each chapter and the introductions to the four parts of the book.
- We offer fuller definitions of terms and concepts throughout, and a glossary of terms on our companion website (see below).
- We list many audio-visual resources throughout, including many on the World Wide Web. This icon  in the text indicates that there is an audio-visual resource supporting the topic that the reader will find listed among the key references at the end of that chapter or case study. Some resources are on the World Wide Web; see our note on the responsible use of these later in this preface.
- Finally, with this second edition, Routledge offers a redesigned, supporting website (www.theatrehistories.com) that provides many additional resources, including discussion questions for many of the case studies, more listings of audio-visual resources, expanded bibliographies, and samples of approaches to teaching theatre and performance history in ways congenial to the objectives of this text.

We have designed this book to achieve two main objectives, mutually supportive.

- We seek to provide a global framework in which readers can consider performances in a variety of cultures, including performances in historical and contemporary India, Japan, Indonesia, Mexico, and China. We consider these first in and of themselves, in their own cultures, and sometimes in relation to cross-cultural themes but never in the margins of Western culture.
- We demonstrate a variety of interpretive approaches to analyzing theatre and performance. We do so to challenge our readers to think critically about how histories are written and to be active learners, taking up problems and issues rather than passively downloading data.

To accomplish our goals, we have organized every part of this book around themes and arguments.

- In the introductions to our four major sections, we relate performance and theatre to transformations in modes of human communication that have reshaped human perception.
- Our chapters within these sections explore the relations between the theatre and many kinds of cultural forces.
- Our case studies at the end of each chapter explain and apply different interpretive approaches applicable to the study of theatre history. Each case study focuses on a specific topic related to the theme of the chapter and so expands on the coverage of that chapter. Most are framed to instructively demonstrate interpretive approaches in the field today. The types of approaches can be seen in a quick review of the table of contents. We have endeavored to explain each approach in language accessible to readers new to them. The case studies vary somewhat in levels of conceptual difficulty; teachers may wish to adjust assignments or provide guidance according to the levels of their classes or of individual students. For each case study we offer discussion questions on Routledge's companion website for this text that will help the reader understand the interpretive approach: www.theatrehistories.com.

Part II can serve to illustrate the design of the book.

- The introduction to this section considers the impact of the development of print culture on plays and performances. It looks through this lens at the *commedia dell'arte*, the rise of professional companies, neoclassicism in Europe, perspective scenery, and the authority of the printed play text, among other topics.
- The three chapters in this section then explore the relationship between theatre and power between 1600 and 1900, considering such issues as patronage, censorship, nationalism, and imperialism, often relating these to print culture. Among the subjects we consider are the impact on theatre of neoclassical rules and church strictures in seventeenth-century France, government regulations of *kabuki* actors in Japan, Enlightenment ideologies in eighteenth-century British drama, romanticism, nationalism in theatre in the United States of America, and Orientalism on the stages of Europe.

- The case studies that follow these chapters include:
 - an essay on Molière and the controversy over his play, *Tartuffe*, in the light of theories of the carnivalesque;
 - a study of *kabuki* and *bunraku* using the concepts of mimesis and the hybrid body;
 - an essay on gender in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* interpreted through “queer” theory;
 - an analysis of portraits of the actor David Garrick as sites of representation of English national ideals and anxieties;
 - a study of types of melodrama defined with respect to the concept of cultural hegemony and power relations within society;
 - an essay on Friedrich Schiller and the dream of a national German theatre;
 - a study of nationalism in the modern Irish theatre seen through the lens of cognitive linguistics.

A second mapping: Theatre in relation to key developments in human communication

One distinctive characteristic of human awareness and consciousness is the ability to reflect on and communicate who we are. New developments in communication in human history have always altered the ways people organize their worlds – from the invention of writing to the creation of digitized communication and satellite relays. Theatre and performance being complex kinds of communal reflection and communication, we have found it fruitful to consider them in relation to innovations in communication at large. For this strategy of *periodization* – which can be defined as the building of interpretive frameworks that order our knowledge of history – we are indebted in part to the visionary work of Walter Ong in his *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (1982) and to Tobin Nellhaus's synthesizing reflections on performance and communication (2000).

- Part I, “Performance and theatre in oral and writing cultures before 1700,” traces communication developments from the emergence of language through oral, ritual, and shamanic modes of performance down to the development of systems of writing and the invention of a variety of types of theatre and drama in literate cultures.
- Part II, “Theatre and performance in print cultures, 1500–1900,” starts at the point when print technologies developed in China and Europe and began to affect the ways in which nations represented themselves to themselves and to the world.
- Part III, “Theatre and performance in modern media cultures, 1850–1970,” traces the impact on theatre and performance of photography and new audiophonic modes of communication such as radio and telephone.
- Part IV, “Theatre and performance in the age of global communications, 1970–2009,” shows how both electronic media and live performances give expression to the cultural disjunctures and the struggle for new communities that mark the age of globalization.

Innovations in communication are not the only forces shaping theatre and performance, of course, and we examine many others. We explain the relation of performances in Iran, India, and Japan to the religions of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shinto, respectively.

We suggest that the development and appeal of European melodrama are related to cultural changes in the wake of the French Revolution. We show how the theatre performs issues of national identity in Germany, Russia, China and Japan in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A third mapping: Cultural performances, theatre, and drama

As the reader will notice, we often use two or three terms, sometimes in combination, to describe our focus: “cultural performances,” “theatre,” and “drama.”

- “Drama” is a term with Western origins that is generally used to describe plays, collectively or in the singular. Sometimes (not in this book) it carries the implicit sense of plays as literary works, printed texts to be read as “dramatic literature,” apart from performance.
- By “theatre” we usually mean live performances by skilled artists for live audiences, performances that engage the imagination, emotion, intellect, and cultural sensibilities of spectators – at varying levels. Such performances may or may not take place in purpose-built theatres.

“Performance” is used today in the field of performance studies as a broadly inclusive term for all the ways in which humans represent themselves in embodied ways. Scholars apply the term not only to the staging of plays but to religious rituals, state ceremonies, carnival festivals, political demonstrations, athletic contests, or the repetition of customs around a family dinner table. This field developed as a way of comprehending “the world of performance and the world as performance,” as Richard Schechner, a pioneer in this field, has put it (2002:22). The field has roots in studies of symbolic language and behavior by cultural anthropologists and linguists who seek to understand why cultural practices and languages are constructed as they are in specific cultures. This kind of study crosses many boundaries that have been drawn around modes of performance, such as those suggested by the terms “high” and “low” art. Anthropologist Edward Schieffelin writes: “performativity, whether in ritual performance, theatrical entertainment or the social articulation of ordinary human situations, is the imaginative creation of a human world” (1998:205). Theatrical productions are one of many kinds of cultural performance. We think it natural and enlightening to make the connections.

Our book considers a wide range of cultural performances – Eastern and Western – from Balinese shadow-puppet shows to productions of the plays of Bertolt Brecht and Samuel Beckett, from Japanese *kabuki* theatre to Western realism. We also consider Vedic chanting in India, the story-telling of pre-Christian Celtic bards (Chapter 1), the performance of healing rites in Korea and Peru (Chapters 1 and 13), Corpus Christi processions in England (Chapter 2), and cultural fusion in rock music (Chapter 13). We believe the juxtapositions among these will attune the reader to appreciate better the wide spectrum of theatre/performance in many cultures.



Figure 0.1

Two male Xantolo dancers dressed as women for the celebrations in Zapotila, Hidalgo, of the Day of the Dead, the Mexican counterpart of the Christian feasts of All Saints' and All Souls' Days.

Source: © Chloe Sayer, color plate 29, in Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayer, *The Day of the Dead in Mexico*. British Museum Press, 1991.



Figure 0.2

Backstage of a *wayang* shadow-theatre in the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, where a *dalang* (puppeteer) manipulates his puppets behind the screen, accompanied by musicians, in a performance of a play about the Pandava brothers derived from the *Mahabharata*.

Photo: J. Highet/Lebrecht Music & Arts.

A fourth mapping: About historiography

Writing about an event in the past always involves constructing a version of it. Historians of the nineteenth century purported to offer objective, scientific histories, ostensibly derived from the empirical processing of facts. Most historians today have a much more guarded notion of objectivity, recognizing that the writing of history has been, and can be deeply affected by the historical, cultural formations within which historians work.

To take just two examples of the impact of such cultural formations, the histories of blacks and women were not given much attention in the textbooks of mainstream Western history until about the 1970s. In the study of theatre history in particular, scholars have long known that male actors performed female as well as male roles in the Greek theatre of the fifth century B.C.E. and in English theatre in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it is only relatively recently that there has been any discussion of what men playing women might have meant to those cultures and what this might reveal to us



Figure 0.3

Mr. Garrick in "Richard III", engraving by William Hogarth and Charles Grignion, 1746, based on Hogarth's painting. This popular image of Shakespeare's version of the English king served several eighteenth-century narratives of English national identity (see the Chapter 5 case study on Garrick).

© Gary Jay and Josephine S. Williams.

about notions of gender and sexuality in these cultures. (See the Chapter 4 case study on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in the light of "queer" theory.) Laurence Senelick, noting that theatre seems to be "most itself when challenging the norms of its ambient culture," writes that "one of the most powerful means of doing so is shape-changing, particularly with regard to sex and gender" (Senelick 2000:10). Critiquing past historical interpretations is possible today in part because of a heightened awareness of the need to represent in our histories those who have had neither power nor wealth and so have had

little voice in how their histories were written. Below, we offer other examples of how engrained cultural habits can inform the writing of histories of theatre.

- Japanese *nō* theatre, developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (see Chapter 3), has usually been represented in Western textbooks as an enigmatic, masked, medieval dance-music-drama, with beautiful costumes, locked in its historical past. Westerners have described it as being performed to "strangely dissonant" music, with "excruciatingly slow" dances.

Westerners have characterized its plays as “more like lyric poetry than drama” because they “lack conflict.” This is to characterize *nō* drama as inferior because it does not measure up to the criteria for Western drama and theatre. Western histories sometimes note that performing or viewing *nō* can be a form of Zen Buddhist meditation, suggestive of the mystical nature of “the Japanese mind.” This is to repeat and reinforce a Western stereotype of an exotic East, incomprehensible to the West and so one that needs to emerge from its inscrutable ways into the modern world – which is to say the Western world. (Scholars refer to this kind of Western rendering of Eastern and Middle Eastern cultures as Orientalism. We illustrate this kind of thinking in several places, including the Chapter 3 case study of *kathakali* and the Chapter 12 case studies on postcolonial studies and deconstruction.) This book deals with Japanese *nō* theatre on its own terms, both in its origins and in its meanings for the Japanese today.

- The ancient Greeks have often been idealized by Western historians in narratives of them as the source of an ever-progressive Western civilization. Any theatre historian would want to mark Athens’ development of the art in Western culture and to admire the architecture of ancient Greek theatres or Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the earliest, extant, systematic analysis of Western drama. But historians operating uncritically in the idealizing mode of humanism have often stopped there. Our account appreciates the ancient plays for both their poetic achievement and as reflections of the tensions and problems that Athenian society was negotiating in the fifth century B.C.E. The artistry of Greek theatre can be appreciated together with explorations of the status of women in this patriarchal culture and considerations of the portraits of the strong, often disruptive women in the plays. We offer a picture of fifth-century Greek theatre as a complex expression of a dialectical culture, an often controversial theatre that was problematically situated inside Athens’ annual

state religious festivals (see Chapter 2). Presenting an idealizing narrative of any historical period is not just to oversimplify. It is to falsify and to leave out the problems that ought to engage us.

- Western theatre studies have long considered theatrical production to be text-centered, playwright-driven. But, as readers of this book will see, in many other parts of the world performance in itself has long been regarded by scholars and audiences as an equally important “text.” Performers are as respected as writers. Actors in India’s *kathakali* dance drama keep manuals that carefully record performative additions to the “original” text (see the studies of the *kutiyattam* Sanskrit theatre and the *kathakali* dance theatre of India in Chapter 3; see also the case study of *kabuki* and *bunraku* at the end of Chapter 4). Throughout our book, the juxtapositions of cultures allow readers to begin to understand and respect significant differences among their theatre practices.
- When the Indian Sanskrit drama, *Sakuntala* (written by Kālidāsa, probably in the fifth century C.E.), appeared in an English translation by Sir William Jones in 1789, there was an enthusiastic response to it throughout Germany, Italy, and France. It was widely translated, and numerous adaptations were produced as ballets, dramas, or operas. The famous German playwright and spokesman for high art in the Western tradition, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), viewed *Sakuntala* as “a rich source of archetypal values.” Even as he was appreciating *Sakuntala* as poetry, he was making an effort to universalize it and so to dissociate it as a “purely” poetic work “from Indian art, religion, and philosophy” (Figueira 1991:13). Goethe’s desire to remove *Sakuntala* from its culture tells us more about nineteenth-century German idealism than it does about Kālidāsa’s play or Indian culture. Together with exploring artistic imaginations, we attempt to explain cultural contexts and historical differences. This seems especially important for an art so intricately linked to the cultures in which it is situated.

The strategies in this book reflect both the always necessary respect for evidence and the critiques of traditional historiography in the last three decades. The new insights into language, culture, and power relationships have brought with them new opportunities for understanding the past. They have, at the same time, shown us how much our concepts of truth are always subject to some degree to powerful cultural formations. However, truth is not always relative and indeterminate. In the face of the massive surviving evidence gathered by many reliable historians, no scholar of integrity can deny the truth of the World War II Holocaust in which German Nazis exterminated millions of Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and political opponents in an attempt to establish a master race.

The historian's fundamental obligation remains; she should be as scrupulous as possible in the pursuit of truth (Iggers 2005:11, 16; Evans 1997:214). The theatre historian will consult all the primary sources available and seek new evidence. She will ask whose history has not been told. She will ask about the gender, race, and class of the eyewitness who left us a written account or sketch of a production. She will ask who benefited from the prevailing ideologies of the age – the visible and not so visible value systems – and who did not. She will ask why previous historians asked some questions and not others. Ultimately, she will be part of the evolving process in which we are all engaged to better understand those in the past and ourselves.

A caveat on using resources on the World Wide Web

In some of our sections, we have referred readers to selected websites listed among the key references (see, for example, p. 39). Many are treasures that will take students to performances worldwide with an ease undreamed of ten years ago. Some of these include videos of the work of famous contemporary artists, such as Peter Brook, Jerzy Grotowski, and Laurie Anderson. However, as our readers well know, anyone can put up a scene from his or her production on a website or YouTube, whatever the artistic quality. Anyone can put

up a website with data and opinions that represent no special expertise. Unlike the data and opinion in scholarly books and articles, those on many websites are not subjected to review by experts in the field before being disseminated to millions of possible users. We have been selective (and do not pretend to offer an exhaustive list of good sites). Still, it is best to use websites in conjunction with the current scholarly books and articles that we also cite, plentifully, in our key references throughout this book. These have been vetted by experts, and many represent new research and ideas not reflected in websites. Of course, websites are ephemeral and sometimes disappear without a trace; those we cite were active as of late May 2009.

Additional support of this book online

On Routledge's companion website (www.theatrehistories.com), we offer many features we hope readers will find useful. These include discussion questions for each case study; practical exercises for teaching theatre history, and additional links to audio-visual resources. We invite contributions to the section on teaching theatre history.

Diacritics, spellings, names, and a final note on authorship

We have followed common scholarly usage in diacritical markings and Romanized spellings of terms from the many languages used in this text. With Japanese and Chinese names, we place the family name first (e.g., Suzuki Tadashi), unless the person has adopted Western usage.

The individual authors of the components of this book are identified at the beginning of each of the four parts, chapters, and case studies. However, this book has been a collaborative work in many ways; each part has been overseen by its own editor, and each of us has reviewed the work of the others, sometimes contributing substantively. Each of us has had a voice in major content and organizational decisions.

The Authors

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PART I

Performance and theatre in oral and writing cultures before 1700

Edited by **Phillip B. Zarrilli**

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PART I: PERFORMANCE AND THEATRE IN ORAL AND WRITING CULTURES BEFORE 1700

THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

Ritual drama of Osiris, Egypt,
4000 B.C.E.–1500 B.C.E.
Ritual landscape sites,
England 3500–2500 B.C.E.
Performances, festivals, Meso-
america, 3000 B.C.E.
Oral epic, *Gilgamesh*, Sumeria
2700 B.C.E.
Hopi Indian performances,
North America 1000 B.C.E.
Celtic rituals, bardic festivals,
Europe 1000 B.C.E.
Homer, bardic performance,
Greece, 800 B.C.E.
Greek Tragedy, 534 B.C.E.

Mahabharata, Sanskrit drama
India 500 B.C.E.
Rāmlilā devotional drama,
Northern India 400 B.C.E.
Aristotle's *Poetics* c. B.C.E. 330
Plato's *The Republic*, B.C.E. 373
Roman drama 204 B.C.E.–
65 C.E.
Ramayana in Sanskrit
200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.
Bharata writes *Nāṭyaśāstra*,
India 200 B.C.E.–200 C.E.
Catholic opposition to theatre
Last theatre performance,
Roman Empire 533 C.E.

Chinese story
recitation 900 C.E.
Kutiyattam temple
theatre India, 900
European Catholic
drama 925–1600
Taz'ieh, Muslim
ritual 1200
Chinese music drama
1279–1654 Ming
dynasty
Japanese *nō* theatre,
Zeami 1363–1443

Renaissance drama,
Europe 1390
Rabinal Achi, Mayan
drama, 1500
Shakespeare 1564–1616
Kathakali dance drama,
India 1500–1600
Rāmlilā, Tulsida's Hindi
devotional drama 1625
Molière 1622–1673
Spanish Catholic drama
1550–1765
Li Yu's theory of theatre,
China 1677

**4000 B.C.E. to
500 B.C.E.**

**500 B.C.E. to
500 C.E.**

**500 C.E. to
1400 C.E.**

**1400 C.E. to
1700 C.E.**

WORLD DEVELOPMENTS, MEDIA

Egyptian civilization 3150 B.C.E.
Civilization in Crete 3800
Phoenician alphabet 3500
Egyptian hieroglyphs 3400
Early Mayan peoples, Meso-
america 2000–1000
Shang dynasty, China 1600–1050
Olmec peoples, Meso-
america 1200
Greeks in Troy 1184
Moveable clay type, China 1049
Zhou dynasty, China 1000–256
Phoenician alphabet in use
in Greece 850
Written Sanskrit 800
Olympic games, Greece 776
Founding of Rome 753
Writing in Mesoamerica 600
Siddhartha Gautama – Buddha,
India 563–483

Greco–Persian wars,
499–479 B.C.E.
Periclean age, Athens 460–429
Peloponnesian wars 434–404
Alexander Hellenizing
E. Mediterranean 336–323
Moveable wooden type
printing China 305
Yamato period, Japan
250–710
Han dynasty, China
206–220
Caesar Augustus, emperor
Roman Empire 27–14 C.E.
Virgil's *Aeneid* 319 C.E.
Jesus Christ 04–29? C.E.
Buddhism from China
to India 67 C.E.
Western Roman Empire falls,
486 C.E.

570 Birth of Mohammed
570 C.E.
Tang dynasty, China
618–906
Viking exploration
790–1066
Trans-Sahara trade
routes 800–1100
Song dynasty, China
960–1276
Normans conquer
England 1066
Christian crusades
against Muslims
1099
Marco Polo 1254–1324
Muromachi period,
Japan 1336–1573
Geoffrey Chaucer,
England 1343–1400

Renaissance, Europe
1400–1600 C.E.
European trafficking
in African Slaves 1400
Ottomans capture
Constantinople 1453
Bible printed using
metal type 1455
Inquisition, Spain 1468
Columbus in North
America 1492
Spanish colonization
W. Hemisphere 1493
Reformation, Europe 1500
Edo period, Japan
1603–1868
English in Jamestown,
Virginia 1607
Louis XIV, Sun King,
France 1643–1715

Timelines 1. 120,000 B.C.E. to 8,000 B.C.E. saw the development of *homo sapiens*, languages, early civilizations, and early art work. The timelines represent benchmarks relevant to themes in Part I. Entries are for reference; some may not be explicitly discussed in Part I, given the thematic organization of our coverage. See the index for name and subject searching.

PART I

Performance and theatre in oral and writing cultures before 1700

INTRODUCTION: SPEECH, WRITING, AND PERFORMANCE

The evolution of human speech and language, and the invention of writing both had a revolutionary impact on human consciousness. Each changed fundamentally the way humans interacted with each other and their environment, and how they imagined themselves and their place in the world. Part I examines cultural performance and theatre as they emerged throughout the world before 1700 C.E. It looks at performance and theatre from the evolution of human speech, through the birth of language and the development of systems of writing, to the invention of printing, first in China (305 C.E. for moveable wooden type; 1049 B.C.E. for moveable clay type) and later in Europe (fifteenth century).

Human history stretches back across five million years, yet the majority of historical accounts of our collective endeavors focus on life since the invention of writing around 3000 B.C.E. Given this historical focus on literate rather than non-literate cultures and peoples, 99.9 percent of human history receives little serious study. Historians of theatre and performance usually focus where evidence exists in the form of written texts or in archeological ruins of purpose-built performance structures. Chapter 1 discusses the historiographical problems of interpreting and understanding performance in pre-literate cultures. It also provides an overview of the wide range of oral, ritual, and shamanic performances that developed during pre-literate human history but which still inform and interact with literate performance practices in many cultures today. In Chapters 2 and 3, we examine how drama and theatre developed as distinctive forms of

performance practice alongside extant oral and ritual performance in some literate state societies.

In this introduction, we consider what human consciousness might have been like before language as we know it, examining how perception, action, and imitation were central to early human existence. We trace one theory of the evolution of speech and language that explains how humans developed the unique ability for symbolic communication – an ability essential for story-telling and for writing and performing drama. We examine the ways in which the human imagination and the ability to communicate through performance are engaged in different types of social organization.

We then consider the impact of the invention of complete systems of writing and the concomitant act of reading, by the Sumerians in Mesopotamia (approximately 3000 B.C.E.), and by Native American societies in Mesoamerica (probably in southern Mexico around 600 B.C.E.). The invention of writing/reading produced a revolution in both human consciousness and social organization as profound as the invention of speech and language. As Maryanne Wolf argues, genetically humans “were never born to read” (Wolf 2008:3). The acts of writing/reading “rearranged the very organization of our brain, which in turn expanded the ways we were able to think,” which altered the intellectual and cultural evolution of our species (Wolf 2008:3). This revolution produced highly reflexive modes of writing/reading/performance, such as poetry, drama, and criticism in some but not all cultures.

The evolution of human language and consciousness

Episodic and mimetic modes of communication

For our earliest human ancestors, direct perception via the senses played an essential role in survival for hundreds of thousands of years. Our five senses allow us directly and immediately to perceive and respond to the environment in the here-and-now. While our senses and perception continue to be important to us today, we do not depend on them for survival to the extent we once did, except in natural disasters or violent conflict.

Early in human history, engaging in participatory, communal, bodily based activities such as early forms of hunting, music, dance, and archaic ritual served both to heighten one’s sensory perceptions and awareness, and to further orient and attune each person to others in the immediate group and to the environment. In these early practices, the human operated primarily as a perceiver/doer/actor-in-the-world. One engaged the world directly and immediately, without the

mediation of “thinking” about an activity. Archaic forms of music, dance, and ritual engaged people in voicing or moving together – a means of attuning one’s sensory awareness to others and developing social bonds (McNeill 1995: *passim*). Success in hunting with archaic weapons depended on the ability of individual and group to move silently, quickly, and with stealth while sustaining synchronous coordination through non-verbal communication with others. Survival was no doubt enhanced for those best attuned to their senses and those who could form strong bonds with others in small communal groups fighting for life in harsh environments.

In his outline of four phases of human evolution – the episodic, the mimetic, the mythic, and the theoretic – Merlin Donald describes this earliest stage of human evolution as being part of an “episodic” culture, wherein one lives within the here-and-now (1991). There is no past or future, only the present.

Ethnologists’ studies of animal behavior show that many animals, and especially our primate ancestors, also engaged in simple mimesis (imitation). The ability to learn by imitating behavior is essential to survival. Mimesis also can be autotelic – that is, it has its own rewards that are experienced as enjoyable and even playful. Mimetic behavior can thereby generate a sense of well-being. Merlin Donald uses the term “mimetic” to describe this second phase of human development beyond the episodic. In the mimetic phase, gesture, posture, and facial expression begin to be used as early forms of non-verbal communication.

Both the episodic mode of staying in the moment and the mimetic mode have been central to the activities of the performer and actor throughout history and across cultures. The episodic and mimetic modes are prerequisite aspects of performance from ritual to drama.

The evolution of human speech

“Language” is a term that is now applied to the myriad forms of communication that evolved over millions of years to allow all living beings to communicate with other animates, especially those of the same species. Ethnologists study everything from the dance language of honey bees, to the chemical “language” used by ants, to various bio-acoustic modes of communication such as those of birds, frogs, blue whales, and elephants. The pitches of acoustic “languages” are often above or below the range of the human ear. Scientists studying Bermudan humpback whales have discovered that they vocalize lengthy “love songs” varying in pitch and lasting from six to thirty minutes. Such songs change over time, with a constant process of development in which new elements are composed, repeated, and elaborated. Dolphins and especially miniature chimps, the bonobos – with whom humans share 99 percent of the same genetic make-up – can be trained to communicate spontaneously and creatively.

But humankind and our closest ancestors developed more sophisticated modes of both natural and unnatural communication. How did this happen? Although the great apes that preceded hominid development possessed the neural pathways necessary for complex modes of communicative expression to convey information, what humans in particular eventually possessed were the lips, tongue, and modes of controlled exhalation that would anatomically allow us to speak.

Some forms of human development, such as tool-making, do not necessarily require language. More complex social activities, for example crossing a sea mass such as the Strait of Gibraltar (between southern Spain and North Africa) in a planned migration, certainly do. Similarly, cooperative hunting requires the use of speech.

As the anatomical ability to breathe properly to support speech evolved, the brain continued to enlarge, and as more complex modes of thought processes and language use evolved, the necessary neural pathways developed. What resulted was not a single “primeval” language, but rather the distinctive capacity to use language self-referentially, that is, the ability to use words that point to other words via syntax. This development was only complete anatomically when modern humans, *Homo sapiens*, became dominant, approximately 150,000 years ago.

Mythic and theoretic modes of communication

By 120,000 years ago a *Homo sapiens* recognizable as our identical ancestor had emerged. One particular group of “modern” *Homo sapiens*, living in a cave at the mouth of the Klasies River in South Africa between 120,000 and 60,000 years ago, were settled permanently, engaged in complex domestic life, felled giant buffaloes with spears, possessed a complex knowledge of their environment, practiced music and art (using red ochre “crayons”), engaged in ritual burial of the dead, and used language much as we do today. *Homo sapiens* either absorbed or replaced earlier ancestors. 🖼️

The period brought a “cultural explosion.” The species could depict humans, animals, symbols, and perhaps even note the passage of time (lunar calendars) in bone and ivory, on stone and wood. They fashioned flutes, drums, and stringed instruments, and painted or etched the walls of caves (Figure I.1).

As Fischer notes, “By now articulate speech – and the symbolic reasoning it allowed – was certainly being used in all the ways we are familiar with today, and hominids were no longer merely the ‘talking ape’, but the ‘symbolic ape’” (Fischer 1999:56).

Early forms of speech allowed communication and planning sufficient for humans to cross seas, settle villages, and further develop technology, hunting, music, dance, rituals, and narratives. According to Merlin Donald, the evolution of human speech and language transformed our mimetic capabilities into the “mythic” phase

of our development. Telling stories about ourselves, our communities, and our place in the world allowed an entirely new way of understanding and representing reality. It is these earliest pre-literate oral, ritual, and shamanic performances that are examined in Chapter 1 as they developed in relatively intimate, small-scale communal settings.



Figure I.1

An engraving of a horse on the walls of the Chauvet Cave in the Pyrenees in southern France, done some thirty thousand years ago, in the Paleolithic Age, and discovered in 1994. It is among hundreds of relatively sophisticated depictions in this cave that are considered the oldest known such art works in the world. When Picasso saw them, he said: "We have learned nothing."

Source: French Ministry of Culture and Communication, Regional Director for Cultural Affairs, Rhône-Alpes Region, Regional Department of Archaeology. The Key References at the end of this Introduction list an interactive website.

Human language, writing, and society

Band, tribe, chiefdom, state

The need for survival and for a sense of belonging or connectedness to others leads human beings to organize themselves into communities. Each type and scale of social organization – bands, tribes, chiefdoms, states (Diamond 1997:267ff) – engages in different ways our communicative abilities, our imagining of ourselves, our relationships to others, and thereby the types of performances we create. The development of writing/reading, and the subsequent emergence of drama and theatre, seems to have come with the formation of states.

By the time fully articulate speech developed (35,000 years ago), all humans lived in bands – intimate, relatively simple, nomadic bands. Most continued to do so until as recently as 11,000 years ago. Today only a few bands live autonomously in remote regions of New Guinea and the Amazon. Bands are usually nomadic and range in size from five to 80 people. They base their relationships on kinship; share a common language; exchange stories, words, dances, music, rituals, and goods; and, arguably, make decisions in ways that are relatively informal. For people living within bands, experience is shaped primarily through ever-evolving relationships with the immediate environment and through face-to-face contact with those with whom one has daily involvement, often shaped by collective performances and rituals.

About 12,000 years ago, a warming climate in the Fertile Crescent of the Near East (today's Iraq between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers; see Figure I.2) and perhaps a few other places in the world, allowed a new form of settled social organization to emerge – tribes. Improved technology allowed the growth and domestication of wild grains, eventually producing a biological revolution. Major population settlements with permanent dwellings were built in which hundreds rather than dozens of people lived, sharing a common language and culture, including music, dance, stories, and rituals. Tribes consist of more than one kinship group (clans), but are still small enough that all individuals are known by relationships and names. As peoples settle, particular languages become associated with specific geographical regions. Language becomes associated with land.

Chiefdoms emerged by approximately 5500 B.C.E. in the region of the Fertile Crescent and by around 1000 B.C.E. in Mesoamerica and the Andes. Chiefdoms are considerably larger than tribes, numbering from several thousand to as many as tens of thousands of people. Chiefdoms were the first societies organized around a central hereditary authority figure who often held a monopoly over the exercise of power, centralizing information and decision-making. Some chiefs, such as those in Hawaii, were assumed to be divine, or of divine descent, and either combined in their own role the authority of being chief priest, or supported a

separate group of priests who provided justification for their authority. As late as 1492 C.E., chiefdoms were common in productive areas of South and Central America and some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the eastern United States, and Polynesia. But by the twentieth century chiefdoms had disappeared as they were conquered by centralized states. Today, states are the most familiar form of social, political, and economic organization; indeed, the entire land mass of the world, with the exception of Antarctica, is now ruled by modern nation-states (see Chapter 6 for a discussion of modern nation-states). Unlike bands, tribes, and

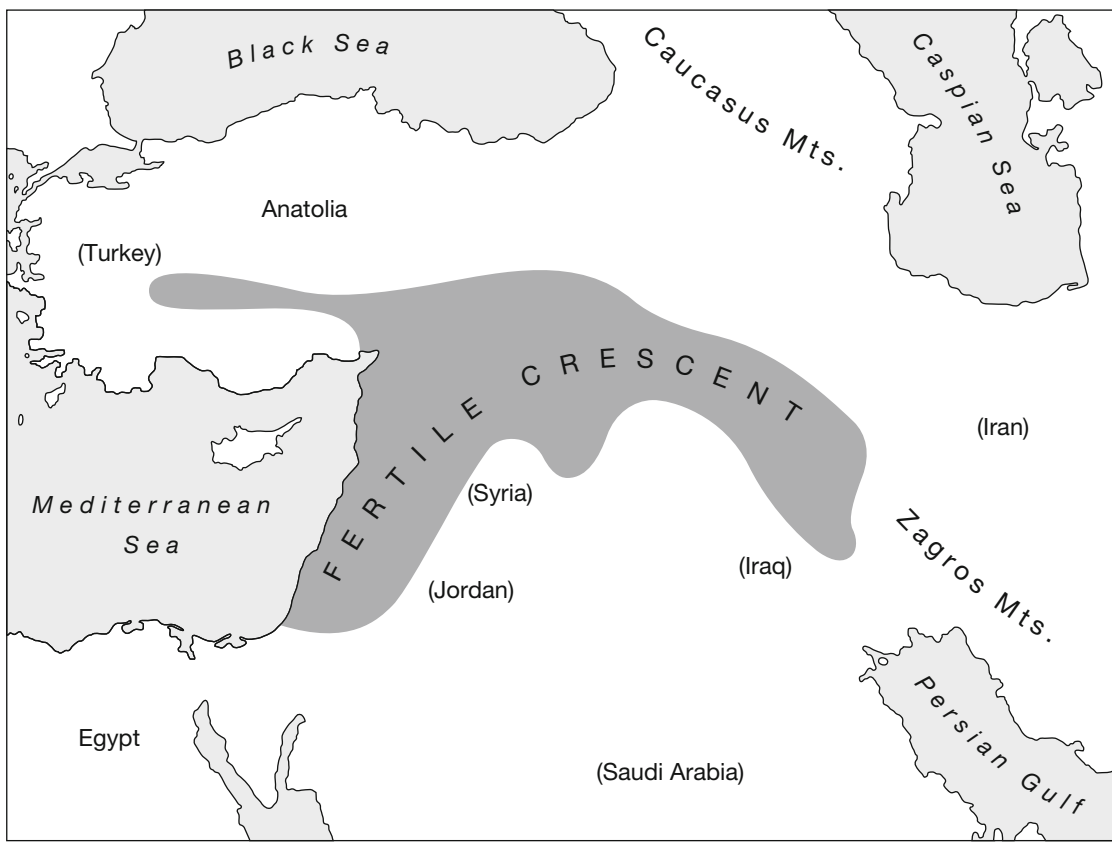


Figure 1.2

The region of the Fertile Crescent at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, an area rich in natural resources and capable of sustaining a large, settled, centrally controlled society.

Source: Jared Diamond 1997:135.

chiefdoms, which consist of a single ethnic and linguistic group, states and especially empires (formed by the conquest of several states) are multilingual and multi-ethnic.

The earliest forms of state organization arose around 3700 B.C.E. in Mesopotamia and 3000 B.C.E. in Mesoamerica, some 2,000 years ago in China, Southeast Asia, and the Andes region of South America, and over 1,000 years ago in West Africa. Features of these early states were: leadership by a titled, hereditary leader – either a king considered divine or an equivalent leader; the adoption of slavery on a larger scale than chiefdoms; and the development of state religions, often with standardized temples. Most important for our discussion, no chiefdom developed writing, except those in the process of becoming states. Indeed, the first “complete” systems of writing developed about the same time as the formation of early states in Mesopotamia and Mesoamerica. Where such complete systems of writing developed, literate elites emerged, creating some of the socio-cultural conditions within which drama and theatre developed, as we shall see in Chapters 2 and 3.

The invention of systems of writing/reading

For approximately 40,000–50,000 years as modern languages continued to evolve, not only were new technologies invented, but modes of oral and expressive culture developed. These allowed particular societies and groups to remember, reflect upon, celebrate, and perform their evolving stories and identities through oral/verbal, bodily, and artistic modes of expression. Precursors of complete systems of writing appeared as early as 100,000 years ago when humans began to invent a wide variety of graphic symbols and mnemonics (memory tools) to store information. Graphic symbols were usually reproductions of commonplace phenomena of the physical world such as the sun, stars, fauna, flora, human-like figures, and so on. Aids to memory such as knot records, notches made on bone or a staff, or pictographs served a linguistic function. Knot records date back to the early Neolithic period and reached their peak with the South American Incas’ *quipus* – an elaborate system of counting. While knots and notches record numbers, prompt memory, and suggest categories, pictures are able to record much more information and suggest characteristics and qualities as well. Tens of thousands of years ago, pictorial communication appeared in early cave art (see Figure I.3), and, among some Native Americans, pictography was long used to convey complex messages with no recourse to articulate speech. Knots, notches and pictographs remain “incomplete” or “pre”-writing in that they do not use their marks or pictures to communicate articulate speech.

Complete systems of writing/reading did not evolve like language, but were invented to communicate articulate speech via the use of conventional, artificial marks on a durable surface. The spoken word is transformed into a representative

sign. It was in Mesopotamia that clay tokens were used as early as 8000 B.C.E. to count grain and animals in the region's early farming settlements. Somewhat before 3000 B.C.E. the Sumerians in Mesopotamia managed to develop from a repertoire of pictograms and symbols the first complete system of writing – cuneiform. Cuneiform is a form of writing scratched or inscribed on clay tablets with a pointed tool (stylus). With the invention of Sumerian, individuals began to read a sign inscribed on clay as a sound with its own independent value.

By 2500 B.C.E. the Sumerians' simple cuneiform script was capable of “conveying ‘any and all thought’ . . . adequately fulfil[ling] the needs of its society” (Fischer 2001:52). The earliest inscriptions are lists accounting for payments, goods, people, etc. Of all the cuneiform inscriptions discovered, 75 percent are administrative and book-keeping records. Among the remaining 25 percent are legal, religious, astronomical, and medical writings, and dictionaries and recipes. Also in this 25 percent – and most significant for our purposes – are the first and oldest of many literatures of the world. These include hymns, laments, descriptions of activities of the gods, and quasi-epic stories. The extant poetic works include two poems of Enmerkar, two poems of Lugalbanda, and a cycle of five poems known as *Gilgamesh*. The *Gilgamesh* cycle dates approximately from 2700 B.C.E. Like the later Greek epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the epic of *Gilgamesh* was most likely a collection of disparate but related stories gathered and elaborated by tale-tellers and eventually written down after hundreds of years of oral transmission and performance. It enjoyed wide popularity throughout the Near East, and also exists in Sumerian, Hittite, and Hurrian versions.

The transition from oral communication to writing was not universal, and its development took place at different times and with different systems in different cultures and historical periods. The second documentable case of an independent development of writing is among Native American societies in Mesoamerica, most likely southern Mexico, from approximately 600 B.C.E. It is possible that

Figure I.3

Some cave art such as this horse at Les Trois in southern France is considered a form of pictorial communication. The significance of the series of 'P's engraved over the horse is unknown.

Source: Steven Roger Fischer, *A History of Writing*, London: Reaktion Books, p.18.



Chinese, Egyptian, and Easter Island modes of writing *may* have also developed independently. Whether this is the case or not, most linguists agree that all other systems of writing were inspired by if not direct descendants of either the Sumerian or Mesoamerican systems.

Most pre-literate peoples who developed writing did so by borrowing and then adapting systems of writing they encountered. For example, on Syria's northern coast, Semitic scribes of Ugarit borrowed the outer physical form of Sumerian cuneiform script to write the Hurrian language (Figure I.4). In East Asia, some scholars believe that it was in the Shang state in north central China (c.1545–1500 B.C.E.) that an early version of the Chinese system of character writing developed (arguably originating in Mesopotamia), later to be influential in the development of the writing systems used in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. On the Indian subcontinent where well over 200 scripts eventually developed, they all derived from one source script – Brahmi – which itself derived from a Semitic (probably Aramaic) source by c.253–250 B.C.E. The success of a particular system of writing does not entail superiority but adaptability. It is not “the efficiency of a writing

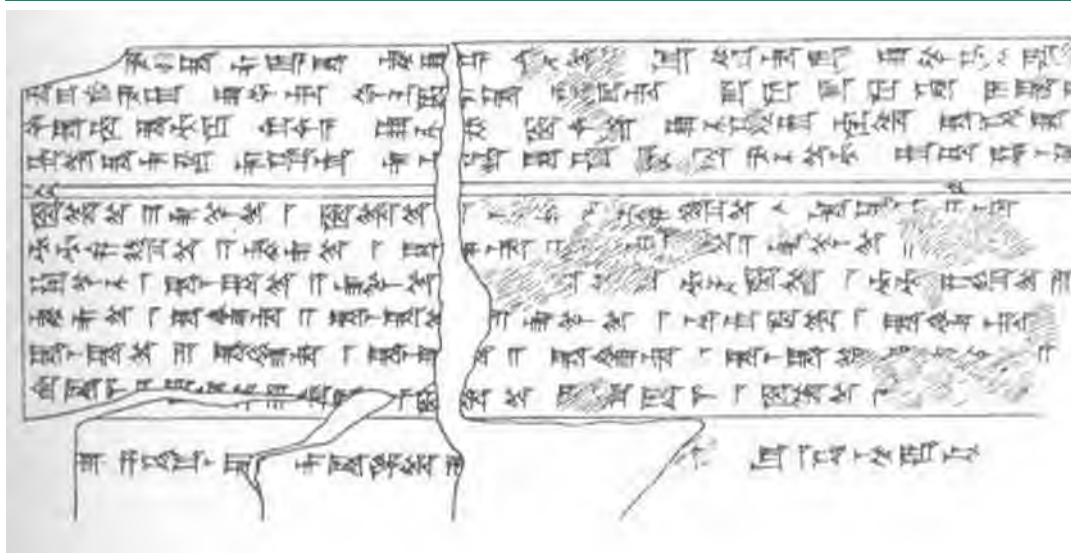


Figure I.4

A Hurrian cuneiform tablet composed about 1400 B.C.E. (in today's Syria). Among the oldest “musical texts” discovered, it contains lyrics and performance information. It is one of many examples of how the outer form of Sumerian cuneiform script was borrowed to write different languages.

Source: Steven Roger Fischer, *A History of Writing*, London: Reaktion Books, p.55.

system or script that determines its longevity and influence, but rather the economic power and prestige of those using it. . . . A powerful society's writing system – the consonantal alphabet – will mark history, while a weak society's will perish" (Fischer 2001:119).

Historians of early writing systems have argued that writing emerged only when and where there was a need for a system of writing within a context that provided the social, economic, and human resources necessary to support specialists in written language, such as copyists, librarians, teachers, religious specialists, poets, and eventually in a few cases, dramatists and the companies of actors/dancers who could perform a play. All of the societies that invented writing (Sumer, Mesoamerica, China, Egypt) or were early in creating their own systems (Crete, Iran, Turkey, the Indus Valley, and Mayan cultures) "involved socially stratified societies with complex and centralized political institutions." They stored food surpluses grown by peasants sufficient to support these institutions and the specialists (Diamond 1999:236).

Writing never developed among hunter-gatherer societies organized into bands or tribes or even among more settled chiefdoms, because they did not possess the need, the institutions, or the agricultural resources necessary to support it. For example, among many of the Pacific islands, writing remained unnecessary for centuries. In many Pacific societies, elaborate states never developed, so there was no need for a complex system of bookkeeping.

Performance, communication, and remembrance

All societies, whether organized as an intimate band or a large-scale state, have a need for communication and remembrance. In Chapter 1, we examine how oral cultures do this through recitations of lengthy genealogies, elaborating epics and myths, or reciting religious/ritual texts, performances that often required remarkable feats of memorization. Rich storehouses of oral lore, epics, myths, and tales were adapted to a variety of modes of oral performance by storytellers and bards. Sometimes they informed rituals, dance, and music which served to knit people together into a community with a particular world-view. In Chapters 2 and 3 we interrogate selected forms of drama and theatre as they emerged in larger-scale literate state societies. Chapter 2 discusses the ways in which the religious/civic festivals within some early state societies produced two very different models of drama and theatre: (1) commemorative ritual/religious dramas re-enacting a mythological/historical event of the past, and (2) independently authored, original "literary" dramas. We examine how each type of drama and its performance is shaped by the particular religious/ritual context of its invention;

how each choreographs in its structure and performance a particular form of state authority; and how each negotiates a particular relationship with writing and textuality. Finally, Chapter 3 examines specific models of pleasure and/or aesthetics generated by, and shaped within the context of, court, temple, market-place, or imperial-state patronage.

KEY REFERENCES



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and many others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts before being disseminated. Material on websites should always be checked against the scholarly books and articles also cited below.

See the Chauvet cave website: www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/arcnat/chaufvet/en/.

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Oral, ritual, and shamanic performance

By Phillip B. Zarrilli

In this chapter we focus on oral, ritual, and shamanic performance practices, the earliest to emerge in primary oral cultures before theatre – part of that pre-literate past that is 99.9 percent of human history. Our main purpose is to discover as much as we can about archaic forms of performance in pre-literate, smaller-scale societies. A secondary purpose is to understand that oral, ritual, and shamanic performance are not part of a “primitive” past, but are dynamic and often adaptable forms of performance that continue to shape many peoples’ personal, social, and/or cosmological identities today (Figure 1.1).

All we can know of performances in the pre-literate past before 3000 B.C.E. is what can be gleaned from scant archaeological evidence, from interpretation of the verbal arts of oral performance, from oral compositions that were fixed when systems of writing developed, and from analyses of early written texts that provide some fragmentary (and usually biased) information about pre-literate beliefs and cultural practices. We can also make careful use of contemporary studies of extant oral, ritual, and shamanic performances by scholars of anthropology, folklore, and performance. Known as ethnographies, these studies usually involve in-depth

fieldwork by a researcher who lives in a culture to observe, participate in, and write about its performances (see the case study on *kathakali* dance-drama, Chapter 3, p. 143). This combination of historiographical methods necessarily involves a high degree of inference in the act of interpretation.

We begin by examining a problem fundamental to the work of the historian: trying to understand primary orality and oral performance in pre-literate societies which, of course, have left us no written records. We will then provide an account of key features of early oral performance, and of oral performance under the “sign” of writing.

We next consider a central question of orality and ritual. How did early peoples orient themselves to the world as they knew and understood it? We can try to answer that by analyzing dynamic and often unstable notions of power – a central force in most archaic performance. Turning to ritual and shamanic performance practices, we describe how they are understood to act upon the world, or “do” something fundamental. However, these practices serve a variety of world-views and accomplish their “doing” in a variety of ways. Because no single definition of ritual can contain all its



Figure 1.1

A modern-day, Chinese shaman dances with incense sticks as he prepares to go into a trance. Green Lake Park, Kunming, Yunnan, China.

Photo by Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, 1990.

possibilities, the remainder of the chapter analyzes ritual and shamanic performance practices across a wide range of historical periods and cultures. As we explain oral, ritual, and shamanic performance, we will use examples selected to illustrate the different types of evidence available to us.

- What can we learn about archaic performance from archaeology alone? We answer this question with a brief account of one ritual landscape in Neolithic England (c.3500–2500 B.C.E.).
- What can we learn about performance in a culture for which there are both archaeological evidence and early written accounts? Here we (re)construct pre-literate Celtic oral and ritual/festival performance circa the sixth century C.E.

- What can we learn about ritual and shamanic performance by examining contemporary ethnographic accounts? Here and in the case studies following this chapter, we examine Hopi, Balinese, Yoruba, and Korean performances – all with historical roots in antiquity.

Each example illustrates the way in which performance orients its participants to the “world” as they imagine and understand it. As body-based practices, these performances helped “make” these worlds in the past and continue to do so for peoples still practicing them in the present.

Primary orality

Just as a distinctive human consciousness and social formations developed with the evolution of language,

the invention of complete writing systems necessarily altered human consciousness. If the earliest proto-written scripts date only from 5,000–6,000 years ago, to what degree is it possible in today's literate world to re-imagine what life and its performances were like before writing/reading? To answer this question, we turn to the work of Walter J. Ong who takes as his subject "thought and its verbal expression in oral culture," and secondarily "literate thought and expression" as they emerged from, and in relation to, orality (Ong 1988:1).

Ong asserts the obvious: we are so literate today that "it is very difficult for us to conceive of an oral universe of communication or thought except as a variant of a literate universe" (Ong 1988:2). Most cultures today have some knowledge of a form of writing in their history. For anyone reading this book, it is impossible to "fully recover a sense of what the word is to purely oral people" (Ong 1988:12). To help us understand the difference between our literate modes of communication and those before writing, Ong identifies two forms of orality: primary and secondary. Primary orality refers to those peoples who have never encountered writing and whose entire worldview and modes of communication are untouched by any form of writing. In contrast are present-day high-technology cultures and societies in which there is "secondary orality," an orality "sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices, an orality that depends on the existence and functioning of writing and print" (Ong 1988:11). (Modern media are discussed in Parts III and IV of this book.)

A primarily oral culture has no written or printed knowledge archive such as stands behind modern oral communications. When spoken words are committed to writing, they are translated into a manual/spatial mode of communication that necessarily restructures thought. The residue of speech left in writing – the marks inscribed on clay or on the surface of parchment or paper – is not present in primary oral cultures. Simple oral dialects usually consist of only a few thousand words, and users have no knowledge of the history of their vocabulary.

For people within primary oral cultures, there is no differentiation between a thought and the words which

express it. Saying something is intending something. One's word is the final authority – no signature in writing is required. One's actions require no authority outside themselves. While primary oral communication is to some degree analytic in that it breaks things down into component units, in contrast, written records "fix" words. They can be read and studied. The very materiality of written words historically encouraged the development of a distinction between what is written and the ideas the words represent. From the root word for the act of speaking, "oration," is derived the word "ratio" for rational thought. It has been argued that literacy creates two separate worlds – the world which we hear and see, and the world of talk and action. The second world is the imperceptible mental world of thoughts, desires, and intentions. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the literate Greeks by the time of Plato and Aristotle created for the West this second space which houses thoughts, intentions, and desires. This Western metaphorical space was called psyche, and is usually known today as "the mind."

Oral performance

Voicing and listening in the mythic mode

Tête ka asom ene Kakyere.

(Ancient things remain in the ear.)

(an Akan [Ghanaian] proverb,
Vansina 1985:xi)

In primary oral cultures, the perception, action, and doing that are fundamental to early human survival remain central to what one does and how things are known. What is known is learned through direct participation and/or apprenticeship rather than through abstract study. In primary oral cultures, there are as yet no "libraries." Human beings are the only potential repository for traditional oral narratives, myths, tales, proverbs, classificatory names, or information on how to perform a ritual or tell/sing a monumental epic story.

Here speaks the storyteller, telling by voice what was learned by ear. Here speaks a poet who did not learn language structure from one teacher and language meaning from another, nor plot structure from one and characterization from another, nor even an art of storytelling from one and an art of hermeneutics from another, but always heard all these things working together in the stories of other storytellers. And this poet, or mythopoet, not only narrates what characters do, but speaks when they speak, chants when they chant, and sings when they sing.

(Tedlock 1983:3)

Apprenticeship in verbal arts of performance, drumming, hunting, dancing, or ritual requires some form of discipleship. Initial learning through listening, doing, the direct imitation of a teacher/elder, and repetition all allow a neophyte to reach a level of mastery sufficient to enable improvisation (within limits of accepted conventions).

Rich and complex early oral texts were eventually transcribed, such as the Sumerian epic known as *Gilgamesh*, India's *Mahabharata*, and the well-known Greek epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. But a fundamental shift occurred when such texts were no longer simply *heard*, but *read* for their meaning. As Walter Ong explains:

The scholarly focus on texts had ideological consequences. With their attention directed to texts, scholars often went on to assume, often without reflection, that oral verbalization was essentially the same as the written verbalization they normally dealt with, and that oral art forms were to all intents and purposes simply texts, except for the fact that they were not written down. The impression grew that, apart from the oration (governed by written rhetorical rules), oral art forms were essentially unskillful and not worth serious study.

(Ong 1988:10)

Recent research by folklorists studying oral performance reveals the creativity and complexity of oral modes of composition. Archaic forms of skilled oral performance and discourse might best be thought of as “weaving or stitching – ‘*rhapsodein*,’ to ‘rhapsodize’ . . . to stitch songs together” (Ong 1988:13). For some forms of oral performance such as epic/heroic tales there is no fixed text. Each performance is composed as it happens. The mechanisms of remembering involve cueing and scanning – highly creative processes that take place as a particular story is “stitched” together in performance.

Primary oral cultures are “episodic” locations of listening, hearing, and voicing where “mythic” worlds are created. The hearer does not attempt to analyze, understand, or interpret what is heard, but experiences and absorbs the musicality of the voice – its timbre, tone, amplitude, pitch, resonance, vibration, and shape as the voice moves between sounding and silence(s) – the pauses of varying lengths that help mark, set off, and/or accentuate what is voiced. Reception is perception, not “meaning.”

We can gain insights into performance in primary oral cultures by examining an extant tradition in which the experience of “hearing” is central. (We need to understand that the extant practices of indigenous peoples today cannot be taken to be exactly the same as practices in archaic periods.) The Sami – also known as Lapps or peoples who herd reindeer – are an indigenous people whose homeland stretched across northern Finland, Sweden and Norway, and into the Kola Peninsula. Like most indigenous peoples, the Sami have suffered years of cultural and political oppression. As one of the most modernized indigenous peoples in the world, the Sami have been in a constant process of negotiating their traditions and ways of understanding their relationship to their world and their immediate environment as they participate in both national (Norwegian) and transnational global worlds. 

The relationship of the Sami to nature was based traditionally on an acceptance of the provisional nature of human existence – a view necessitated by living in close relationship within a particular ecosystem. The

necessities of survival produced a worldview in which all creatures and their environments are seen as fundamentally interdependent. One Sami practice illustrates this: “serious listening,” that is, hearing and obeying the heartbeats of the Earth itself. Among the many stories still part of the extant Sami tradition is the myth of the creator god who plucked a beating heart from a two-year-old reindeer and placed it at the center of the earth so that its living pulse beat in the ground of all being(s). When life becomes difficult, people press their ears to the ground and listen. If they hear the reindeer’s beating heart, all will be well. If not, they are doomed.

“Seeing” words in the mythic mode

Just as “listening” is an episodic mode of communication that helps create a “mythic” world, so does “seeing.” Among the Yoruba of Nigeria and Benin, West Africa, the oral elaboration of a story by an excellent teller makes the story a “spectacle” (*irun*) in that “it is visible through the storyteller’s dramatization, and the spectator visualizes it further in his mind’s eye” (Drewal and Drewal 1983:1). As seen in early cave paintings, some of the earliest forms of oral performance no doubt literally made use of images as a memory aid for the teller and to enhance the pleasure of the audience. Imagery is a way for humans to access the “invisible” where their language is not written. But images also played a key role in the development of some writing systems such as Sumerian cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphs, and Chinese characters. For literate Westerners raised in alphabetic cultures, the central role of images in early communication may be difficult to comprehend.

“Picture-recitation” – the telling of lengthy stories with pictures – exemplifies the central importance of images in some archaic performances. One scholar hypothesizes that picture-recitation originated in India (*śāubhika*, *citrakathā*, and *paṭ*) and spread through Indonesia (*wayang bèbèr*), Japan (*etoki*), China (*zhuanbian*), Iran (*parda-dar*) (Figure 1.2), Turkey, Italy, and Germany (Mair 1988, *passim*). When this genre first developed, it is likely that the pictures were primary and the “texts”

(eventually written down) were oral elaborations of the stories told by the pictures.

Chinese “transformation texts” (*bianwen*) date from the Tang period (618–906 C.E.), and are part of the central history of Chinese fiction and drama since they represent the first extended vernacular narratives in China. The *bian* story-tellers were lay entertainers – mostly men, but occasionally women – inhabiting a niche in society between the sacred and the secular. The contents of this once flourishing popular performance tradition were both secular and religious, and in China mainly Buddhist. *Bianwen* became a well-known literary genre but it derived from a much earlier form of oral story-telling with pictures, first called *zhuanbian*, literally “turning transformation [picture scrolls]” (Mair 1988:1). The term “transformation” refers to miraculous powers of transformation and manifestation of early Buddhist figures. Artists represented these manifestations in wall-paintings, on silk or paper, known as *bianxiang* – “transformation scenes or tableaux,” which a story-teller used during performance. Like most such “folk art” traditions, in China these modes of performance were neglected in historical records which exclusively documented the products of elite, high society.

In the Javanese version of picture-recitation, *wayang bèbèr* (“unfolding/unrolled shadows”), a narrator (*dalang*) unrolls a long, horizontal scroll on which are painted a series of scenes as he chants and speaks the story the scroll reveals (Figure 1.3). Six to eight scrolls are required to perform an entire story. It is likely that *wayang bèbèr* was at first “closely connected with animistic rites of ancestor worship” (Brandon 1970:5). Some scholars have argued that Java’s most popular and well-known form of traditional theatre today, *wayang kulit* (literally, “shadows made of leather”), developed as figures on a scroll, were at some point detached from the scroll to become individual puppets. With a host of puppet-characters to manipulate independently, the shadow puppeteer was able to bring the shadows to life on his screen. (See the discussion at the end of this chapter of a Balinese shadow puppet play.) This allowed shadow-puppetry to supersede in popularity the older, more



Figure 1.2

An Iranian *parda-dar*, outside Masjid-I Juma' in Savara.

Source: Photo by © Samuel R. Peterson in Victor H. Mair, *Painting and Performance*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.

static picture-recitation form. As explained in our Balinese example, it also became a powerful efficacious ritual practice through which one could cast out or exorcise witches (Mair 1988:60).

“Serious listening” and/or “seeing” characterize many archaic modes of performance which engage the spectator’s senses directly, and help create one’s relationship to the world understood through myth, not history. Myths, epics, and even tales are traditionally context-specific; that is, like rituals they are told or

enacted within a context that specifies precisely when or where each story is to be communicated. Among the Zuni of New Mexico a story such as “The Girl and the Protector” is only to be told late at night; if you tell it during the day you will hasten the coming of the darkness.

If you tell it after the snakes have come out in the spring and before they go underground in the fall, take care to omit the first and last lines and

Figure 1.3

A Javanese *wayang bèbèr* scroll, with painted scenes, used by the narrator (*dalang*) as he speaks and chants a story.

Source: *Archives Internationales de Ethnographie*, 16 (1903), taf. 18.2. In Victor H. Mair, *Painting and Performance*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.



to hold a flower in one hand while you speak. Otherwise the story may attract the attention of the snakes.

(Tedlock 1983:68)

In primary oral cultures, everything has its place and time, usually within a recurring cycle. One's experience of the day, the waxing and waning of the moon, the passing and return of seasons, the placement of the stars in the sky, and the marking of larger units of "annual" time help create an experience of time as cyclical – not linear or historical.

But what happened to early oral performances when they encountered writing for the first time?

Oral texts and their transmission under the written sign: Vedic chanting in India

Where complex writing systems did develop, they did not displace many modes of oral, verbal, expressive communication. We now examine the history of how a once completely oral mode of performing and transmitting sacred texts – the Vedas of India – has continued to exist to the present day "under" the written word.

Most well-known oral compositions – Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* or the Sumerian Epic of *Gilgamesh* – died out as oral performances. All we possess of these traditions, especially in the West, is a suggestion of these traditions in the form of texts set down in writing. But in other parts of the world, among native peoples in Asia and Africa for example, oral performances still abound. The oldest sustained form of continuous oral performance in the world is chanting of the Vedas in India. Four different Vedas exist, the oldest of which is the *R̥g Veda*, dating from as early as 1200 B.C.E. The four Vedas are collections of poems, hymns, and invocations derived from ritual and religious practices which originated in the Central Asiatic region. Since their composition, they have continued to be transmitted orally from generation to generation down to the present by socially high-ranking, male priestly communities, for whom recitation of the Vedas is their life's work and purpose – an unbroken line of transmission for over 3,000 years.

With the development of written Sanskrit (eighth century B.C.E.) these priestly families became literate. However, their texts were not committed to writing until very recently. Vedic education is not an intellectual undertaking but a rigorous training in ritual chanting.

It is traditionally undertaken by all Brahmin boys who must learn to recite in its entirety the specific Veda inherited by their families (for an early twentieth-century account, see Wood 1985:58–89). This prodigious task of memorization is necessary so that each boy can chant the Vedic verses appropriate for each of the specific rituals required to sustain Brahmin life, can function as a priest in the temples, and can collectively perform the lengthy sacrificial rituals understood to be necessary to sustain the universe.

Until the late twentieth century, full-time training for young Brahmin boys started soon after the ceremony of the investiture of the sacred thread (*upanayanam*) at approximately the age of seven and continued for eight to twelve years. Teachers as well as students undertake instruction in recitation of the Vedas with little if any intellectual understanding of the meaning of the texts they are learning. The process of transmission is an entirely oral, embodied process. In the Sama Veda tradition of Kerala, in southwest India, the most musical of the four Vedic traditions, the teacher literally places his hands on the student as he chants the text, manipulating the student's head and body to the particular rhythm of the text so that the student learns not in his head by memorizing, but through his body's engagement with the text (Figure 1.4).

When writing was introduced, Brahmins saw writing as inferior to speech. Indeed, writing down the sacred chants was at first forbidden, because a Veda is intended *only to be heard* as it is chanted. The Vedas are distinguished from written texts which are “remembered.” Since the written word is not directly heard, it is a recollection of something heard or spoken in the past. The religious prohibition against writing the Vedas is probably one reason among many that writing did not develop on the Indian subcontinent until about the eighth century B.C.E.

But when writing did develop, oral transmission continued to play a central and even dominant role in many modes of traditional knowledge and learning, from religious ritual to hands-on therapies within traditional medicine and performance down to the present day.

(See the case studies of *kutiyattam* and *kathakali* at the end of Chapter 3.) Simultaneously, a great body of literature emerged. India produced the world's first linguists who categorized letters according to the specific place of articulation – a very “modern” practice. From the time that Sanskrit texts began to be written down and eventually composed, the way of writing Sanskrit has always borne the marks of the centrality of the aural/oral dimension of the language. Scribes traditionally did not distinguish one word from another, but rather used *sandhi* to mark and distinguish “breath groups,” so that the text would be chanted correctly (these are not markings for understanding in silent reading).

Among the oral traditions briefly discussed thus far, Vedic chanting and *wayang bèbèr* in its earliest form served sacred, ritual purposes. In early archaic cultures, primary ritual practices shaped one's consciousness and awareness. Early complex states in Egypt and Greece (with its city-states) organized their societies around ritual much more than we do in modern Euro-American societies, as we shall see in Chapter 2. Unlike Christianity, especially the Protestant tradition with its emphasis on personal faith and a written word considered divine, early societies often “had no holy books and no interest in what individuals privately believed. Piety was a matter of performing ritual acts in honor of the gods, and these acts were the glue that held society together” (Wiles 2000:27). While rituals continue to be practiced by many peoples today, they are secondary in shaping most people's consciousness and relationship to their world.

In the remainder of this chapter, we interrogate and reflect upon ritual practices, beginning with an examination of the dynamic notion of “power.”

Ritual specialists: Accessing sacred power

In twenty-first-century cosmopolitan cultures, commonplace understandings of “power” and “energy” are based on biomedical, scientific assumptions. It is typical to presume that power and energy are stable, rationally measurable, and quantifiable. But this has not always been so. In this section



Figure 1.4

A teacher gives bodily instruction in Sama Veda chanting in Kerala, India.

Photo © Kunju Vasudevan Namboodiripad.

we examine cultural specialists whose performances are a means of accessing powers that are considered sacred. These specialists perform in order to diagnose and/or heal an illness, to read signs of the future, to help conquer an opponent or an enemy army, or to uphold the universe itself. They may be said to have “agency.”

In many historical periods and cultures, agency and power are viewed as a complex set of interactions. Many traditional concepts of power and agency consider neither to be absolute. Both power and the ritual specialist’s ability

to access or wield that power are considered contingent, unstable, capricious, dangerous, and locally immanent. Within such a contingent “world,” it is necessary to have cultural specialists who gain specific forms of agency that enable them to engage, interact with, and/or control unstable powers. (Two examples of the harnessing of such powers are included in this chapter; see the discussion of the Balinese shadow-puppet play, *wayang Calon Arang* (p. 37) and the case study of Korean shamanism (p. 45)).

Many archaic prayers, incantations, rituals, and the like were developed and performed in order to actualize, stabilize, or rectify human relationships to the immanent powers of the cosmos within the immediate environment. Sacred words or ritual landscapes (sites for rituals) do not “represent” or “mean” something, nor is it necessary for them to be interpreted; rather they are understood to have “power” in and of themselves. By its very design, a particular ritual landscape is assumed to actualize a relationship to the sacred.

Saying certain words also can actualize a particular power, it is believed. In the oral transmission of the Vedas in India, discussed above, the Brahmins chanted *mantras* – a series of sacred words and/or syllables, often not translatable. They are instruments of power, that is, tools designed for a specific task. Their transmission is usually circumscribed by secrecy. Once a *mantra* is given by a master who possesses its power to a student, it must be brought to accomplishment, usually by a process in which the student undergoes austerities and works through thousands of cycles of repetition. *Mantras* today are ubiquitous throughout South, Southeast and East Asia, and are used for either good (“light”) or evil (“dark”) purposes.

Different types of cultural specialists are understood to possess as a divine gift the ability to access and develop special powers to diagnose and/or heal an illness, to read signs of the future, to conquer an opponent or an enemy army, or to uphold the universe itself. In small-scale bands, tribes, or even in somewhat larger chiefdoms, multiple powers are often assumed to be present in single individuals – ritual specialists and/or shamans. The term *shaman* derives from the original Siberian Tungus word, *saman*, meaning “one who is excited moved, raised” (Laderman 1991:7). Shaman refers to a member of a traditional branch of religious specialists believed to be able to heal a variety of illnesses, counteract misfortune or solve personal or social dilemmas after entering a state of trance to communicate with the powers in the unseen world.

As societies grew larger and more complex, some individuals became specialized in applying their powers

within a single sphere. Where states developed, individuals with special powers continued to function, but their powers were sometimes circumscribed by the centralization of authority in official religious practices. Specialist groups of priests acted on behalf of the state.

In the sections that follow, we examine a range of ritual landscapes, practices, and performances within which small-scale communities experienced and/or special agents accessed powers within their world for a variety of purposes. We examine how some specialists utilize techniques of masking, rhythm, music, impersonation, and/or costumes to help access power or contact the sacred through invocation, transformation, and the like. We begin with a discussion of one type of ritual landscape in England that oriented a pre-literate people to their “world.”

Late Neolithic ritual landscapes and pilgrimage in England

Among the 100 monuments of the late Neolithic period in Britain are the complex at Thornborough (North Yorkshire), possibly the most important sacred site of the day, and the site at Stonehenge (Wiltshire), well known today. The Thornborough complex was in use from approximately 3500 B.C.E. to at least 2500 B.C.E. Its henge monuments were the site of major calendrical rituals that attracted masses of short-term pilgrims from across the entire northern region (Figure 1.5). A henge is a circular structure with a surrounding bank. On a flat gravel plateau near the River Ure, the ancient peoples of the period constructed the only linked cluster of three massive henge monuments ever built.  Each of the three primary henges measures a staggering 250m in diameter and 15m in height, capped at the time with local white pumice. Each has a double entrance, with an external ditch. The three henge monuments are equally spaced, and extend over 1.7km (more than a mile) on an orientation running northwest to southeast. As seen in Figure 1.5, the three henges are linked by passageways. The central henge was constructed on top of an earlier cursus monument measuring at least 1.1km, indicating that the site had already long been



Figure 1.5

Aerial view of the central Thornborough henge in Yorkshire, England, a part of a large "ritual landscape," in use between 3500 and 2500 B.C.E.

© English Heritage. NMR 20633/002.

used for ritual purposes. Scattered near the site are additional Neolithic–early Bronze Age monuments, including three other henges in areas close-by, at least ten burial mounds, and traces of contemporary settlements. The massive scale of the linked henges indicates that it accommodated significantly large gatherings of pilgrims. It is as if the three major cathedrals in England (Westminster, York and Canterbury) had all been placed in one location.

Henges are specially constructed to interact with the landscape and thereby create what is known as a “ritual landscape.” Once inside a circular henge, one enters a 360-degree self-contained universe – nothing of the outside world can be seen. Cut off from the everyday world outside the enclosure, environmentally and architecturally, the space is bounded by the henge whose white-pumice face joins the sky.

One hypothesis is that the henges were built to align with the three middle stars within the constellation Orion known as “Orion’s Belt” on specific dates. When pilgrims gathered inside the site facing one of the openings on a clear night, they witnessed a spectacular moment – the appearance on the horizon of the constellation, Orion. Since the three linked henges reproduce the precise configuration of Orion’s Belt, those gathered would have experienced a moment of union between earth and sky – a womb-like encirclement of self/community within their cosmos. It must have been an awe-inspiring annual moment for those making the pilgrimage.

These sacred, ritual spaces were kept apart from everyday activities. Camps were set up at a distance of approximately 600 meters from the henges. Beyond the camps, at least some individuals performed a “ritual deposition” of highly valuable Cumbrian stone axes and perhaps other objects of high value. The monuments themselves are part of a wider landscape that contains burial monuments and settlement areas.

While much remains speculative, what can be concluded from these Neolithic sites is that there was a richly elaborated system of ritual performance taking place within them. The ritual within these landscapes

served to orient the peoples of the period within personally, socially, and cosmologically specific spatial and temporal frames that must have given shape and “meaning” to their lives. The shape and meaning derived from their involvement in and experience of the act of pilgrimage and participation in the rites that no doubt occurred within this extraordinary ritual landscape.

The Thornborough site provides us with a tantalizing view of early ritual performance in a sacred, ritual landscape. Sketchy as the picture is, it is soundly based on the archaeological evidence of this and comparable sites of the period. In the next section we provide an overview of oral and ritual/festival performance practices in early Celtic cultures in Ireland and Wales – an era for which there is archaeological evidence, as well as some problematic textual evidence.

Early Celtic oral and ritual festival performance

In this section we address the question of what we can learn about performance in a culture for which there are both archaeological evidence and early written accounts. Here we (re)construct pre-literate Celtic oral and ritual/festival performance circa the sixth century C.E. The Celts possessed rich traditions of oral (bardic) performance as well as ritual/festival performance. At its peak in the later first millennium B.C.E., the Celtic world stretched from Ireland, Wales, and Spain in the west, and Scotland in the north, to the Czech Republic in the east and northern Italy in the south, and even beyond Europe to Asia Minor (Figure 1.6). During most of the first millennium B.C.E., the entire region of northern Europe inhabited by the Celts was virtually non-literate. So, of the three traditional primary sources of evidence for interpreting ancient history – archaeological, linguistic, and literary – our only ample evidence for the early Celts is archaeological. The earliest linguistic evidence is sparse before the Roman period. The first allusion to the Celts by name (*Keltoi*) is in the writing of the Greek historians, Hecataeus of Miletus, in about 500 B.C.E., and Herodotus in the fifth century B.C.E.

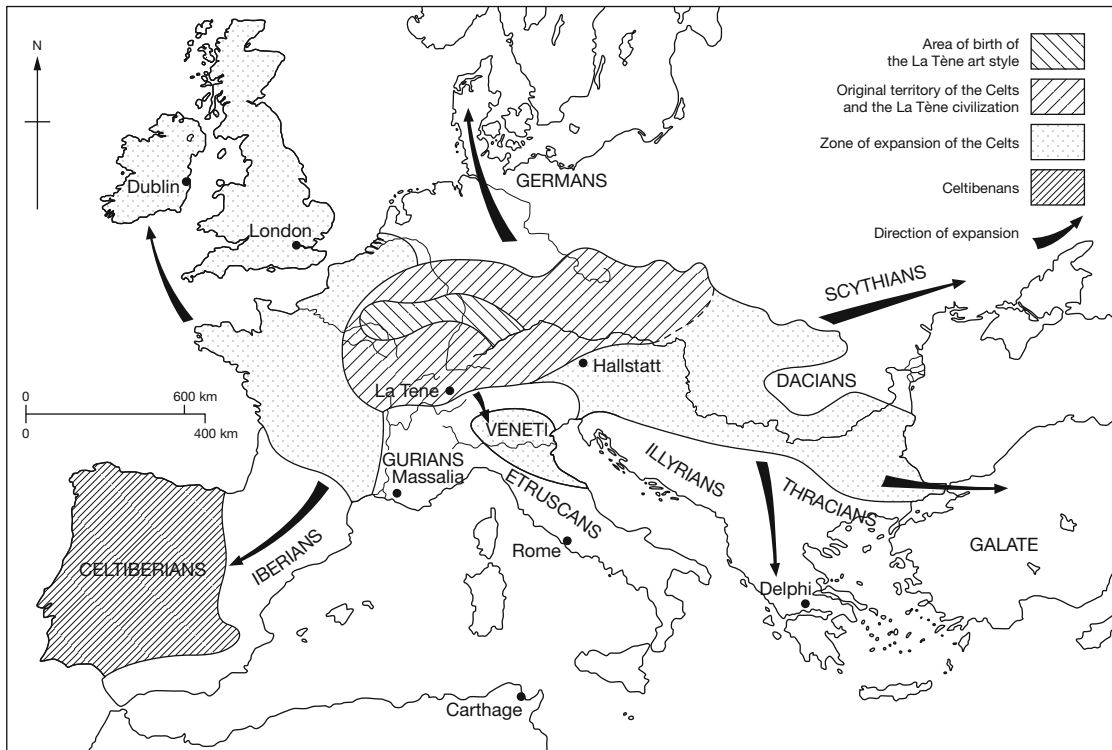


Figure 1.6

Territories occupied by Celts from the fifth century B.C.E. until the Roman conquest.

Source: After R. and V. Megaw, *Celtic Art*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1989. In *The Celtic World*, edited by Miranda J. Green (London: Routledge), p.xxxiv.

By the end of the first century B.C.E., Celtic culture seems to have ended as Europe came under the control of the Roman Empire. A new hybrid culture emerged from the interaction between Roman and Celtic traditions and practices. The new “Romano-Celtic” culture is nowhere better witnessed than in the bardic traditions.

After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West during the fifth century C.E., Europe was overrun by a new Germanic culture. The Celts virtually disappeared, except in the furthest western extremes of Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and Brittany, together with Cornwall and the Isle of Man. There the Celtic languages survived,

and a vernacular Celtic mythic tradition developed during the first and second millennium C.E.

Written Irish dates from the sixth century from within a monastic milieu and remained so for 600 years. Can these texts reveal much about the earlier, oral Celtic traditions? Scholars do not agree. From the sixth century on, Irish and Welsh thought and learning were an amalgam and interweaving of indigenous and monastic elements. All that remains of course is what the monks chose to record and transmit. “Of the learned oral tradition which preceded the written and which continued alongside it, obviously we know nothing except by

written reference,” writes Celtic scholar, Proinsias Mac Cana (1995:782). The monks left a vast collection of prose and verse texts covering historical and genealogical, mythico-historic, lyrical, tribal and family lore, social and legal procedures, medicine, and even some dramatic materials. In Wales the corpus of lore was known as *cyfarwyddyd*, meaning “guidance, direction, instruction, knowledge.”

The tale of the birth of Ireland’s greatest epic hero, Cu Chulainn, is both “a coherent mythico-heroic text” and “a tersely phrased version of an [earlier] oral narrative” (Mac Cana 1995:783). Mac Cana argues that there was a very high degree of consistency between the earlier oral and later written versions of these stories for the following reasons: (1) oral literature/learning were highly valued long before the invention of writing; (2) the stories were formulaic; and (3) their transmission and telling were “cultivated and controlled by an elitist and privileged class of semi-sacred savants and poets” known as druids, and later the *filidh* (Mac Cana 1995:783).

Oral performance in the telling of such tales no doubt played a central role in pre-literate Celtic culture. Although very late, the following eleventh-century tale from Wales tells what happened when Gwydion and his companion poets visited the court of Pryderi:

They made them welcome. Gwydion was placed at Pryderi’s one hand that night. “Why,” said Pryderi, “gladly would we have a tale [*cyfarwyddyd*] from some of the young men yonder.” “Lord,” said Gwydion, “it is a custom with us that the first night after one come to a great man, the chief bard [*pencerdd*] shall have the say. I will tell a tale gladly.” Gwydion was the best teller of tales [*cyfarvdd*] in the world. And that night he entertained the court with pleasant tales and story-telling [*cyfarwyddyd*] till he was praised by everyone in the court.

(Davies 1995:786)

Telling tales was the product of a dynamic verbal culture prior to the invention of writing. Stories were

told to entertain, with rules for oral art playing a key role in their composition and performance. Only eleven native Welsh tales have survived. The earliest texts that have emerged, though, are clearly a result of the interweaving of the early oral culture, and the later literate culture.

The picture of the early bards that emerges from Irish and Welsh sources is that the early, pre-Christian Celtic bards sang praises to the gods. Their songs of praise were thought to bring benefits to their patrons and the people in general. Their words also had power in them. When praising the qualities of a ruler, the singing bard was in effect calling these qualities into existence in the ruler (Ross 1995:431). Bards also might sing satirical songs, which were understood to bring physical blemish, bad luck, or even death to the person against whom they were sung.

The early monastic literature also provides glimpses into the early ritual and religious life of the Celts. Written either in Latin or early medieval Gaelic, these monastic sources attribute many miracles and powers to the monks in order to make them competitive with the Celtic druids. In pre-Christian Celtic cultures, the druids were the religious and ritual specialists who were thought to possess special powers, knowledge, and the ability to communicate directly with the gods. (The druids correspond to the Brahmins of India and flamines of early Rome – all three descended from the ancient Indo-European priestly tradition.) The druids were in charge of all ritual, assisted by other specialists including the bards. They used incantations and other means to foresee the future and predict events, serving therefore as prophets for their rulers. They may have received their divinatory powers through trance states, prompted at times by chewing acorns. They possessed knowledge of astrology and did calendrical computations. They reputedly possessed powers as shape-shifters and could either change their own shape, or that of others, into animals or birds. They were masters of illusion and skilled healers through the use of therapeutic and other treatments. Even natural phenomena supposedly obeyed their dictates – they commanded winds,

fires, and mists. Finally, they were teachers of songs for noblemen and guardians of hereditary learning and oral traditions. Oaths sworn before druids were considered sacred and binding. Druidic teaching was completely oral. Irish druids “sang over” (*for-cain*, a word which can also mean “prophesy, predict”) their pupils; the pupils repeated the lesson in chorus. Led by the druidic orders, great national assemblies and performance festivals took place annually in ritual landscapes as part of a liturgical calendar of sacred times and festivals.

Under the influence of Christianity, the druids came to be negatively regarded as “witchdoctors” or “sorcerers.” As Celtic culture was Christianized, only vestiges of early Celtic oral and ritual traditions remained.

We now briefly consider how to interpret and understand the complex phenomenon of early ritual. We will then consider how accounts of extant ritual and shamanic practice might further help us understand archaic performance practices.

Interpreting and understanding ritual

If in primary oral cultures saying something is intending something, performing a traditional ritual is similar in that it is understood to “do” or “accomplish” something. Rituals are not done “for nothing.” When performed fully and correctly, a traditional ritual is sufficient to itself and therefore requires no authority outside itself. Early in the development of ritual activity, what was accomplished may have been nothing more than fully engaging in ritual activity as part of a small community – the structuring of movement, gesture, voice into patterns that pleased or bound people together, thereby creating its own intrinsic value. Today the practice of ritual and religion has become a matter of individual choice rather than social or cosmological necessity. Indeed, the term ritual is used often to refer not only to traditional sacred or religious rites, but also to “rituals of everyday life” or “secular” rituals, constituted by the performance, for example, of the ceremonies of a monarchy or state government. Given our focus here on the early history of performance, we examine traditional rituals.

Traditional rituals are special occasions, made distinct from everyday time, that form and re-form self and social identity, and in which self and one’s relationships are “constituted and ordered” (Kapferer 1984:179). Many rituals are performed to achieve a purpose or results; they may be intended to heal, to protect, to harm, to propitiate an ancestor spirit or a god, or to mark a major transition or transformation in one’s status, such as birth, puberty (initiation), a new relationship, or death. Whatever the purpose of a ritual, as Richard Schechner reminds us, there are usually elements within a ritual process which provide some form of pleasure or entertainment (2002:70–71). Masking, costuming, impersonation, dance, music, narrative, and humor are strategically utilized in some rituals, not only to achieve their efficacious ends but to please the gods, ancestors, and/or humans gathered to participate or witness. Consequently, efficacy and entertainment are not binary opposites, but rather form a continuum.

Of the many types of rituals which exist, ethnographer/folklorist Arnold van Gennep has examined “rites of passage” as they mark major transitions in one’s life within both simple and complex societies (1960). Van Gennep identified a three-fold structure of ritual action through which an individual passes – separation from society, existing in a marginal or liminal state, and reintegration based on achieving a new condition or status. The investiture of the sacred thread for Brahmin boys described above is one example – a rite of passage into one’s life-work of chanting the Vedas. Among the Gisu of Uganda, an extensive ritual of initiation marks a young boy’s transition from boyhood to manhood whereby he becomes able to serve as male provider and sexual partner. Here young boys are sequestered from their family and undergo a series of rites that culminate in circumcision. For the ritual initiation to achieve its efficacious end of transforming boy to man, the neophyte must not flinch or in any way register a response to the tremendous pain and blood-letting as his foreskin is cut off. Male powers and courage are thereby tested (La Fontaine 1985:117ff).

Anthropologist Victor Turner describes how at the time of undergoing such rites, the individual is “neither here nor there” but rather is “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner 1969:95). In the post-liminal phase at the conclusion of the rites, the individual exists within a “new” reality – one’s fundamental state, condition, and/or status has changed. The transformations that take place within ritual processes can be generative, profoundly changing an individual. As discussed in Chapter 2, other rites of passage, such as ceremonies of death, mark the crossing of different thresholds – in this case from life to another dimension or world.

Some rituals are highly prescribed processes, requiring specialist knowledge. Others allow for improvisation within the context of performance (see the Yoruba case study at the end of this chapter). What does one experience when performing a very strictly prescribed ritual? Frits Staal argues that ritual structures follow rules that may result in no single, explicit meaning (1996). More like the pleasure, purpose and function inherent in music, some rituals have a satisfaction and pleasure all their own that are part of the practice and structure of the ritual, that is, rituals do not *have* to be *about* something other than themselves.

The structural properties of ritual . . . require not only consummate skill and expertise but also a lot of the priests’ attention – not less than is required, say, from the member of an orchestra, a ballet company or a team of engineers set upon the execution of a common task. . . . It is characteristic of a ritual performance, however, that it is self-contained and self-absorbed. The performers are totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks. Isolated in their sacred enclosure, they concentrate on the correctness of act, recitation, and chant. Their primary concern, if not obsession, is with rules. There are no symbolic meanings going through their minds when they are engaged in performing

ritual. . . . [W]hat counts in ritual is what the ritualist *does*.

(Staal 1996:115, 453)

Staal’s focus on the experience of the ritual participant is a useful antidote to the over-emphasis that some Western scholars have given to the “symbolic” dimension of ritual – to what ritual *represents*. Symbolic interpretations of ritual were developed by Westerners whose early speculation about the nature of ritual was informed by the Christian assumption that all ceremonies *symbolize* religious truths and eternal values. But historically, Christian preoccupation with symbolic interpretation of Christian rites developed very late, at the time of the Carolingian Renaissance during the eighth century C.E. in Europe (Staal 1996:124–125).

Some forms of ritual or shamanic performance require either the ritual specialist or a member of the community to undergo possession or to enter an ecstatic state of trance. What happens when an individual experiences possession? Anthropologist Edward Schieffelin provides the following analysis based on ethnographic research among the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea.

Kaluli spirit séances in Papua New Guinea were highly entertaining, even thrilling events, but they could only ethnocentrically be called performances in a Western sense. . . . This is because, in séance, the issue is not performative illusion but the exact opposite: it is the presence of spirits. If anything, it is the spirits themselves who perform.

Kaluli spectators know very well that spirit séances can be faked and keep a sharp eye for signs of “performing” or, as they see it, deception. Spirits in séance cured illness and revealed the identity of witches, both of which were activities of considerable (even life-and-death) social and political consequence, and people did not fool around with them. . . . A “performance” in the Western sense was precisely what speaking with the spirits through a medium was not and

could not be. It had more of the character of a telephone conversation. The Kaluli themselves likened it to speaking with someone over two-way radio. To describe Kaluli séance as a performance in the popular Western sense would be to violate its ethnographic nature.

(Schieffelin 1998:203)

When discussing traditional rituals, we must also be careful not to assume that the participant/spectator relationship is like that at most theatre performances. Schieffelin describes what the relationship is like between dancers and spectators in the Gisalo ceremony of the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea:

In Gisalo, the dancers sing nostalgic songs about the lands and rivers of their audience's community. Members of the audience are moved so deeply they burst into tears, and then, becoming enraged, they leap up and burn the dancers on the shoulder blades with the resin torches used to light the performance. Indeed, this remarkable response could be interpreted as virtually necessary to the performance, since if the audience is not moved and the tension between performers and audiences does not rise to the pitch of violence, the ceremony falls apart and is abandoned in the middle of the night. . . . [A]fter a successful performance, the dancers pay compensation to those whom they made weep. . . . It is real grief and rage that are evoked. . . . The performers are held accountable for the painful emotions they evoke – and the retaliation upon them (and the compensation they must pay) return that account – as well as those emotions being an indication of the beauty and effectiveness of the performance. The dancers and song composers . . . are extremely pleased if they have managed to provoke numbers of the spectators to tears, despite the consequences to themselves.

(Schieffelin 1998:203; 1976:21–25)

Clearly, traditional rituals are understood to have real consequences, attain fundamental change, and/or access specific powers in particular contexts.

Between ritual and theatre

Just as oral performance and verbal arts continue to be practiced and interact with complete systems of writing, so did oral, ritual and shamanic performance practices interact with the new forms of dramatic performance (or theatre) wherever they began to develop, such as in Greece, India, China, and Japan. Ritual and shamanic performance helped shape dramatic conventions, aesthetics, and/or performance context. Oral and ritual performance remain an integral part of many cultures and sub-cultures today; therefore, it is wrong to use the word “primitive,” in its popular demeaning sense, to describe cultures where ritual or shamanic performance still exist.

Until fairly recently, theatre historians accepted the argument that theatre was born out of ritual. This theory was put forward by a group of Cambridge University classics scholars known as “the Cambridge Anthropologists” – Gilbert Murray (1866–1957), Francis Cornford (1874–1943), and Jane Ellen Harrison (1850–1928). These arguments have been revealed as spurious, since they are based on a mistaken notion of social Darwinism. Underlying social Darwinism is the assumption that cultures have evolved, so they can be viewed hierarchically from the “primitive” culture at the bottom to the “great civilizations” at the top – with such Western genres as “tragedy” considered the pinnacle of theatrical culture. This theory of the “origins of theatre” is now thoroughly discredited. The assumption that it is possible to find a single origin of “theatre” is in itself a problematic proposition. Theatre is not one “thing,” but rather a complex set of human communicative activities involving, as does the practice of ritual, fundamental human desires to imitate, play, imagine, and structure our experience. In Chapter 2 we examine the development of several forms of drama/theatre, but we will make no attempt to create a general theory of origins of (all) theatre.

Many scholars have fruitfully used theories of ritual as a tool for the interpretation of “ritual action” of later forms of drama and theatre. Naomi Conn Liebler has argued for a reading of Shakespeare’s tragedies as “festive,” a term which marks “the celebration of a community’s survival” (1995:8). Liebler builds on theories of ritual and the “festive,” especially the early work of C.L. Barber in *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy* (1959). She argues for an analogous understanding of tragedy’s relationship to the “festive,” that is to say, to social, communal functions. Liebler concludes that “tragedy is not ritual; ritualistic elements in tragedy are not themselves actual rituals. In theatre, we are always in the realm of ‘as if,’ of semblance or resemblance. Ritual and theatre do not share similar efficacies, but they do share similar intents” (1995:25–26).

In the remainder of this chapter and the case studies that follow, we examine accounts of four different types of ritual and shamanic practice. Each type in its own way helps form (or reform) historical “selves” and/or “social identities” in the ever-changing present. The first example is an annual cycle of traditional Hopi ceremonies in Arizona which emphasizes the social and collective domain of social (re)formation. The second example is a shadow-puppet performance in Bali, Indonesia, which is a ritual exorcism. The two case studies – ritual as “play” among the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Korean shamanic performances (*kut*) – provide more in-depth accounts of ritual/ceremonial practices at work within two different cultural contexts. Today’s Hopi, Balinese, Yoruba, and Korean practitioners constantly (re)negotiate their traditional ways of understanding, organizing, and performing their ritual and ceremonial practices with new and often conflicting social, political, and economic realities.

Ritual, ceremony, and collective social life

Hopi ritual performance cycles

We focus here on the ritual practices of one Native American people – the Hopi whose traditional

homeland is on three mesas in what is now northeastern Arizona (Figure 1.7). Perhaps 30,000 years ago, the first ancestors of today’s Native Americans, including the Hopi, arrived in North America. In pursuit of mammoths, bear, and reindeer, proto-Mongoloid groups living in northern China and northeast Asia crossed the Bering Strait – a temporarily exposed land bridge. These immigrants, now called Native Americans, were at first exclusively groups of hunters who eventually diversified as they moved south and as the climate they encountered changed. Some key traditions, practices, and beliefs have survived the centuries, such as dwellings (earth lodges, conical tents, birchbark lodges), use of feathered ornaments, and a relatively democratic political organization featuring tribal/group councils. A strong ceremonialism attached to hunting survived, as did elaborate ceremonies and rituals practiced in order to contact and make present the spirits. Three classes of traditional healers and ceremonialists developed among the early Native Americans, consistent with their proto-Mongoloid origins. There were herbalists who cared for everyday wounds and aches, the medicine man who sought to access the supernatural to make ill persons well, and the shaman – a medicine man who, like the shamans in Siberia, underwent a trance state to discover disease or cure the sick.

Until about 5000 B.C.E., Native Americans continued to live as hunters, while some descendants lived as fishermen and collectors. A new era dawned in Mexico at this time when humans in the region developed the ability to grow crops. Squash, beans and maize became staple foods allowing the development, as in early Sumeria, of fixed, agriculturally based settlements. For some Native Americans, annual hunting rituals were displaced by rituals and ceremonies centering on the growth of vegetation and marking harvest seasons. Those living settled lives developed a spiritual view of the cosmos and their environment in harmony. In the American Southwest, one settled form of Native American culture is known as Pueblo. Among the Pueblo peoples are the Hopi and Zuni, whose rituals and ceremonies were elaborated as a means of securing rain

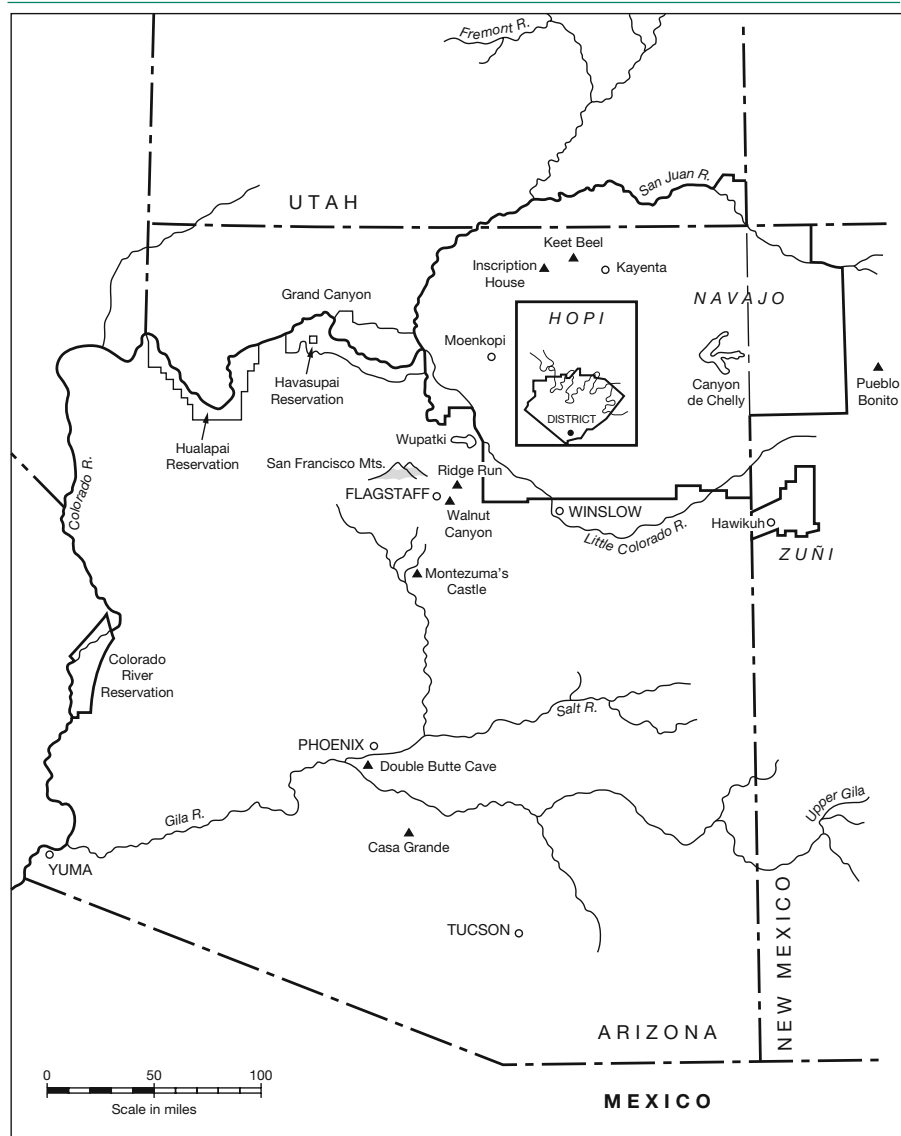


Figure 1.7

The Hopi Reservation and neighboring areas.

Source: In *The Kachina and the White Man* by Frederick J. Dockstader. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985, p.3, copyright uncertain.

and fertility. Each society developed its own ceremonial organizations to keep its world in harmony.

We focus here on the ritual practices of the Hopi. In prehistoric times, the Hopi cultivated a variety of crops including kidney and tepary beans, cotton, pumpkins, and maize. The most ancient Hopi village, Oraibi, dates from around 1125 C.E. suggesting it is either the oldest, or one of the oldest, continually inhabited locales in what is now known as the United States of America.

When the Spanish first encountered the Hopi people (whom they called “Moqui”) in 1540, they imagined that the high cities on rocky mesas, gleaming like gold in the desert sun, were the legendary Seven Cities of Cibola. Although not made of gold, Hopi villages were thriving urban centers.

In 1629 Catholic Franciscan friars were sent to evangelize the Hopi and their neighbors – the Zuni and Acoma. Although the Hopis converted peacefully to Catholicism, their native religion, at the center of which were the ritual dances of the Kachinas, never died out. In the descriptions of these by the evangelizing Spanish, we can see that the ritual Kachina dances then were similar to those still performed (although the Spanish did not understand the purpose of what they were seeing). Traditional Hopi religion and beliefs are organized around an annual ritual calendar intended to maintain equilibrium with their environment. For a period of approximately seven months each year Hopis interact with the Kachinas (from *kachi*, life or spirit, and *na*, father) – unseen supernatural beings and spirits of the dead. Kachinas have the power to “bring rain, exercise control over the weather, help in many of the activities of the villages, punish offenders of ceremonial or social laws, and in general act as a link between gods and mortals” (Dockstader 1985:9). The Kachinas visit during the months beginning with the Winter Solstice, *Soyala* (21 December), and stay until just after the Summer Solstice (21 June) when the Home Dance (*Nimán*) takes place. As beneficent supernatural beings, the Kachinas are thought to have always been with the Hopi, having come with the original Hopi ancestors when they emerged from the Underworld at the beginning of time.

They wandered together until they settled where they are located today in Arizona.

Hopi interact with these beings via male masked dancers – also known as Kachinas. As in other Native American ritual societies, such as the Yaqui peoples, it is a great honor and responsibility to become a Kachina. To become a particular Kachina by enveloping oneself in a complete costume and “helmet-mask” covering the entire head, is to lose “one’s personal identity and . . . [become] imbued with the spirit of that being” (Dockstader 1985:10). At the time of the ceremonies, one must follow specific prescriptions for behavior and deportment, remaining pure and celibate in order to serve as a suitable messenger. The performers embody and impersonate these beings through a series of dances from their initial emergence at Winter Solstice until they return “home” in July. From August through November, non-Kachina rites occupy the ritual calendar, with the Snake or Flute Dance (*Chuchubti*) in August, Women’s Society rituals in September/October (*Marí* and *Oáqöle*), and the Tribal Initiation (*Wuwuchim*) in November.

Hopi religious ceremonies are conducted between underground chambers (*kiva*) reached by ladders, and public areas of villages, especially the plaza. The *kiva* are both sacred spaces for secret ceremonies as well as communal lodges.

The nine-day *Powamú* (Bean Dance) ceremony celebrates fertility each January. It is the major ritual of the Kachina cult. Sixteen days before *Powamú*, beans are planted inside warm, humid kivas, in order to force new growth. There are eight days of secret rituals and preparations. Some performances are dramatic enactments of Hopi mythology, with clan ancestor Kachinas, such as Eótoto – the father of the Kachinas – putting in an appearance. On the night of the fifth day of the ceremony, Kachina Mother Hahai-I Wuhti demands to see the sleeping children. The following afternoon, she and her monster children, the Nataşka Kachinas, are joined by Ogre Woman, Soyok’ Wuhti Kachina, who carries a bloodstained knife and long crook to capture young children to eat. Parents threaten their disobedient

children with the monsters' wrath and bribe the monsters with food.

Eótoto Kachina is the chief of all Kachinas (Figure 1.8). Aided by the loyal Aholi Kachina (who once cut his own throat to permit Eótoto to escape), Eótoto draws cloud symbols in corn flour on the earth, pointing towards the village. Aholi calls out loudly while striking the picture with his staff. Carrying green shoots of corn, Eótoto performs a water ritual in six directions to guide the rain-clouds to the village.

Simultaneously, other Kachinas bring gifts to the children.

During Kachina dances, a number of *Táchkutí* appear – the clowns (Figure 1.9). Commonly known as “Mudheads” since their heads are covered with sack-like masks, they dash around the village making crude jokes, eating like gluttons, and tripping over themselves. They mime falling down dead and are only revived by the performance of explicit sexual acts. They then distribute seeds to young women who plant them to ensure



Figure 1.8

Eótoto Kachina doll, in several views, carved by Timothy Talawepi. Given the central importance of Kachinas to Hopi culture, no photographs of actual Kachina performances are permitted. From the Giorgio Mira Collection, Italy. Photo courtesy of Giorgio Mira.

fertility. Long-Billed Wapamu Kachina is a guard who uses his yucca whip to keep the clowns moving and to prevent onlookers from disrupting the Kachina processions. During *Powamú*, people with rheumatism can be cured if Wapamu whips the affected body part.

On the ninth day, the public ceremonies occur. As many as 100 masked Kachinas may dance in the plaza. Warrior Maid He'e'e Kachina waves her arms from the rooftops, signaling other Kachinas to chase people into their houses and whip those who refuse. The young bean plants in the kivas are cut and taken to a shrine. Finally, the Kachinas distribute the beans to the households. Various clownish Kachinas mimic the serious rituals. Sometimes, they even impersonate obnoxious tourists, pushing, taking photos, and shouting in crude English.

Every four years when children between the ages of six and ten are to be initiated, they are brought to the kivas. After rituals and songs, the elders depart. It is dark.

The sound of pounding feet on the roof signals the entrance of the Kachinas who climb down the ladder. The children suddenly recognize their fathers, uncles and brothers. Hú'Kachinas whip the children with yucca whips, then whip themselves, fiercely warning the children to keep their new knowledge secret. This annual cycle of traditional ceremonies constitutes an elaborate ritual drama through which "men, animals, plants and spirits are inter-transposable in a seemingly unbroken chain of being" (Ortiz 1969:143). Historically, this type of ceremonial cycle is typical of peoples who created settled, agricultural communities. For Hopi and others still practicing complete ritual cycles today, the ceremonies point to a common past, usually articulated in an origin myth, and also serve as the primary touchstone of individual and social identity in a changing world. In the case study of Yoruba *Egúngún* that follows this chapter we examine how creative ritual can be past and present.

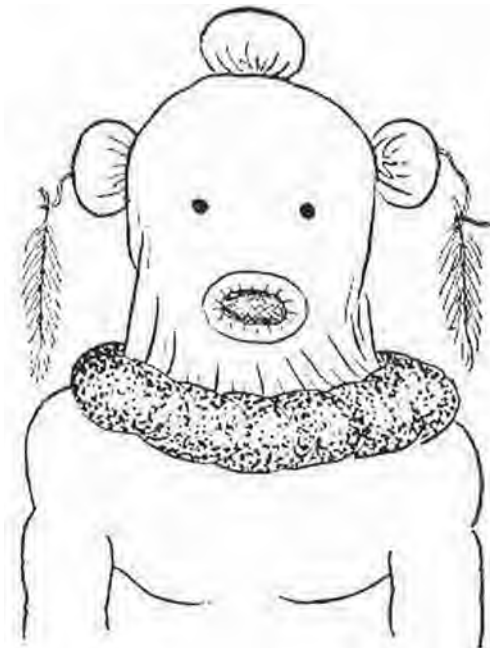


Figure 1.9

Tachukti Kachina. One of several types of "Mudhead" clown masks.

Source: In *The Kachina and the White Man* by Frederick J. Dockstader. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985, p.20. (Line drawing.) Copyright uncertain.

Healing powers of ritual/shamanic specialists

An exorcistic shadow-puppet performance in Bali

The performance of the Balinese shadow-puppet play, *wayang Calon Arang*, is, in effect, a healing ritual. The play demonstrates the early historical roots of shadow-puppet theatre in animistic ritual/religious practice. It also demonstrates how the serious business of ritual may quite logically involve humor, including ribald comedy, scatological word-play, or sexual innuendo, such as we have seen in the comic “Mudmen” in Hopi Kachina ceremonies.

Calon Arang is the supreme or “Queen Sorceress in Balinese ritual drama . . . the semi-historical manifestation of the widow (Rangda)” (Hobart 2003:103). Performances of *Calon Arang* are arranged with a specialist puppeteer when villagers wish to expose

and exorcise witches in their area. Involving learned/scholarly healers, spirit mediums, and masked ritual dramas, the performance of *Calon Arang* engages one or more of the diverse, sometimes demonic, dark, or evil powers in order to “heal” an individual or community. In Bali, illness, death, and a considerable number of human troubles in everyday life are attributed to *leak* (in high Balinese *desti*) – usually translated as witches. Healers refer to them as “agents of power” or “poison wind” – people whose practices access the destructive and the malign, rather than the positive aspects of power (Hobart 2003:104). They are able to transform at night into monkeys, tigers, pigs, chickens or flickering lights. In such transformed states, *leak* can enter households to bring a variety of troubles, illness, or even death. If someone wishes to victimize or curse another, one goes to a sorcerer to acquire a drawing inscribed with magical syllables (Figure 1.10).

Figure 1.10

In the Balinese shadow-puppet play, *wayang Calon Arang*, a witch charged with power puts her foot on a man’s head. Alongside the image are magical syllables.

Source: Drawing by a Balinese sorcerer, reproduced with permission of Dr. Professor Angela Hobart from her *Healing Performances in Bali*. N.Y. and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2003, line drawing 4.1, p.109. © Museum der Kulturen, Basel.



The performance of *Calong Arang's* story in the form of a traditional shadow-puppet play takes place outside the local village death temple at night. 🎭 It is considered dangerous for the puppeteer to undertake, since it temporarily exposes the invisible realm of dark powers. The puppeteer, therefore, is usually also a healer who regularly encounters both demonic and protective powers. He must be an individual with strong spiritual powers since narrating the story “tests [his] capacity to combat and contain malevolent forces and energies” (Hobart 2003:112). During the performance, at a certain point in the story, the puppeteer “‘summons the witches’ . . . of the area to attend. Only a few witches may come, but many may be drawn to the show, like heavy gusts of wind, in order to ‘test’ the power of the puppeteer” (Hobart 2003:114). The local witches who come are called out by the shadows on the screen. In such performances, past and present, the invisible is made visible, at least temporarily, so that the invisible, in its malevolent form, can be engaged and controlled, at least temporarily, by the healing powers of the puppeteer.

Humor, like ritual, often plays at the transition points or boundaries where darkness, horror, and human fear lurk. The opening scene of *Calon Arang* is set in the court of the great Balinese prince, Erlangga. Erlangga has ordered his two servants, the proto-typical comic duo, Wayan Geligir and Nang Kinyan, to deliver a message to the widow from Dirah. The comic duo hold the “screen” as they discuss their fears about their forthcoming journey. The naive and simple Nang Kinyan whispers to his companion:

Agents of power will approach us at night. . . .
[D]o you know any mantras so that it will become light?

WAYAN GELIGIR: Why should I learn mantras?

These days we have electricity! Lights can now be switched on and off with ease in the villages. Matches can also be bought for a few Rupiah. It takes at least one year of study to become

sufficiently *sakti* [powerful], just to transmit mystic fire from the hands.

NANG KINYAN: Wadah!

WAYAN GELIGIR: [M]oreover witches who take on the forms of monkeys, chicken, pigs, or fierce ogres may these days be electrocuted!

Attending the 1993 performance of the play in Tegallalang, Gianyar, Bali, anthropologist Angela Hobart relates how the audience, in response to the servant's comic repartee, “bursts out in laughter” while simultaneously “tension mounts as [they are] alerted to the presence of *leak* . . . who may be lurking nearby” (Hobart 2003:116). Here comedy, so far from being separate from ritual, serves the serious business of exorcistic ritual. Also, while the Hopi Kachina ceremony and Korean *kut* performance (explained in a case study following this chapter) include comic “acts” or “mini-dramas,” only the Balinese shadow-puppet performance of *Calong Arang* performs a fully developed dramatic narrative. 🎭

Summary

This chapter has considered oral, ritual, and shamanic performance practices in pre-literate cultures, and their encounter with writing when it developed. We considered the nature of primary orality and discussed key features of oral performance. We discussed how traditional ritual is organized to “do” something and surveyed a variety of ways in which this is accomplished. We examined a Neolithic ritual landscape in northern England using archeological evidence, oral and ritual performance among the Celts in Ireland and Wales using archeology, and problematic early monastic texts. We considered four examples of ritual or shamanic performance in the ethnographic present.

We have seen how many of the elements utilized in theatre are present in oral, ritual, and shamanic performance including masking, impersonation, and costuming. The Hopi Kachina ceremonies and, as we shall see, the Korean *kut* include comic “acts” or “mini-dramas,” and the Balinese shadow-puppet performance of *Calong*

Arang performs a fully developed dramatic narrative. Although Balinese shadow theatre probably had its origins in Javanese/Balinese ancestor and/or animistic worship, it exemplifies how a genre of theatrical performance in certain contexts functions as a ritual intended to have a real effect – identifying and exorcising witches in a particular village. We will want to keep this particular example in mind as we turn, in Chapter 2, to the specific history of the development of specific forms of drama and theatre with the emergence of early states.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Sami peoples: <http://www.samitour.no/english/9-1-historie.html#02>.

Thornborough: For more images of the ritual landscape, go to the following websites: <http://thornborough.ncl.ac.uk/>, <http://thomodernantiquarian.com/site/3939>, www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nov.10712.

Balinese shadow puppets: search YouTube for this topic and select *The Sacrifice of Bima*, Parts 3 and 4 for a sampling of music and puppets (not translated). Scenes from *Calong Arang* are also available but with live actors. Search “calong arang”.

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CASE STUDY: Yoruba ritual as "play," and "contingency" in the ritual process

Aiyé l'ojà, òrun n'ilé.

"The world is a market, the otherworld is home."
(Drewal and Drewal 1983:2)

By Phillip B. Zarrilli

If this world is a market, and one's permanent residence is the otherworld, then life in this world is contingent and transitory. For the Yoruba, life in this world is a constant process of balancing or "playing" with and between opposing forces. As a cultural designator, the term "Yoruba" has been used only since the nineteenth century to identify this large, socially and culturally diverse set of subgroups speaking many different, but related dialects of Yoruba. The Yoruba peoples are spread across the coastal region of West Africa (Togo, Benin, and Western Nigeria) (Figure 1.11). They are also in diasporic communities in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States. One prominent, early subgroup among the Yoruba is Ketu, whose antiquity has been established from at least the fourteenth century. It was via the Ketu that Islam began to have an impact on the area by the late seventeenth century.

Balance and symmetry are central to Yoruba religion and are embedded in all aspects of Yoruba life – dance, speech, and ritual. Traditional Yoruba deities who have boundless energy and provoke action are classified as "hot," and must be counterbalanced by those who are "cool" – "whose strength is in the patience and gentleness they radiate" (Ajayi 1998:38). Éṣù, the capricious trickster god of the crossroads, and Ọ̀ṛínmílá, the god of fate, are two opposites who complement one another, as reflected in the Yoruba's primordial creation myth. Dances of all types are informed by an aesthetic of balance and symmetry – in practice, a constant process of shifting between right and left (*ìwòntúnwònsì*). Indeed, Yoruba society does not expect rigid conformity, but "appreciates occasional lapses and personal idiosyncrasies" (Ajayi 1998:29). This is also evidenced in the delight people take when engaging in both *èdà-òrò* (inverted discourse) and in the indirect handling of the "truths" of riddles and proverbs – a trait some Westerners ethnocentrically deride as "never straightforward" (Ajayi 1998:31).

We have seen that some rituals are highly prescriptive in form, inviting absorption of ritual *specialists* in the

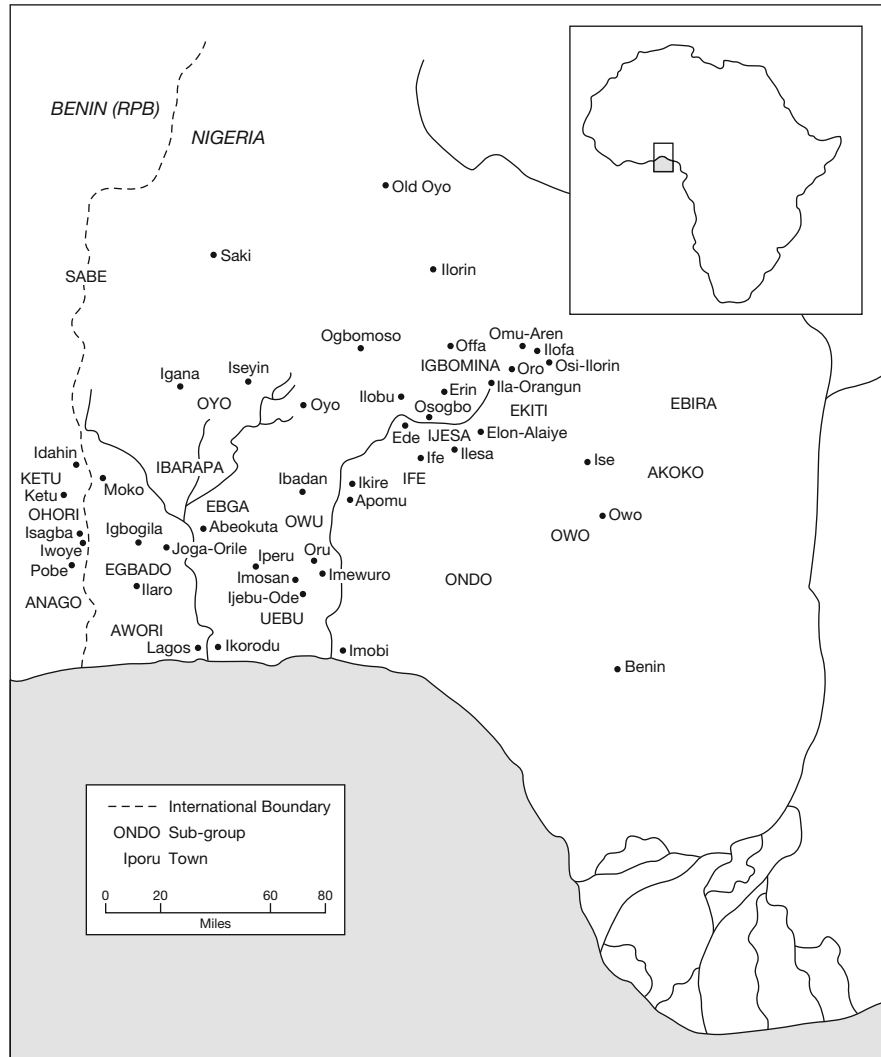


Figure 1.11
Map: the Yoruba
of Nigeria and
Benin, West
Africa.

intricacies of the repetition of highly codified scores. While all rituals have a structure, not all ritual structures possess a rigid score. Indeed, Yoruba ritual practices are founded on the transformative possibilities of ritual becoming a “journey” for its participants. Through ritual deep-learning takes place by “playing” in the moment.

The concept of Yoruba ritual (*ètùtù*) encompasses “annual festivals (*òdún*), weekly rites (*òsẹ̀*), funerals (*ìsínkú*), divinations (*idafà*), and initiations and installations of all kinds” (Drewal 1992:19). As Margaret Drewal explains, Yoruba say they go to “play” ritual, that is to say they spontaneously “improvise” dance steps or rhythmic patterns, and improvise through parody,

elaboration, or invention. Some forms of improvisation are obvious, such as when the Yoruba incorporate in their *Egúngún* masquerade festival (described below) parodies of Western behavior or dress (using tuxedos or World War II gas masks, for example).

Journey as a metaphor for this contingent life is embedded in all Yoruba ritual, as reflected in the final two lines of these verses by diviner, Kolawole Ositola:

We are going in search of knowledge, truth, and justice . . .

We are searching for knowledge continuously.
(Ajayai 1998:33)

This is not a journey from predetermined point A to point Z, but rather a life-long processual journey of exploration and discovery through which consciousness is to be transformed.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Theories of play and improvisation

In her study of Yoruba ritual, Margaret Thompson Drewal asserts that “playing is the power Yoruba actors exercise in transforming ritual itself, and indeed it may be more precise to say that ritual structures, or strategies, have no existence apart from the tactics, or play, of actors. It is in play that ritual’s very efficacy resides” (Drewal 1992:28). Here Drewal is counteracting many earlier anthropological accounts of ritual that overemphasize structure, convention, rigidity, and the role that “rules” play in the efficacy of ritual.

Drewal adopts an “actor-centered approach” focused on “the relationship between actors and the forms they operate on” (Drewal and Drewal 1983: xvi). This locates the “power” of ritual not in the structure, but in the active engagement of the individual “actor” within the experience of the structure as it is performed/practiced. Drewal’s emphasis on the centrality of play and improvisation within Yoruba ritual is specific to the “ethnographic present” – that is to say, to the way in which the Yoruba people situate the contingency of “playing” as central to both their worldview and their engagement of ritual structures. It relates to the general theories of play as developed by sociologists Huizinga (1970), Callois (1979), and Sutton-Smith (1997). Theories of play emphasize the autotelic enjoyment of engaging, stretching, and breaking rule-governed activities. Given its ephemeral mode of engagement “in the moment,” this idea of “play” is usually lost in the writing of theatre histories. But the joy of “playing” or “attending to play” is central to the moment of both ritual and theatrical performance. An “actor-centered” approach to the study of performance histories necessarily will mean attempting to understand and interpret what cultural actors experience and how they engage in the moment of performance/practice.

Below are some questions to ask when considering any type of performance in light of this theory.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 How might an “actor-centered” approach be applied to performances in another culture or era?
- 2 How much attention do specific historical studies give to understanding and interpreting what particular actors within specific cultures were experiencing and how they were engaging in the moment of performance/practice?

***Egúngún* masquerade spectacle**

From the many forms of Yoruba ritual, we have selected for brief description here the masquerade spectacle, *Egúngún*, which honors the spirits of ancestors. On dates set by diviners and publicly announced, *Egúngún* festivals are organized by *Egúngún* societies and held in the open air in villages or towns annually, biannually, or on the occasion of a funeral. Each occasion is unique, with great variation in the numbers and types of masked and unmasked performers that appear, in the order of performance, and in the type, range, and quality of audience engagement. During performances, the spectators' attention is never directed to one place at one time. Their attention is drawn to what is happening in particular (often improvised) moments rather than

to "repetition of a stock formal segment" (Drewal 1992:93).

Egúngún begins at night in the center of the town when a spirit (Agan) "brings the festival into the world" (Drewal and Drewal 1983:2). *Egúngún* society members invoke the elusive Agan into the world by using idiophonic language that simulates the "actual dynamic qualities" Agan possesses. He is likened to the "[small, quick, light, drizzling] . . . early night rain" (1983:2–4). It is forbidden that anyone see Agan's entry into the world; therefore, all non-members must lock themselves in their houses as Agan is beckoned. The first rhythms played on the *bata* drum summoning ancestors or deities for this and other festivals are called *alùwási*, literally "drums come into the world." 📺

Figure 1.12

The masks worn in *Egúngún* are called *idan*, literally meaning "miracle." The "miracle" depicted here represents Gorilla, a character that figures significantly in *Egúngún* origin myths. Egbado area, town of Imasai, 23 December 1977.

Source: From Margaret Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual*, p.161, by kind permission of Indiana University Press.



Egúngún is an opportunity for the unseen ancestral spirits to visit. Performers are understood to possess *àṣẹ*, the “activating force or energy” (Drewal and Drewal 1983:5), with “the power to bring things into existence” (Drewal 1992:90). *Egúngún* performances temporally weave together a series of equal, but quite different stylistic and thematic segments, each of which has its own independent origin myth.

These myths are available to particular segments of performance as source traditions, but each occasion of performance is a completely unique negotiation of that past with the present. Drewal witnessed the appearance of four maskers in a performance in the town of Imasai, in the Egbado area, one of whom appeared as the Gorilla (*Inṣẹṣi*), with “naturalistically carved wooden testicles and a penis painted red on the tip” (Drewal 1992:93) (Figure 1.12). He represented a character that features significantly in the *Egúngún* origin myth in which a gorilla rapes Iya Mose, who thereby gives birth to a half-human, half-monkey child. The child eventually grows up to be “‘One-Who-Brings-Sweetness’ to the community” (Drewal 1992:92). At this performance, Gorilla “sneaks up behind unsuspecting women in the performing space, raising his penis as if he is going to rape them” to the ideophonic sound (*sabala-sabala-sa-o*) of the drums aurally simulating the sounds of Gorilla’s sexual movements. Because the attention of spectators was not centrally focused, the Gorilla masker was able to catch-out women in the audience, much to the amusement of the other spectators.

We can see the underlying creativity and sense of play informing Yoruba ritual in many other examples of improvisational intervention, especially when a segment of *Egúngún* is a competitive performance where individual skills and techniques are tested. So fluid is an *Egúngún* masquerade that master performers “continue to refine their skills,” while “neophytes learn in plain sight of everyone” (Drewal 1992:89). At the conclusion of the festival, a different spirit (from Agan), known as Aráńta or Olódúnghódún (“The-Owner-of-the-Festival-Takes-the-Festival”) “carries the spectacle back to the otherworld” (Drewal and Drewal 1983:4). The playful

improvisation at the heart of Yoruba practice points to an important dimension of many historical forms of ritual. It has allowed the Yoruba to creatively interact with, and respond to neighboring peoples such as the mask of the Hausa (Meat Seller), or to changing historical circumstances, from the introduction of Islam to European colonialism.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

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Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our website.

Yoruba performance

Drewal, M.T. (1992) *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press. A video-tape companion to this book includes sequences from Agemo, *Egúngún*, and Jigbo masking and dancing; divination rituals; an Osugbo elder’s dance; and a Muslim Yoruba celebration. Indiana University Press, 601 North Morton Street, Bloomington, Indiana 47404–3797.

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Beckwith, C. and Fisher, A. *African Ceremonies*, Vol. 1, New York: [n.d.] Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Many color photographs from the text of the *Egúngún* masquerade, with explanatory notes: <http://www.abujacity.com/culture/egungun-masquerade>.

Michael C. Carlos Museum of Emory University: Page of masks, costumes, and very brief video of the *Egúngún* masquerade: http://www.carlos.emory.edu/ODYSSEY/AFRICA/AF_rit_cerem_mask_egungun.html.

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CASE STUDY: Korean shamanism and the power of speech

By Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei

Korean shamanistic performance can be analyzed from various perspectives that emphasize its aesthetics, its cultural functions, or its linguistic place in Korean society. For many people today, the term “shaman” may suggest a masked dancer from a long-vanished tribe, or a grass-skirted “witch-doctor,” offering dubious cures to those deprived of modern medicine. However, in industrialized, twenty-first century South Korea, “[t]he rituals of the shamans are very much in demand because many people consider them an effective way to cope with the material and spiritual needs of modern society” (Bruno 2002:1).

We begin by looking at Korean shamanistic performance in light of the contested theory of ritual origins. Next, we consider the formal structure of *kut* and offer an interpretive approach to its performance, that of speech act theory.

Shamanism, ritual, and theories of the origins of theatre

The term “shaman” originally derived from Siberian (*Tungus*), referring to religious specialists able to mediate between the human world and the spirit world by means of an altered state of consciousness described as trance, spirit possession, or ecstasy. The shaman’s goal is to control the spirits in order to heal the sick and protect

society from evil. Shamans are, or have been active in every continent inhabited by humans.

Mircea Eliade’s *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1964) is considered the classic work on shamanism from the perspective of comparative religious study. Eliade noted that all shamans share a number of traits, including the experience of a complex, sometimes psychologically painful initiation. All shamans embark on spirit journeys to the realms of gods or demons; they are trained in song, dance, and the skills of impersonation; they serve as priests and personal advisors; they cure the sick and exorcise malignant spirits; and they aid the dead to find peace. In some societies, the shaman’s journey or initiation involves imbibing hallucinogenic plants.

Despite his insights, Eliade has been criticized for failing to make sociological distinctions between cultures and for overgeneralization in terminology. Nevertheless, performance scholars such as Richard Schechner and Eugenio Barba, inspired by anthropologist Victor Turner, embrace shamanism as a possible root of theatre. They note that both shamans and actors are “liminal” beings who mediate between the everyday world of the audience (or believer) and another realm that only these beings can enter. Both willfully “become” or “call down” another persona (a spiritual being or a character); both use “ritually repeated” special words, movements, gestures, costumes, objects, and spaces, differently than in everyday life. In both cases, audiences are aware of the

performer's or ritual practitioner's "doubleness"; that is, audiences know who the enactor is in real life and who she is impersonating or becoming in the ritual or play. This theory suggests that the shaman or religious practitioner performs rituals to change reality (for example, to purify a sinner, answer prayers, cure the sick, talk to the dead, or bring rain), while the goal of the actor is primarily to entertain and/or enlighten.

Recently, such comparisons have been challenged. Eli Rozik (2002) cites the lack of empirical historical evidence of connections between shamanism and theatre, and questions why the idea of ritual origin should be reserved exclusively for theatre, when other arts share elements with ritual (music, song, dance, art, or architecture). He suggests instead that "theatre is a specific imagistic medium (that is, a method of representation or rather an instrument of thinking and communication), and as such its roots lie in the spontaneous image-making faculty of the human psyche" (Rozik 2002:xi). He maintains that theatre and ritual are different types of human activity:

Theatre is a medium that can serve different intentions and purposes; and ritual is a particular mode of action, with definite intentions and purposes, which can use any medium. Ritual and theatre do not constitute a binary opposition: they operate on different ontological levels.

(Rozik 2002:337)

Rozik proposes that theatre exists at the borderline between the conscious and the unconscious, "an arena where culture confronts and subdues nature" (2002:347). Theatre comes into being when "the human psyche spontaneously formulates thoughts in the shape of fictional worlds (i.e. worlds populated by characters and their actions). . . . Theatre . . . affords an imagistic

medium for imagistic thinking" (2002:343–344). In this view, spectators at theatrical performances confront their own consciousness and subconsciousness, rather than observing a staged world with which they may or may not identify. Korean *kut* poses an interesting problem, employing as it does both ritual and theatre, sometimes making a clear distinction between the two and sometimes blurring the boundaries.

Performing Korean *kut*

Kut is a type of Korean ritual performed by shamans (mostly female), called *mudang*. The "mu" (shaman) in *mudang* is written with the Chinese character formed by two horizontal lines at the top and bottom, symbolizing heaven and earth, with a central vertical line uniting them; on either side is a human being. According to Hogarth, this suggests dancing in the air (Hogarth 1999:2); thus, the very character describes a *mudang* as one whose dance links the material and spiritual realms. In anthropologist Victor Turner's term, she is a "liminal being" (Figures 1.13 and 1.14).

Kut may be performed to let the dead vent anger, regrets, or desires in order to rest in peace; to heal the sick and control epidemics; or to obtain good luck. A *kut* can last for several days. It may include choosing a colored flag to determine the mood of a spirit, consuming ritual wine and food, playing music, singing, reciting long tales, chanting Buddhist sutras, performing spirit-possession dances (both by the *mudang* who is inhabited by the spirit, and by non-possessed audience/participants who impersonate the *mudang*), and performing dances purely for fun. Separate (non-ritual) theatrical pieces are usually performed at the end of the *kut*. 

The most famous of such independent plays is the masked dance drama of Hahoe village. It contains not

Figure 1.13



The Chinese character *wu* (pronounced *mu* in Korean), part of *mudang*, the term for the shaman in the Korean ritual, *kut*.

Source: Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei.



Figure 1.14

A group of Korean shamans perform a ritual in which they entertain a General thought to be a divine of the spirit world, petitioning him to comfort troubled spirits and bring happiness to the village. Seated in the foreground are musicians.

Source: From Traditional Performing Arts of Korea. © Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 1975.

only an invocation to the spirits but also crude and obscene elements, which in former days served as a social “safety valve,” allowing the oppressed to poke fun at their masters. For example, a servant boy sits on the head of a nobleman, a girl urinating in public sexually excites a monk, and a butcher tries to convince a pair of hypocritical aristocrats to buy a bull’s testicles and heart to increase sexual potency. Such comic reversals, obscenity, and the incongruous are parts of life often suppressed in “official” or “classical” art, as well as in many religions. Nevertheless, such elements appear in

traditional belief systems throughout the world. They are found in spring festivals marking fertility and rebirth, and sometimes serve as a means of releasing aggression against the ruling class in stratified or unjust societies (This tradition is taken up again in the Molière and Bahktin case study, at the end of Chapter 4.)

In addition, the entire *kut* has a dramatic structure. It includes an opening invitation to the spirits, a central portion in which the shaman and her clients entertain and supplicate the visiting spirits, and a conclusion in which the spirits are sent back to their own realm.

During the *kut*, the possessed *mudang* enacts various spirit-characters, while the audience/participants take on roles as they speak with, coax, plead with, or even try to bribe the spirit-characters with food, wine, entertainment, and money. If the *kut* is successful, the audience/participants experience deep emotional satisfaction or a sense of release.

Some *mudang* have been invited to international festivals to perform *kut*. While some members of the audience may be seeking a genuine spiritual experience, others want exotic secular entertainment. Similarly, the financial backers may be believers, promoters of cross-cultural understanding, or people out to make money. Generally, shamanistic performances at non-religious venues require significant changes in the rituals. Holledge and Tompkins note, in analyzing the 1994 Australian tour by the Korean *mudang*, Kim Kum hwa, that “The packaging of spirituality as a commodity – and particularly the spirituality of an indigenous culture defined by the West as primitive, mythic, and irrational – presents peculiar problems for the marketplace” (Holledge and Tompkins 2000:60). They suggest that “the future of intercultural work is more likely to be tied to patterns of consumption than to idealistic notions of cultural exchange” (2000:182). Not all scholars and artists agree with this assessment, and Chapter 13 considers some of the controversies and ethics of cross-cultural, intercultural, and fusion performance.

Anthropologist Choi Chungmoo has employed performance analysis (including the methods used by Schechner) in her study of *kut*. The shaman’s language communicates her liminal status, which must be real for the ritual to be effective (unlike theatre, where liminality is symbolic or suggested). For example, when invoking and impersonating the spirit of her client’s dead son, the shaman shifts between the third person and first person. Using “he” to refer to the spirit of the son emphasizes the distance between this world and the realm of the dead; using “I” in impersonating the son’s spirit emphasizes the presence of the spirit in the material world. The shaman is simultaneously “I” and “Not I.”

In Richard Schechner’s terms, she is a “between persona” (Schechner 1981:88). In Rozik’s terms, however, the shaman’s impersonation and doubleness stimulate the brain’s imagistic capabilities.

By skillful impersonation and transformation, the shaman creates an emotionally and aesthetically satisfying dialog between herself and her characters, and between each of these and the audience. The solo performer/shaman consciously shifts roles between narrator (herself) and character (the dead spirit) in a manner similar to that of contemporary “one-person shows.” This shifting also may be compared to that in traditional Korean *p’ansori* (solo story-telling to music). In addition, the shaman must sense the desires and tastes of her audience. She must be able to vary the length of a song, dance, dialog, and all other elements to give the audience/participants the greatest emotional satisfaction. Although performing ritual actions, she must be willing to improvise and “break the rules.” Choi concludes that the shaman balances “ritual efficacy and aesthetic felicity to come up with a convincing dramatic performance” (Choi 1989:236). Her conclusion also accords with Rozik’s analysis of theatre as the creation of an “imagistic” world of the mind, peopled by fictional characters and situations.

Using speech act theory to interpret Korean *kut*

Antonetta Lucia Bruno agrees that the shaman’s language choices are crucial, while emphasizing the importance of non-written communication. Her methodology is inspired by “speech act theory,” originally defined by philosopher John L. Austin.

In her insightful *The Gate of Words: Language in the Rituals of Korean Shamans*, Bruno employs variations of Austin’s theory that emphasize performance. She defines speech as dialog rather than as monologue. That is, the speaker (shaman, character, invoked spirit, or actor) does not merely speak to a passive listener. She has a social and physical relationship with the world; communication goes both ways – that is, the audience (and/or the

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Speech act theory

Speech act theory may be stated simply as “to say something is to do something.” Austin’s 1962 *How to Do Things with Words*, like Eliade’s monumental book, has proven useful for various academic disciplines. However, like Eliade, Austin has been criticized for his failure to emphasize differences between languages and cultures. In addition, some scholars fault him for failing to consider adequately non-linguistic factors, particularly the speaker’s “intention” and the listener’s active role. But the basic theory is so useful it has often been re-interpreted and modified.

Speech communicates not merely by words but also by gestures, tone of voice, style of language, level of discourse, word choice, speed of delivery, and so on. Such communication (taking words, grammar, and mode of delivery together) is called a “locutionary act.” If the words spoken are meant to do something, that is, if the words are “performative” such as making a promise, an assurance or a threat, they are called “illocutionary acts.” Illocutionary acts are especially important for actors and directors, since they must learn to think in terms of active verbs and intentions. A third type of speech is called a “perlocutionary act.” Here, circumstances determine how the speech act affects the listener’s feelings, thoughts, or actions – for example, persuading someone to do something. The meaning of the communication (from the perspective of both speaker and listener) varies depending on how the speaker delivers the words and gestures. For example, does the shaman or actor sing, whisper, dance, mime, use an unknown language, stutter, or suddenly speak in the voice of a dead person? Like theatre, speech acts take place in both time and space. Dance, mime, and music are also communication. Depending on rhythm and movement qualities, a dance may be a dance of joy or a dance of lamentation; drumbeats might encourage a feeling of dread or of elation. Similarly, people mingling in a theatre lobby (or those awaiting the arrival of the spirit of a dead relative) perform gestures and words that are appropriate to the situation. Even without intending to, they are clearly communicating by performing “speech acts,” although an outside observer might “misread” the communication, especially if she comes from a different culture. Thus, both the intention of the speaker and the effect of the speech on the listener are crucial in determining the meaning of a speech act.

Below are examples of the kinds of questions one would ask using speech act theory, which is interested in the “performative” nature of language, language that makes something happen.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 **When is the language spoken by one person simply informative and when is it performative – designed to affect another, provoke a response, force a reaction, change an opinion or change the circumstances? What especially powerful words are used to do these things? (One might ask these questions about a scene in a play.)**
- 2 **Does the oral delivery of this language support the speaker’s design (or not)? Consider such factors as tone, volume, rate, particular inflections, or emotional coloring. What effect does the delivery have on the listeners? (One might ask these questions of the delivery of an exchange of lines in a scene.)**

spirit who is being addressed) can also affect her performance. Bruno writes that during a *kut*,

the speaker, whether human (shaman) or supernatural (ancestor or divinity), possesses a special authority or power to perform speech acts. These acts consist of utterances (including chanting or singing) of a particular nature and are accompanied by particular actions (ritual action, including dance and music) performed at specific moments of the *kut*. The meanings of speech acts are created and recreated during the entire *kut* by all the participants.

(Bruno 2002:13)

Since words and gestures mean different things depending on the context, “speech act theory [must be] reinterpreted, focusing on a continuous transformation of meaning according to the speech event, which is constituted by both linguistic forms and social norms” (2002:11).

To analyze a specific ritual using speech act theory, one must focus on the effective combination of ritual speech (magic spells and incantations) with ritual actions (the manipulation of objects). For example, when performing a divination, the *mudang* takes bits and pieces of her clients’s casual conversations and re-contextualizes them, so that she is able to use them in a new text when she speaks in the voice of the spirit. This re-contextualization of remembered dialog does not mean that the *mudang* is “faking”; rather, she is in control, making the ritual emotionally effective for the audience. Similarly, her choice of words and style of performance will help the audience “see” and “hear” a god or ancestor rather than the *mudang* herself, who is a person her audience knows in daily life. The differences between daily and “extra-daily” activities and words, performed by a special person in a special setting with special ritual objects, mark the *kut* as a powerful event for her audiences.

Speech act theory, here modified for ritual analysis, is a valuable tool that can help us understand all types of theatrical as well as social performance.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

YouTube

Search “Mudang”; see specifically: “Trailer of Mudang,” “Shaman of Korea” and “Korean Shaman – Possession by the Spirit of Changun”.

DVD-video

Mudang: Reconciliation between the Living and the Dead (“Yeoungmae: San jawa jugeot ja-ui hwahae”). 100 min, 35mm, color/b&w. Directed by Park Ki-bok. Produced by Cho Sung-woo. International Sales by Music & Film Creation Company, 2003. (See YouTube, “Mudang”, “Trailer of Mudang”.)

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Religious and civic festivals: Early drama and theatre in context

By Phillip B. Zarrilli

In large-scale states where centralized authority developed, public life was organized around elaborate annual religious festivals featuring commemorative celebrations, rituals, and performances held on specific dates in the sacred calendar. Early religions are best understood not as matters of personal faith but as apparatuses for enacting highly choreographed performances believed necessary for maintaining social, civic, and cosmic cohesion.

Festivals lasting days or weeks create a “time out of time” (Falassi 1987). At festival time, people leave behind everyday concerns to be subsumed within a larger whole. They participate in the large-scale celebratory practices that constitute a festival – processions, pilgrimages, rituals, singing, dancing, performances, and competitions/games. Social codes are played out and social memories invoked and reinforced as people process, dance, sing, prostrate themselves, or engage in self-flagellation.

In large-scale societies where writing developed, it stimulated economic and cultural growth. A writing system is a technology which, similar to the clock or the map, transforms what is recorded, measured, or encoded. The precise nature of that transformation differs

according to context. In some societies, writing shaped new forms of cultural performance like drama and theatre, providing distinctive ways of encountering myths, epics, or narratives. This chapter examines a variety of different types of early drama and theatre that emerged in the context of religious festivals in large-scale literate societies – in Egypt, Greece, Mesoamerica, Persia (Iran), and medieval Europe.

Many early forms of drama or quasi-dramatic activities were part of commemorative ritual/religious ceremonies that celebrated, re-enacted, or elaborated a fundamental mythological, cosmic, or historical event or source of power. Commemorative ceremonies sometimes provided dramatic means of encountering a power or a past event in the present, reminding a community of “its identity as represented by and told in a master narrative . . . making sense of [its] past as a kind of collective autobiography” (Connerton 1989:70). Commemorative “dramas” are often anonymously created by one or more individuals. Although great artistry and imagination may be involved in their creation, they are usually not judged on artistic merit. Rather, these works are assembled, “authored,” and performed to enhance the relationship of the community or the

individual to the divine or to achieve a ritual purpose; the boundaries between spectating and participation may be blurred. The commemorative performances in Egypt, Mesoamerica, Persia, and Europe that are discussed in this chapter range from “dramatic” elaborations of a ritual or liturgy to dramas that enact a narrative. Commemorative dramas may be enacted to liturgically honor appropriate deities; to ritually pacify cosmic or natural forces (winter/summer solstices, etc.); to enhance communication with the divine; or to commemorate mythic, quasi-historical or historical moments in human history.

Individually authored dramas, by contrast, are (usually) authored by one person, bear both the name and imprimatur of an individual’s poetic voice, engage narrative in some way, and are judged by a set of specific aesthetic criteria. Writing is clearly a necessary but not sufficient cause for the invention of literary drama. While the spectator is ideally engaged in an aesthetic experience, some degree of reflection or critical response to the drama, to its ideological content, or to the performance is expected. This chapter discusses the earliest forms of literary drama authored for the annual dramatic competitions in the fifth century B.C.E. during the festivals in Athens, Greece, honoring Dionysus (god of fertility and wine). This discussion continues in Chapter 3, focusing on aesthetics in three different contexts, temple, court and marketplace.

Some early forms of drama and theatre discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, whether commemorative or literary, might be described as exemplifying “total theatre.” They combine acting, music/song, and dance/movement. They employ non-realistic modes of representation in costuming/masking/make-up and acting in order to depict larger-than-life figures, such as epic heroes, gods, and ghosts. Staging conventions obviously differ from those of contemporary Western realist theatre. Consider, for example, the relationship between actor and character. In ancient Greek tragedy, three actors played all the speaking roles in a play, with each playing at least two different roles in a play, rather than a single actor playing one character. In Japanese *nō*

(Chapter 3), the main actor (*shite*) takes one role in the first part of the performance and returns in the second part in a transformed state, while the onstage chorus occasionally chants in first person some of the character’s lines, expressing her innermost thoughts, thereby helping make present that figure. In many cultures, “impersonation” is not theatre’s ultimate goal.

Among the questions we address as we examine early forms of drama and theatre are these.

- What were the religious and social contexts within which early forms of drama and theatre developed?
- How did the structure, context, and content of performance “choreograph” civic and religious authority?
- What was recorded in early dramatic texts, and who composed/authored them? As these dramatic versions of myths, tales, or epics were transcribed for the first time, were they “fixed” or did they vary in performance?

We begin our examination in Egypt where the myth of Osiris was re-enacted annually at a festival in the god’s honor.

Commemorative ritual “drama” in Abydos, Egypt

The earliest settled agricultural activity in Egypt was in the region of el-Badari, Upper Egypt, around 4400–4000 B.C.E. The Upper and Lower Kingdoms were unified between 3200 and 3000, by which time a distinctive Egyptian civilization had evolved that had a highly complex set of religious practices and beliefs. For well over 3,000 years, Egyptian religious and cultural life exhibited a tolerant polytheistic openness to the worship of a spectacular array of many deities – gods and goddesses both old and new, local and foreign. Their myths and legends were often contradictory. Three different, but interconnected accounts of creation existed, each focusing on a different group of deities and each considered equally valid.

A series of dualities was fundamental to the Egyptian worldview, within which chaos was balanced by order.

In the fragile physical environment of Egypt, the “Black Land” of the rich, fertile banks of the river Nile and its annual life-giving waters balanced the “Red Land” of the surrounding barren deserts. Day balanced night. Their regular alternation demonstrated how the gods controlled the cosmos. The god Ra was both lord of time and the sun-god who ruled the day. His counterpart was Osiris – ruler of death and the underworld. Death and life were not two different states, but two aspects of one state; therefore, life balanced death. The afterlife – an idealized version of Egyptian daily life – was assumed to be an “underworld,” located in the heavens where the dead lived as *akhs* – eternally blessed spirits, transfigured both by their difficult journey through a dark underworld and their final judgment by the great god, Osiris.

Life was associated with day and death with night. The sun god, Ra, was born in the morning, aged during each day, and then sank into Osiris’s underworld at night, to be reborn at dawn. The daily rebirth of the sun mirrored the constant rebirth of the dead in afterlife. Elaborate mortuary rituals were developed to ensure that this rite of passage was successfully accomplished by the souls of the dead. In the underworld, Ra and Osiris became one. According to the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*, “Osiris is yesterday and Ra is tomorrow.”

Cosmic equilibrium could be maintained only through the cooperation of the gods and goddesses. Chaos was kept at bay by the earthly representative of the gods – the pharaoh. As the intermediary between divine and mortal worlds, the pharaoh (male or female) possessed the inherent dualities of the cosmos. Only the pharaoh was empowered to intercede on behalf of humankind; therefore, s/he was considered the main priest of every Egyptian temple. Temple rituals, offerings, public ceremonies, and secret esoteric rites replenished the power of the gods who kept the universe in order. As high priest, the pharaoh delegated most daily temple obligations to a hierarchy of male and female priests. These “servants of the gods” ranged from a few at small temples to 81,000 serving the great Karnak temple during the rule of Rameses III (1184–1153 B.C.E.).

The pharaoh was at first regarded as a servant of the gods, but later was considered divinely conceived, therefore equal to the gods. Each pharaoh was considered an incarnation of Horus, son of Osiris. When a pharaoh died, he was immediately identified with Osiris.

Ritual/ceremonial practices and the commemorative ritual-drama of Osiris at Abydos

The elaborate ritual life of Egyptian temples was based on making offerings that nourished the gods – food, libations, song, dance, incense, and annual festivals. Before conducting daily worship or public ceremonies, priests and priestesses purified themselves by bathing, chewing natron salts, and removing body hair. Song and dance were especially central to worship of the goddess, Hathor, at her temple at Dendera. One hymn describes how even the king danced and sang before the goddess while wielding a sacred, golden rattle:

He comes to dance,
comes to sing,
Hathor, see his dancing,
see his skipping!
... O Golden One,
how fine is the song
like the song of Horus himself,
which Ra’s son sings as the finest singer.
He is Horus, a musician!

(Fletcher 2002:83)

The sacred Egyptian calendar featured numerous annual festivals, astrologically determined, during which statues of gods and goddesses were housed in sacred barques (boat-shaped shrines) (Figure 2.1). These barques usually were hidden from sight and were the subject of secret rituals inside temples. When they were taken in procession by land and water to visit other temples or burial tombs, the barques were carried out of the temple on the shoulders of priests and accompanied by dancers and musicians (Figure 2.2), making that deity’s power present for the people.

The festival season began each year with the celebration of New Year's Day (19 July) during the first Egyptian month of Akhet (Inundation) – the season when the Nile floods. Four other major festivals were celebrated in this month alone. The festival of Osiris at Abydos took place in the fourth Egyptian month, among other festivals honoring Hathor and Sokar (god of cemeteries).

Arguably the most important Egyptian myth is that of Osiris and his sister and consort, Isis. Before human-time, when Osiris and Isis ruled the world, prosperity

and peace reigned. But Osiris's brother, Seth, became jealous. Therefore, Seth killed Osiris by sealing him in a coffin and drowning him in the Nile at a location near Abydos, thereby bringing conflict to the world. When Isis recovered Osiris's body, Seth took the body from her, and dismembering it, scattered it over the far expanses of Egypt. Isis and her sister Nephthys (protectors and restorers of the dead) scoured the kingdom, locating every piece of his body. After reassembling the body, Isis used her great powers to revive Osiris. From their union was born their son, Horus – raised to avenge his

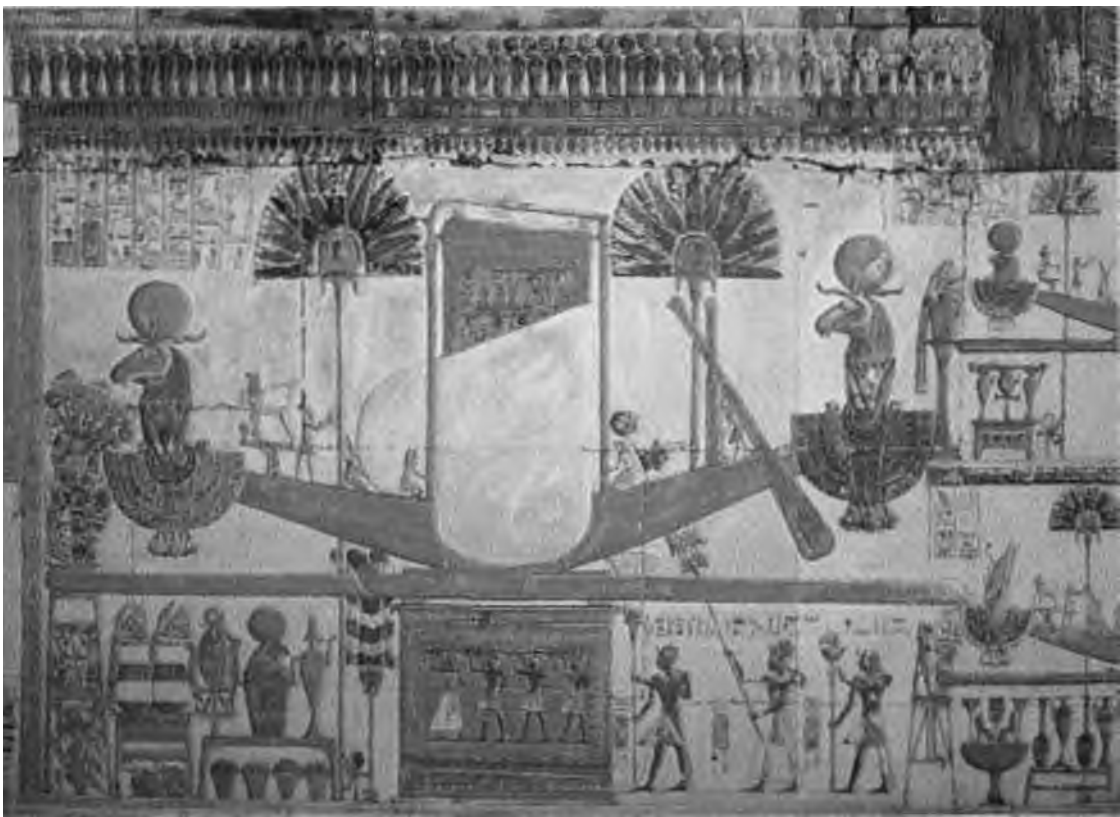


Figure 2.1
The sacred barque of Amun-Ra in a relief from a temple of Seti I.

Source: Joann Fletcher, *The Egyptian Book of Living and Dying* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 2002), 103.



Figure 2.2

Fragment from a relief from a tomb at Sakkara (c.1250 B.C.E.) showing women and young girls playing tambourines and clapsticks and dancing at a festival procession (right), led by a baton-carrying official and other male officials, their arms raised in rejoicing.

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father's death. Osiris left to become ruler of Duat – the underworld.

This legend was central to Egyptian belief in the rebirth of the dead into an afterlife. In the Egyptian view, Seth represented chaos and Horus the divine nature of kingship, always to be reborn. Osiris was the god who restored life, and therefore was regarded as the fecund god of fertility, agriculture, and the Nile.

The deity most honored with great public ceremonies was Osiris, especially at the main center of his worship in Abydos by the period of the Middle Kingdom (after 2055 B.C.E.). Middle Kingdom rulers lavished patronage on the cult. Osiris's statue was re-housed in a new "everlasting great barque," lavishly constructed of "gold, silver, lapis lazuli, bronze, and cedar." Annually, the barque containing Osiris processed

from the temple to the desert site of his tomb and back again. At the center of this liturgy lasting a few days (if not several weeks) was a commemorative re-enactment of dramatic moments of Osiris's story.

The little that is known to us of this quasi-dramatic commemorative ritual is the information inscribed on a single stele (a flat stone), dating from the rule of Senusret III (1870–1831 B.C.E.). It provides a description of the dual roles of the chief priest/organizer of the festival, Ikhernofert, who was both overseer of the ceremonies and a participant/actor playing the role of the "beloved son of Osiris":

I arranged the expedition of Wepwawet when he went to the aid of his father. I beat back those who attacked the Barque of Neshmet. I overthrew

the foes of Osiris. I arranged the Great Procession and escorted the god [Osiris] on his journey. I launched the god's ship . . . I decked the ship with gorgeous trappings so that it might sail to the region of Peker [near Abydos]. I conducted the god to his grave in Peker. I championed [avenged] Wenn-nefru [Osiris as the re-risen god] on the day of the Great Combat and overthrew all his adversaries beside the waters of Nedit. I caused him to sail in his ship. It was laden with his beauty. I caused the hearts of the Easterners to swell with joy, and I brought the gladness to the Westerners at the sight of the Barque of Neshment.

(Gaster 1950:41–42)

Other major roles were taken by priests and priestesses, supported by a large group of “extras” who constituted the warring factions of Seth and Horus/Osiris. The “Great Combat” was a spectacular occasion, with thousands of participants on the two sides. The Greek historian, Herodotus, recorded in his *Histories* how the massed armies engaged in “a hard fight with staves . . . they break one another's heads, and I am of the opinion that many even die of the wounds they receive; the Egyptians however told me that no one died.”

Hieroglyphic texts as mnemonic manuscript records

Egyptians borrowed the idea of writing from Sumer – a mixed form of writing using hieroglyphs (“sacred carvings”). Egyptian writing dates from 3400 B.C.E., before the establishment of the first dynasty of the pharaohs. Since writing was considered a gift of the god, Thoth, the healer, lord of wisdom, and scribe of the gods, it recorded *mdw-ntr*, “god's words.” Egyptians first used hieroglyphs for accountancy and then as a bureaucratic tool. With less than 1 percent of the populous literate, scribes were a learned, specialist community. Colorful hieroglyphic inscriptions decorated tombs and temples and were elaborated with special symbols and images of animals, birds, and humans to

“activate” the scenes. Learning was highly respected, and papyrus texts devoted to astrology, law, history, mathematics, medicine, geography, and sacred liturgy were stored in great libraries attached to temples.

The reign of Senusret III during the Middle Kingdom “was a time when art, architecture, and religion reached new heights, but, above all, it was an age of confidence in writing” (Shah 2000:183). Many literary forms flourished. Narratives such as *The Story of Sinuhe* and *The Shipwrecked Sailor* were composed. “Wisdom texts” recorded maxims on how to gain well-being in life, while “dream books” guided priests in their interpretation of dreams. Manuscripts such as *All Rituals Concerning the God Leaving His Temple in Procession on Festival Days* recorded sacred words and the correct performance of rites.

No specific manuscript has been located for the rites of Osiris at Abydos. If any manuscript had been used, it would have recorded the sacred words used to animate and honor Osiris; there would have been no “dialog” specially authored for the figures central to the re-enactment. The focus of the performance would have been on the processional spectacle and re-enactment manifesting the presence and power of Osiris in his annual going-forth, his conquering of death, and rebirth. Perhaps the contemporary focus on narrative in literary works of the Middle Kingdom helped create a climate within which dramatizing parts of the Osiris story was an obvious means of enhancing the efficacy of the annual commemoration.

The way in which Egyptians “imagined” their place within the world and cosmos was informed by two paradigms of great antiquity – the assumption that society was organized around “high centers,” headed by divinely ordained monarchs, and the assumption that cosmology and history were indistinguishable. Both assumptions are evident in the commemorative ritual drama of Osiris at Abydos.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, when the Romans began to rule over Egypt, traditional religious beliefs and rituals began to lose their hold on cultural life throughout Egypt. When Christianity was declared

the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century C.E., non-Christian places of worship were closed and ancient Egyptian religion and culture died.

Dialogic drama in the city-state of Athens

We have seen the divine god-kings of Egypt locate authority in a single person and produce hieratic festivals honoring gods like Osiris. A very different way of negotiating the relationship between divine and civic authority, and between the cosmos and history developed in Athens, Greece during the fifth century B.C.E., where distinctive forms of literary drama and theatre flourished. The spectacular quasi-dramatic re-enactment of Osiris's story was monologic. It presented Osiris within a ritual/liturgical context that invited no participation on the part of the spectator. By contrast, the forms of drama that developed in the context of the annual festival of Dionysus in Athens may be said to have been "dialogic." That is, they represent conflicts over cultural issues that would have invited social, political, and aesthetic debate.

As in Egypt, ancient Greek religion was polytheistic. Within the Greek pantheon, a complex host of anthropomorphic gods and goddesses vied for power, prestige and influence. The Greek gods (mis)behaved much as did the great epic heroes. The most powerful of the gods were assumed to reside on mount Olympus – the highest peak in Greece. Zeus was considered both king of the gods and ruler of the sky. Zeus's siblings and children each had their own spheres of influence, and each god or goddess embodied a complex set of ways in which the Greeks understood their world. For example, Artemis, the goddess of the hunt, twin to Apollo, was a keen hunter of wild animals and their protector, a virgin goddess who was associated with both chastity and fertility, and a protector of maidens and of women in childbirth.

The gods associated with oral epic poetry (Apollo) and later forms of choral dance and drama (Dionysus), reflect contrasting dimensions of human experience. As David Wiles writes:

Apollo is associated with light, thus intellectual enlightenment, and far-sighted prophecy. Dionysus the wine-god is associated with darkness, with nocturnal drinking bouts, and the loss of mental clarity in moments of collective emotion, with the loss of boundaries around the self experienced in a crowd, and the hiding of self behind a theatrical mask. Apollo makes music with the measured chords of his lyre, whilst the instrument of Dionysus is the haunting double oboe which can whip up wild dances. The worshippers of Apollo tend to be male, those of Dionysus more often female.

(Wiles 2000:7–8)

Living inside the earth were the furies or demons. Important forces active in the world, such as justice and destruction, were imagined as powerful in their own right as semi-personal deities. Ancestors could exert influence over the living; therefore, death rituals and burial rites were important. All the gods and forces active in the world were often in conflict. This in itself reflected the fact that Greeks did not share one set of core values or beliefs, contrary to some romanticizing views of Greek civilization. None of the gods was inherently good or evil, but each needed to be appropriately honored, propitiated, and worshipped to access their potential beneficence or prevent their wrath.

In the eighth and ninth centuries, B.C.E., epic bards like Homer "recited or sang" their own monologic versions of lengthy stories of the gods and epic heroes of bygone eras, such as *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Their performances gave life to the deeds of a heroic aristocracy, populating a murky, distant, quasi-mythic/quasi-historical past.

Alphabetic writing, debate, and "democracy"

Around 850 B.C.E., a system of alphabetic writing adapted from the Phoenicians was introduced into Greece (Fischer 2001:123). In a remarkably short time

– by the end of the fifth century B.C.E. – there was a literacy revolution in Athens. “Everyday life was so overrun with books . . . that cheap editions of philosophy could be picked up from the bookstalls for a drachma” (Wise 1998:21). Most poet/performers refocused their creative work, and, rather than composing solo oral epics, they began to write tragedies or comedies in which multiple actors spoke dialog and choruses played a central role, with choreographed dancing/singing. The high place once accorded to oral performance by bards was soon replaced by the celebration of dramatists who were awarded prizes for plays. How and why did this revolution occur? The nature of Greek alphabetic writing, the competitive spirit in Greek culture, and the Greek creation of an early form of democracy all played roles.

In the Greek alphabet syllabic notation was broken down into phonemes, consonants, and vowels for the first time. It is important to understand a distinction here between written and spoken language. Alphabetic writing separates meaning from sounds, the effect of which is to open up the possibility and space of difference within the operation of written language. Alphabetic writing thereby invites debate, and debate became central to Greek, and especially Athenian, culture and society.

A unique set of socio-political circumstances had developed in Greece by 508 B.C.E. An amorphous, polytheistic tradition of myths had combined with an emergent political system of autonomous and independent city-states together with alphabetic writing to produce a totally new form of governance – an early form of democracy. All this probably spurred the drama’s development. The governing arrangement was unlike that of Egypt, in which the Upper and Lower Kingdoms combined to form a single, vast empire ruled centrally by their god-kings for over 3,000 years. The Greek city-states, which included Athens, Sparta, and Corinth, were discrete socio-political entities that alternatively vied with one another for ascendancy and occasionally joined forces in alliances to face a common outside threat – such as that of the Persians (defeated in 479 B.C.E.).

The focus of our attention here is the city-state of fifth-century Athens because it is here that we see the earliest Greek drama. Athens was then in effect the entire region known as Attica, within which were 139 smaller townships (*demes*). Citizenship was restricted to male Athenians (perhaps 30,000), who were expected to fulfill civic obligations as soldiers/sailors, athletes, debaters, or judges, and as participants/spectators at annual public religious festivals. Citizens whose wealth exceeded a certain sum were expected to take on such civic obligations as maintaining a warship, equipping a religious procession, or financing a “chorus,” which meant underwriting the production of a set of plays in one of the annual theatre festivals. The civic obligations of male citizens were shaped also by their location within a township and by their lineage within one of Attica’s ten tribes.

The give-and-take of competition (*agon* – a term the Greeks assigned to a scene of dialog among characters in their tragedies and comedies) was central to the spirit of the age. This is exemplified not only in the struggles among the gods and heroes in Greek myths and epics, but also in public debate and oratory, newly developing modes of education emphasizing the art of rhetoric. It is evident in new ways of thinking, such as stoicism and skepticism, in the many forms of public contests (athletics, choral dancing, and later drama), and in the constant state of bellicosity requiring the training and readiness of extensive sea and ground forces to protect the city-state or expand its territorial power.

The centrality of the art of rhetoric, originally known as *technē rhetorikē*, translated as “speech art,” or oratory and exemplified in Aristotle’s (384–322 B.C.E.) *Art of Rhetoric*, demonstrates how the invention of writing led to an organized, abstract analysis of speech itself. In this sense, writing in fifth-century Athens enhanced some forms of oral communication since speeches were given extempore – no orator would ever speak from a prepared text. For the Greeks (and later the Romans – see Chapter 3), oratory and reading were social activities. They always read aloud, even when there was no audience. Literature existed for hearing, not for

a silent, private activity. Manuscripts were intended for declamation. Composition continued to take place in the very art and act of telling, even as the principles of the act of telling were becoming the object of a separate art and science.

Clearly, increasing attention was being paid in Athens to the give-and-take of dialogic forms of thought, reflection, and civic engagement. These were exemplified in the teaching of Socrates and the later writings of Plato (c.428–348 B.C.E.), especially in Plato's *Republic*. One significant philosophical result was that by the end of the fifth century B.C.E. a mental world of thoughts, desires, and intentions the Greeks called "psyche" was postulated – today usually known as "the mind" – and was conceived as separate from the body. Thus was one pervasive form of philosophical dualism created in the West.

Drama in the context of the Dionysia (festival) in dialogic Athens

The theatrical performance of tragedy and comedy in ancient Athens needs to be understood also in the context of all the civic/religious rituals and ceremonies of which it was a part. Fifth-century Greek theatre was woven into the fabric of civic/religious discourse, a matter obscured by the literary considerations of Greek tragedy that began with Aristotle's *Poetics*, written almost a century after the height of the great tragic playwrights, and which long dominated Western approaches to drama. To read the idealized accounts of ancient Greece of the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, one would hardly believe that the Greek theatre gave voice to a volatile, competitive culture, one often involved in war and often debating difficult internal social issues. 

By the fifth century B.C.E., Greek religious festivals typically included processions, sacrifices, celebrations, and (in some cases) competitions. The worship of dead heroes was among the most important rites of ancient Greece from at least Homeric time forward. Their propitiation enacted and reflected the belief that the dead

enjoyed some of the same activities in death as in life. Their spirits could be recalled by the re-enactment of their past deeds. They could be propitiated through athletic feats, contests of horsemanship, offerings of cakes, and the performance of choral laments – group singing and dancing. Since communication between the living and the dead was thought to be essential to the well-being of the city-state itself, each township held a festival at its local burial site where local heroes were appeased. Eventually these local rites were expanded to include deities from the larger pantheon, including Zeus, Apollo, Poseidon, and Dionysus.

These religious rites often included competitions in honor of the gods, best exemplified in the well-known pan-Greek Olympic games (from 776 B.C.E.), held in honor of Zeus every four years following the summer solstice. Young male competitors trained for thirty days in foot and chariot racing, boxing, wrestling, *pankration* (martial arts), discus, and javelin – all of which contributed to military preparedness. Competitions were often violent and brutal, and could end in death. A religious ceremony and two-day procession preceded the games. Spectators were exclusively male, with the exception of the priestess of Demeter, the goddess of agriculture. At the concluding ceremony on the fifth day, there was feasting, giving thanks to the gods, and the awarding to the victors of olive branches cut from Zeus's sacred grove. The rites and ceremonies constituted an important framework that, while honoring Zeus, in effect allowed athletic competitions to become increasingly professionalized and secular.

Every mid-summer the *Panathenaia* honored Athena, the patron deity of Athens. Following a great procession, a new dress was presented to clothe the image of the goddess. To further popularize this festival and achieve civic cohesion, athletic contests were held every four years, starting in 566–565 B.C.E. Among the team events was the *pyrrhic* – a martial dance in which the dancers wore the full armor of the ancient Greek foot soldier and executed military movements. Additional competitions eventually included solo recitations of works by Homer, and musical contests.

There were four major festivals annually in honor of Dionysus, the god of fertility and winemaking. The Lenaia festival (from 440 B.C.E.), named after the Lenai or maenads who danced ecstatically under the influence of Dionysus, took place in January–February. It was first devoted to comedies and later included tragedies. The Rural Dionysia was a series of smaller township festivals in December–January. It featured phallic chants, sacrifices, and wine-drinking, and ultimately incorporated performances of tragedies and comedies that had been performed at the City Dionysia. The Anthesteria festival was an early spring festival in February–March which celebrated the opening of new wine, and began to include comedies quite late, perhaps around 326 B.C.E.

The most notable of the Dionysian festivals was the Great, or City, Dionysia, which was also the second most important of all the city's annual festivals. It was as part of this festival that dramas were first performed. They were staged ultimately in a large outdoor amphitheatre, seating 10,000–15,000, located near the temple of

Dionysus. The temple and the theatre were just below the Acropolis, the promontory at the center of Athens that served as both a stronghold and center of public life. Scholars have long believed the tragedy competitions were instituted at this festival in 534 B.C.E., and that Thespis was the first winner. Some scholars have suggested recently that the tragedy competitions came only later, with the advent of Athenian democracy in the last decade of the sixth century.

Each March or April, the Great Dionysia began with a raucous procession, celebrating the coming of the god Dionysus to Athens. This was followed by sacrificial rituals, civic ceremonies, and competitions in dithyrambs – choral songs and dances – and competitions of tragedies and comedies. The procession, which began just outside the geographical boundary of the city-state, incorporated the citizens of Athens as well as visitors. It opened a complex series of events, civic and religious, and the theatrical performances are best understood within the fullness of this civic and religious context. The probable order of events is described below.

The Great Dionysia in fifth-century Athens: Probable order of events

Day 1: Procession of the statue of Dionysus and the Proagon

The coming of Dionysus to Athens from Eleutheraï was re-enacted. After a ritual sacrifice, Dionysus's statue was brought from a temple near Eleutheraï in a procession to his temple in Athens, at the base of the Acropolis. The procession was probably conducted by a group of young men (ephebes) in the midst of their military training (Winkler 1990:37). They offered another sacrifice at the base of the Acropolis, within the sacred precinct of Dionysus's temple. In the *proagon* that followed, the playwrights and their

choruses who were competing in the tragic competition were introduced to the public and the subject of their plays announced.

Day 2: Dithyramb competitions

Dithyrambs were performed – choral songs and dances in honor of Dionysus, first regularized by Arion at Corinth around 600 B.C.E. Each of the ten tribes of Athens sent representative performers with a poet who composed/choreographed the year's entry. These works were danced/sung by two choruses of fifty – one of younger boys, and a second of mature men. Although the verses were originally dedicated to Dionysus, the contest was eventually opened up to other myths, leading some to scoff that the dithyrambs had “nothing to do with Dionysus.”

Day 3: Comedy competition (beginning in 486 B.C.E.)

Five different playwrights competed with comedies that offered keen satirical commentary on current socio-political matters, such as war, education, politics, the legal system, or even tragic poetry. The comedies of Aristophanes (c.448–380 B.C.E.) freely caricatured well-known individuals, including Socrates the philosopher, Cleon the politician, and Aeschylus and Euripides – who, together with Sophocles were the greatest of the fifth-century writers of tragedy. The only comedies of this type to survive, in fact, are the eleven by Aristophanes. The genre came to be referred to as “old comedy” to distinguish it from the later genre of domestic situation comedies, known as “new comedy.”

Days, 4, 5, and 6: Tragedy competition

Important civic-religious ceremonies were held before the assembled public on the day of the opening of the tragedy competition (Goldhill 1990:104–109). These included the display of tributes by outlying cities under Athenian rule and the appearance of young men in full military dress, whose training was provided by Athens after their fathers had died

in battle in service to the state. The names of those citizens who had benefited the city-state that year were read out, and these citizens were presented a crown or garland.

The playwrights then presented their sets of four plays, probably one set by each playwright per day. Each set – three tragedies and a final satyr play – were original variations on a Greek myth. The satyr plays were farcical renditions of incidents from the same myth as the tragedies. These ribald pieces were named after the satyrs – the half-horse, half-human wine-drinking companions of Dionysus who constituted the chorus of these plays. Their costumes (Figure 2.3) included a horse’s tail, an erect phallus, and a head-mask with pointed/equine ears, snub-nose, and wild hair and beard. Only one satyr play survives: *Cyclops* by Euripides (c.480–407/6 B.C.E.). The satyr plays were characterized by broad physical sight-gags and scatological humor.

Probably on the last day, the judges of each category of the competition announced the winners of the tragedy and comedy competitions and awarded prizes. At the end of the festival, officials held an open public assembly to receive any criticism of the proceedings, including complaints about the plays selected or the judging.

The degree of direct civic engagement in the festival is staggering – at least 2,500–3,000 male citizens were directly involved as participants in the processions, ceremonies, rites, or dramatic competitions constituting the festival. For the choral dithyrambs alone each of ten tribes organized 50 boys under 18 and 50 men (aged 20–30) – a total of 1,000. The three days of tragedies utilized between 36 and 45 young men (at first 12 and later 15 in each chorus) and nine mature men (each playing three speaking roles). While the boys dancing their first dithyramb were under 18, the young men dancing in the tragic choruses were in the prime of their

youth, aged 18 to 20, and in the process of undergoing two years of military training. At any one time (by the fifth century), there were two cohorts of 450–500 young men, known as *ephebes*, drawn from the ten tribes, who were undergoing training. The second-year cadets put on a public demonstration in the theatre of their “hoplite military manoeuvres [combat exercises in battle dress] and close-order drill”, while at least 36 of those in their first year were selected to perform as the chorus members in each of the three sets of tragedies (Goldhill 1990: 22–23). The philosopher Chameleon (fifth century B.C.E.) described choral dancing as “practically

a manoeuvre in arms and a display not only of precision marching in general but more particularly of physical preparedness.” It is these young “citizen soldiers in training” who are depicted on the famous Pronomos Vase (Figure 2.3) as members of the chorus in a satyr play.

So, the City Dionysia offers a festival model within which ritual practices frame competitive performances in a civic/religious event, an event that flows from and constitutes life within the *polis* – that is, the civic body of the whole. It was also a rite of transition for young men as they moved from boyhood to manhood, taking their place as citizen-soldiers in civic society.

The tragedy competitions within the festival would have fostered keen debates in a dynamic, dialogic culture. The dramatists reworked the myths over and over again – usually the stories of conflicts with ruling families, such as the house of Atreus, conflicts that have consequences

for the *polis*. The myth of the house of Atreus was the basis for the tragic trilogy of *The Orestia* by Aeschylus (c. 525–456 B.C.E.), the only complete set of three related tragedies to survive. Each playwright re-imagined these stories from the distant Bronze Age; their tragedies were imbued with contemporary relevance. Their characters inhabited “the mental universe of the audience,” and their values were, David Wiles believes, “substantially those in the democratic period” (Wiles 2000:10–11). There are, it should be noted, considerable differences between the vision, structure, and poetic style of the plays of Aeschylus, written in the first half of the fifth century, and those of Euripides, written in the latter half. Euripides was influenced by the development of Sophism, the philosophical movement that brought disciplined processes of reason and critical thinking to Athens. Athenians associated Euripides with Socrates,



Figure 2.3

This Greek vase for mixing wine, dating from the late fifth or early fourth century B.C.E., is famous for its theatrical figures, perhaps a company who performed a trilogy and satyr play. Called the “Pronomos Vase” after Pronomos, the aulos player seated at lower center, it shows (top center) the god of theatre, Dionysus, Ariadne (his wife), a muse, and to the sides, mature actors holding their masks – one costumed as a king, one as Herakles (with club), and the third as Silenus (leader of satyrs). Below left, is a playwright (with scroll) and a choral trainer (with lyre). The young beardless men (*ephebes*) are costumed as satyrs with erect phalluses.

Drawing by E.R. Malyon from the Pronomos Vase. © Museo Nazionale, Naples.

and the poet was a controversial figure. His tragedies critiqued traditional values and religion, no longer showing reverence for the heroes and gods of the myths. The theatre audience consisted primarily of male citizens of Athens who constituted the *polis*. Seated in tribal order, each tribe occupied one wedge in the amphitheatre, mirroring the seating of the Athenian Assembly, with the tribe's Council seated in a special section or at the front. As we have seen, the third day of the festivities of the City Dionysia, the day on which the performances of the tragedies took place, was preceded by the performance of important civic/religious ceremonies. The sons of fathers who died in battle and whose training and education had been undertaken by the state processed annually in military dress into the theatre where Sophocles's *Antigone* was played, with its central conflict between the rules of a state at war and the interests of the individual. Generals from each of the ten tribes offered ritual libations to Dionysus in the theatre where Euripides's *The Trojan Women* was played. In that tragedy, Euripides used one of the most famous war stories in Greek history – Greece's conquest of Troy – to focus on the brutality of war and the suffering it brings to the innocent. In one year, the playwright, Phrynicus (writing between 511 and 475 B.C.E.), was heavily fined for dealing with the painful subject of the destruction of Miletus by the Persians, a city Athens had pledged to defend but did not. Its fall precipitated the invasion of the Persians. Throughout the fifth century, there was almost no year without an Athenian military engagement, and the festival ceremonies would have prompted the citizens of Athens to reflect upon state decision-making (Winkler 1990:21).

Within the festival, the performances of tragedies, satyr plays, and comedies were not simple acts of affirmation of the value set of some ideally homogeneous community (a notion once dear to the academy). Rather, performances of these plays staged the current tensions of the *polis* in an imaginative negotiation with stories of the past. As such, they often provoked a critical examination of the *polis* of the present. 📺 There is much debate today among scholars about whether

Aeschylus's *The Persians* (72 B.C.E.), his prize-winning tragedy on the recent Battle of Salamis, was written to praise the victorious Athenians or to express sympathy with the defeated Persians (Harrison 2000:16–18). To take a final, salient example in addition to all those already cited here, there are many strong women characters in the surviving tragedies, from Clytemnestra in Aeschylus's *The Orestia* through Sophocles's *Antigone* and Euripides's *Medea*. The women in Aristophanes's comedy, *Lysistrata*, protest against war by refusing to sleep with their husbands. These strong women on stage are, as Helene Foley has observed, quite surprising in a patriarchal society in which women were largely restricted to the domestic sphere (Foley 1981: *passim*). Some scholars are suspicious because these women characters were authored by men and played by male actors in a phallogocentric culture (Case 1985: *passim*). But it seems likely that Athenians expected their theatre to stage contemporary cultural issues in its dialogic process, stirring debate.

To judge from the scant evidence of the judging procedures, the playwriting competitions sometimes generated controversy, as in the case of Phrynicus's tragedy about Miletus, mentioned above. Great care was taken to select judges who would be beyond reproach. The methods of selecting the winner became elaborate. In one year, the judges cast their ballots, and then a blind drawing from those ballots was conducted to produce a winner. This introduction of randomness in the selection was apparently intended to stave off any accusations of corruption (Pickard Cambridge 1968:95–99). All of this was undertaken under the sign of the delirious Dionysus – the irrepressible god of wine and fertility who condoned at least temporary transgressions and ecstatic excess.

After the fifth century B.C.E.

At the City Dionysia in 449 (or Lenaia in 442) a competition among the actors of tragedy was introduced, marking public recognition of the actor's art. An actor could win although he might appear in a losing tetralogy. Actors were celebrated or critiqued on the basis of their day-long performances. By the fourth

century B.C.E. when, instead of new plays, previously authored plays were re-presented and/or toured other cities, the emphasis shifted further toward celebrating actors such as Polos, rather than playwriting. The Roman Aulus Gellius recorded a story of a performance by the famous fourth-century Greek actor, Polos, in the title role of Sophocles's *Electra*, who takes the ashes of her brother, Orestes, from his tomb. Polos used the ashes of his own recently deceased son in his performance, and, according to Gellius's version of the story, Polos "filled the whole place, not with the appearance and imitation of sorrow, but with genuine grief and unfeigned lamentation" (Gellius 1927:II, 35–37).

It was nearly a century following the peak achievements of Athenian theatre that Aristotle gave his lectures that have come down to us as his *Poetics* (c.330 B.C.E.). He focused on the formal attributes and proper aesthetic effects of tragedy. Drawing on plays that had won the City Dionysia competitions, he discussed the kinds of plots, characters, and language appropriate to achieve the effects of a genre he considered a "natural" form. Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* is a frequent reference point. He thought that *mimesis* – direct imitation of reality – was theatre's goal. One of tragedy's chief effects, he believed, was catharsis, a term that for the Greeks had associations with both religious purification and medical purging. Aristotle suggested that an audience experiencing tragedy would achieve a sense of proportion once purged or purified of emotional and/or intellectual error.

When recovered in the Renaissance, Aristotle's *Poetics* came to be used pervasively as a model for European dramatic writing and analysis. While he was the first to offer insights into the drama, Aristotle's discussion was also a rationalized processing of the complex Greek art of theatre. He dismissed performance as unnecessary for tragedy's effects, making the play text the chief object of the study of theatre. From his formalistic analysis, the reader would have little idea of the civic context in which the dialogic drama of Athens took place in the fifth century B.C.E. (The legacy of the Aristotelian tradition is discussed in Chapter 12.)

Beyond Athens, an independent comic tradition developed in Syracuse in the fifth century. Syracuse became a second major center of performance. In the fourth century B.C.E., the legacy of Greek theatre was spread by the conquests of Alexander the Great – once a student of Aristotle – in his campaign to "Hellenize" non-Greek peoples. As we will see in Chapter 3, this Hellenic era of theatre (317–86 B.C.E.) developed through the period of the Roman Republic and eventually gave way to a theatre transformed by the Roman Empire (86 B.C.E.–692 C.E.). Greco-Roman drama then gave way to spectacular popular entertainments during the period of imperial rule. After Rome's fall, classical drama was sustained in the medieval scholastic imagination, and then emerged in the context of the Renaissance's imitation and reinvention of the classical past, taking its place in the rational, logocentric discourse of Western thought.

Mesoamerican performance

"If only they'd come make a show for us we'd wonder at them and marvel," the Xibalba said, referring to the two sacred "boys" – Hunahpu and Xbalanque. "Please entertain us . . ." So they began their songs and dances . . . the spectators crowded the floor, and they danced . . . the Weasel . . . the Poorwill . . . the Armadillo.

(Tedlock 1985:151–152)

This passage from the centuries-old sacred book of the Maya Quiché peoples – *Popul Vuh* – provides clear evidence of a rich Mesoamerican performance culture, one stretching back to as early as 3000 B.C.E. The Mexica (Aztecs), Maya, and Inca kingdoms ruled Central and South America until the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the Spanish conquered the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Throughout Mesoamerica, public celebrations before the conquest always involved a religious element while also serving as a means of social integration. Performances could involve thousands of highly skilled performers who "used elaborate and highly colorful costumes,

masks, body make-up and, at times puppets and stilts. The sets were lavishly adorned with arches, flowers, animals, and all sorts of natural and artfully designed elements” (Taylor 2004:357). Most performances were outdoors in public spaces (courtyards and temples), while some were in private patios. Rigorous training in genres of music and dance was normal for boys and girls from ages 12 to 15 and took place in “houses of song.” Rulers performed “a ‘princely dance’ on special occasions,” and priests “embodied god-figures” (Tedlock 1985:358). Such performances were staged in the context of religious festivals and set against the great architectural spaces of Mesoamerican cities, which included massive pyramids. Temples were regarded as the “navel of the world” and “the human-made equivalent of nature’s mountains [. . .] forming a living link that conjoined the heavens above, the earth, and the underworlds below” (Tedlock 1985:364). They were situated to cast shadows or catch the rays of the sun at the equinox. Public ceremonies were synchronized with the movement of heavenly bodies, making cosmic time palpable and elaborate calendar-keeping essential. Within this ceremonial context, there were practices for paying debts and offering important sacrifices. Among the Aztecs, these ceremonies included human sacrifice.

At the apex of the pyramid, contact point between the heavens and earth, the high priests reenacted the ur-scene of the giving and taking of human life. Victims – often illustrious war captives but also women and children – were bathed and prepared. The six priests who performed the sacrifice appeared on the pyramid dressed in large, colorful vestments, their bodies and faces painted. They adorned themselves like the god, ‘whom they represented on that day.’

(Tedlock 1985:361)

Naked, the sacrificial victims were led up the stairs of the temple. One special priest displayed for the victims an image of the god (*ixiptlatl*). Following a set formula, each victim was ritually slain as the high priest cut out

the heart, held it up to the sun, and threw it to the image of Huitzilopochtli. The body of each victim was then thrown down the temple steps. Diana Taylor explains the concept behind a practice regarded as inhumane today:

[I]t reflected the belief that there was no firm division between life and death. Being was not considered ontologically stable but in flux, a transitive condition between here and there. The sacrificial victims would be joining the gods, at times taking messages from those on earth, while the victims’ energy and force would be transferred to others on earth through the donning of the skin. Notions of continuity and constantly recycling life forces, rather than cruelty or revenge, sustained these practices. The Mayas, for example, referred to certain forms of sacrifice as *ahil* (acts of creation).

(Taylor 2004:361–362)

Religious rites create a synergy between the divine and human realms. If the gods sacrificed themselves for humans as the world was formed, then the gods require similar sacrifices in return.

Sacrificial rites performed by divinely ordained priests or kings maintained the social and cosmological orders mandated by the gods at the time of creation. Constant human sacrifice was therefore considered a necessity, manifesting the economic and military power of the state.

Sung dance-drama: The Mayan Rabinal Achi

There were two general types of overtly dramatic and theatrical performances among Mesoamericans. Comedic figures performed caricatures, ridiculing those who were ethnically different, and sung dance-drama (*mitote* in Nahuatl; *taqui* in Quechua) recounted and commemorated group and individual histories and past glories. We examine here one important Mayan song-dance-drama, *Rabinal Achi*. We also will see in this an

example of the Spanish suppression of indigenous systems of belief and cultural performances that came with Spain's conquest of the New World.

Rabinal Achi is a Quiché language song-dance still performed today in the highlands of Guatemala. It is known both as *Rabinal Achi*, meaning “Man of Rabinal,” and *Xajoj Tim*, “Dance of the Trumpets” – a reference to the fact that during parts of the performance characters dance to the playing of trumpets. It is one of few extant plays with Mayan (rather than Spanish) dialog. *Rabinal Achi* relates and dances the story of conflict between the noble warriors and leaders of two Mayan city-states, Quiché and Rabinal, that reached a climax in the early fifteenth century, well before the arrival of the Spanish. 

The first form of the Spanish invasion of the Guatemala highlands is known among Mayans as “the great death of the flesh” or “the sickness” because the coming of Europeans to these isolated peoples was accompanied by a smallpox epidemic that struck in 1520. The Quiché were finally conquered by the Spanish in 1524, the Cakchiquel nation in 1530, and Rabinal in 1537.

The primary historical incident around which the performance score for *Rabinal Achi* evolved is the story of a famous Quiché king, Quicab – a member of the lineage of the house of Cawek of the Forest People. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Quicab ruled a confederation of the Rabinal, Cakchiquel, and Tzutuhil nations. While Quicab was away on a military campaign expanding his kingdom, there was a revolt at home. One of those involved was his fifth son, who may have been the historical figure on whom the character Cawek in the play is based.

In the play, the main characters are Lord Five Thunder – ruler of the mountaintop fortress of Rabinal, the Man of Rabinal (serving at his behest), who together uphold a traditional order, and the renegade who disrupts that order, Cawek, the son of the Lord of Quiché. All three wear distinctive helmet-masks and carry axes and shields, symbols of royal power (Figure 2.4). Cawek's father was a noble who fought alongside the neighboring

city-state of Rabinal. Rabinal's boundaries are guarded by Eagle and Jaguar, priests in the service of Lord Five Thunder, whose names are taken from the source of their spiritual power to protect. At Lord Five Thunder's court resides his wife and his unmarried daughter, “Mother of Quetzal Feathers.” Cawek becomes a renegade warrior when he betrays the people of Rabinal, causing much suffering. As the drama opens, Cawek has already betrayed his father's former allies and been captured by Man of Rabinal. The drama presents the confrontation between Man of Rabinal and Cawek in the context of Cawek's trial. Cawek remains defiant toward his captors throughout, but accepts death by beheading at the end of the drama. Before dying, he is allowed to view aspects of the world he will leave. He is shown the lovely daughter of Lord Five Thunder and shown dances depicting the beauty of nature.

As a representation of Mayan royalty and culture, *Rabinal Achi* does reflect some early history. But it is not an historical drama as such, but rather a commemorative ritual drama. It is a montage of fragments of royal stories from across six different generations, gathered into the confrontation between Man of Rabinal and Cawek. Generic character names allow the story and its examination of the power negotiations between rulers and city-states to remain open.

Episodes from the history of royal lineages were the subject of many other early pre-Spanish dramas. In all such plays, the actors represented the main characters through costuming and dancing, while dialog was sung or chanted by separate choruses to musical accompaniment.

After the Conquest, Spanish missionaries recognized that the participation of the people in annual cycles of ceremonial performances at which dramas like *Rabinal Achi* were performed had great meaning for the Maya. The Spanish attempted to suppress and/or alter the performances by a variety of means. They insisted that Christian hymns be substituted for Mayan songs and eventually, as early as 1593 and as late as 1770, they issued bans against indigenous plays, “warning that



Figure 2.4

Rabinal Achi, or the Man of Rabinal, a conjectural image similar to that of an eighth-century lord found in the Mayan Temple of the Inscriptions at Palenque (not depicted). He wears a feathered headdress, mask, short cape and kilt, and he carries an upraised axe and a small round shield.

Drawing by Jamie Borowicz. © Dennis Tedlock.

representations of human sacrifices would lead to real ones” (Tedlock 2003:5). The Spaniards also introduced Christian biblical theatre from medieval Europe.

The first European play performed in the Americas, *The Final Judgment*, attributed to Andrés de Olmos, was staged in Tlatelolco (c.1531–1533). It threatened natives with damnation in hell if they did not marry. Most significantly, Time appeared as a character. This Western European figure represented a “linear, universalizing force, antithetical to native understandings of cyclical motion.” Also, death was “depicted as an individual fate” (Taylor 2004:369). As we have seen, the Mayan world-views governing *Rabinal Achi* and other Mesoamerican indigenous performances were very different.

In order to save their performance of *Rabinal Achi* from censorship, Mayans separated the words of their play from its music, and removed “all but the main outlines of the original religious content from public view” (Tedlock 2003:2). Religious aspects of the performance today are the primary responsibility of the play’s “Road Guide” (*K’amol B’e*) – the native ritual specialist, or priest-shaman whose prayers and offerings circumscribe and punctuate the performance.

Today’s performance of *Rabinal Achi* offers some hints of what Mayan drama might have been like before the Spanish conquest.  In the plays the Spanish had created since the Middle Ages, dramatizing battles between Moors and Christians (see the case study following this chapter), the characters danced in parallel files, confronting one another. In *Rabinal Achi* “when the actors dance, they move around the perimeter of a square, and when they promenade they move in a circle. These pathways locate them all in one world . . .” (Tedlock 2003:14). The distinctive rhythms of the Mayan calendar are suggested in the Mayans’ counter-clockwise movements within a square, together with their temporal marking of the 260 days of the divinatory calendar during which Cawek says farewell to his homeland by moving “on all four edges/in all four corners.” In the Spanish plays, when Moors confront Christians or Indians confront Spaniards, their costumes are from two different worlds – one “evil” and the other

“good.” In *Rabinal Achi*, both Cawek and his captors dress alike, and their arguments are shaped by a shared, rather than opposite set of values. In *Rabinal Achi*, one of the opponents may be misguided or wrong but he is not, as in the dramas of the Moors and Indians, “evil” or living in “falsehood.”

The aesthetic conventions governing performances of *Rabinal Achi* are presentational – not representational or realistic. The audience is located on four sides of the playing space. The drama unfolds. The actors deliver lengthy speeches as solos, similar to the renderings of ancient Mayan court songs. There is no fast-paced realistic dialog, and actors never attempt a conversational tone. The main characters narrate more events from the past than they re-enact in the dramatic present (reminiscent of the style of the Japanese *nō* theatre – see Chapter 3). When Rabinal captures Cawek by “roping” him with the rope he wears around his waist, he does not realistically lasso him, but rather, as the two remain still, a stage assistant appears and ties the end of the rope carried by Rabinal around Cawek. Toward the conclusion of the play, when Cawek is to die by beheading, he simply kneels, and other characters dance around him. In a simple and unhurried manner, those with axes simply bring them toward but not to Cawek’s neck. Immediately following his “beheading,” Cawek stands, and joins the other dancers in a final collective dance. It is as if he and all the other characters were ghosts again, returning to the parallel world, where they lead lives visible only to dreamers. Shoulder to shoulder, they dance westward until they reach the foot of the steps leading to the door of the cemetery chapel. There the actors all kneel, and the Road Guide leads them in a prayer to their ancestors (Tedlock 2003:19). According to Tedlock, today’s Mayan actors are speaking to and for their ancestors as much as to and for anyone else, including all those who ever acted in the play. Acting in this play, then, is not so much a matter of impersonating historical individuals – as if their lives could be relived in realistic detail – as it is a matter of impersonating their ghosts. All the ghosts except Cawek are thought to have their home in a cave beneath the ruins

on Red Mountain, where they remember what they did when their bones wore flesh (Tedlock 2003:14–15).

The figure of Road Guide maintains links between the present and past. He visits the ruins each day, making burnt offerings to the original spirits and “praying for permission to make their memories visible and audible in the waking world” (Tedlock 2003:15). During the play, it is revealed that Cawek secretly laid a curse on Rabinal land, a curse understood to be still in effect today. So each time Cawek mentions a place at which he stopped, Road Guide says prayers and burns offerings to counteract the curse as the performance continues.

Mayan texts

A system of writing was independently invented among native peoples in Mesoamerica, most likely in southern Mexico, around 600 B.C.E. but the Mayans never used their own system of writing to record what performers spoke in their performances. It was only in the sixteenth century, under the influence of Christian missionaries, that Mayans wrote down “texts” like *Rabinal Achi* in their own language, using the Roman alphabet. The missionaries had created handwritten scripts for the European Bible and saints plays that they introduced, translating some speeches into local Mayan languages. Under the guidance of the missionaries, Mayans wrote out some plays such as *Rabinal Achi*. This was new. These alphabetic texts contained details and content never included in the older Mayan hieroglyphic texts. Tedlock attributes these differences not to alphabetic writing per se, but to the fact that indigenous authors were responding to the missionary suppression of their performances and “the destruction of hieroglyphic texts.” Therefore, “they sought to conserve the audible words of endangered performances for which those books provided prompts” (2003:158). Their “texts” of the sixteenth century were, then, written as records of oral performances and, according to Tedlock, are more like “a set of program notes than a libretto” (2003:158). They are not single-author works but

collectively created, mnemonic records of performance. The earliest of these “texts” followed an oral model that participants would have elaborated on in the moment of performance.

For Mesoamericans, such annual performances were necessary to sustain the universe and their place within it. Performances such as *Rabinal Achi* were commemorative. They were not representational in the Western sense. In Western representationalism, primacy is given to the text. Performance therefore usually is regarded as having a secondary authenticity. In many extant fiestas and celebrations throughout the Americas (such as those on the Day of the Dead in Mexico), commemorative performances continue to be understood not as representational but as doing something fundamental in the world.

Texts in other traditions

In other religious traditions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, people saw themselves as communities bound less by ethnicity and geography than by language and sacred, written script (Anderson 1983:20). Texts held the truths fundamental to communities (Chinese, Pali, Sanskrit, Arabic, Latin). We conclude our discussion of commemorative religious drama in this chapter by examining the liturgies and “dramas” produced within two monotheistic traditions originating in the Middle East – Christianity and Islam. Each was founded on the notion that God acted in human history through a specific individual – Jesus Christ and Muhammad, respectively. In the case of Christianity, Jesus (4? B.C.E.–29 C.E.?) was one of the sons of Mary and her carpenter-husband, Joseph, Aramaic-speaking Jewish residents who lived in the semi-pagan village of Nazareth, within the area known as Galilee (Palestine). Jesus was proclaimed by his followers to be the “anointed one” or the new “messiah.” In the case of Islam, Muhammad (c.570–632 C.E.) was a merchant living in the city of Mecca (in today’s Saudi Arabia), to whom, his followers believe, God chose to reveal his eternal message.

Medieval Christian liturgy and drama

Early Christianity developed the ritual of the Mass, a performative commemoration, and the medieval Christian Church developed plays and performances, some deriving from the Bible. A brief overview of developments in Christianity and Christian ritual will help the reader understand the function of both types of performance.

When the Jewish people returned from exile in Babylon (586–538 B.C.E.) to their homeland in the volatile basin of the eastern Mediterranean, their trials and tribulations continued under a series of mostly foreign rulers. From 63 B.C.E., when the Roman general Pompey conquered Jerusalem, the area remained under either direct or indirect Roman rule until the end of the Roman Empire. When Jesus began to carry out his public ministry in Galilee, like John the Baptist before him, he was one of a number of contemporary Jewish prophets declaring the imminent arrival of a “new” kingdom of God. When he arrived in Jerusalem for a celebration of the Jewish Feast of the Passover with his followers, he extended his teaching and healing into an aggressive public protest by driving traders and moneychangers out of the main Jewish temple. He was arrested by the Roman authorities, put on trial, condemned to death, and crucified – a common mode of execution. Thrown into turmoil by Jesus’s death, his small group of disciples gathered to share a memorial meal that recreated their last supper with Jesus and that commemorated his crucifixion and resurrection.

To the authorities of the period, whether Roman or Jewish, Jesus was a minor figure. According to Tacitus in his *Annals* (15.4, written in the second century C.E.), “Christus” had been “sentenced to death by the procurator, Pontius Pilate, during the Reign of Tiberius.” He was the leader of the “Christians,” Tacitus writes, those who shared a “detestable superstition . . . suppressed for awhile, spread anew not only in Judea where the evil had started, but also in Rome, where everything that is horrid and wicked in the world

gathers and finds numerous followers.” Many such “enemies of mankind” were sentenced to death in the Roman public spectacles on the command of the Emperor Nero (mid-first century C.E.; see Chapter 3).

For his followers, the period immediately after Jesus’s death was fraught with uncertainty. Was the new “Kingdom of God” imminent? As decades passed, and Jesus’s death and resurrection receded further into the background, common worship among his followers evolved to mark the key events in his life and ministry. Christian liturgy came to focus on recreating the memorial meal (the Eucharist or “thanksgiving”), and Christ’s suffering at the hands of the Roman authorities, his death, and his resurrection.

In spite of the dismissive attitude of authorities, followers of Christ grew in numbers. St. Paul (d. approximately 67 C.E.) ministered to the new groups of non-Jewish believers throughout Greece, including the cities of Corinth and Ephesus. By the time of Paul’s ministry, a very simple and informal Christian ceremony was being conducted in Greek – then the language of the eastern Mediterranean. It included readings from the “old law” of Moses as well as the “new law” of the Christian prophets, communal singing, perhaps a commentary by an elder in the community, and the blessing and distribution of bread and wine, as Christ had at his last supper with his disciples.

The conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity in 312 C.E. ended the persecution of the Christians and made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Although a service in Latin existed from the second century, with separate forms for the Syrian and Greek Orthodox Churches in the East, the Latin Mass, with its specific structure, did not become universal until the fifth century – the moment at which the vast Roman Empire was beginning to crumble in the face of invasions from the Goths and Lombards. Perhaps it was in the face of the collapse of world order as they knew it that Christian leaders fixed the order of the Mass and their symbolic vestments. By the sixth century, St. Gregory established a common form for the

Mass throughout Western Europe, realized when his book of rules, *Sacramentary*, became the pattern for the Catholic Mass under the Frankish King Pepin in 754.

Just as European vernacular languages were developing (Spanish, French, Italian, etc.), the standard liturgy was being written and delivered in Latin. Since priests were coming largely from well-to-do families, they were educated in Latin and well versed in ancient literature. Knowledge of ancient rhetoric, poetry, drama (especially Roman drama, being accessible in Latin) was central to medieval thought. Drama was not equated with the excesses of theatrical spectacle during the days of the Roman Empire (Dox 2004: *passim*). This is exemplified in the adaptations from Terence's plays by Hrotsvitha (c.935–973), a noble lay member of the all-female Abbey of Gandersheim, in Saxony. Her writings in Latin included six plays, based on the comedies of the Roman playwright, Terence (discussed in Chapter 3). Her adaptations put them to use for the personal discipline of young Christian women, especially for the suppression of female sexuality in favor of virginity. The plays may well have been intended for reading, reflection, and semi-dramatic recitation, rather than performance.

Dramatic and performative elements related to Christian rituals

From the ninth through the twelfth centuries, the “Word of God” came to the vast majority of illiterate lay people not via reading the Bible but through performative acts of worship and other media. These included homilies (sermons in the Mass), visual symbolism (the sacrificial Christ as the lamb of God), and the visual narratives of stained-glass windows and church wall paintings. Worshipers participated in prayerful processions to the “stations of the cross” which were depictions in the churches of episodes in the sequence of Christ's suffering. Paintings or wood sculptures provided images of Christ carrying the Cross, Christ being nailed to the Cross, his death, and the removal of his body for burial. Meditative visits to these

images allowed congregants to embody and re-live key events in the life of Christ.

Since the liturgy manifested and commemorated the saving “acts” of Christ, inventive clergy in monasteries that were centers of learning and the arts began elaborating on key moments of the liturgy early in the tenth century. Interpolations were added to the Mass for special occasions and to the cycle of community prayers known as the Divine Office that marked the stages of the day from sunrise to midnight. Amalarius, Bishop of Metz, used a service for the consecration of a new church as an occasion for “remembering” one important moment in the sacred history of Christ known as the Harrowing of Hell. Christ is believed to have descended into hell after his “death” on the cross to release righteous souls from the devil. When the Bishop, representing Christ, knocked on the doors of the new church, this was understood as symbolizing Christ's knocking on the gates of Hell. The devil (played by a clergyman) appeared to defy the Bishop, but when the doors were opened, the devil fled, and the edifice was purged of any evil.

In another performance development, melodies taken from Greek and Jewish originals were standardized within Pope Gregory the Great's *Antiphonarium*. Known as psalmody, these melodies were attached to liturgical texts in chant and response – a question and answer form in which the text was divided between a single singer (*cantor*) and the remainder of the male community (*decani responsores*). Such musical elaboration eventually allowed for harmony and ornamentation – melismatic chant – in which the final syllable of a text was elaborated with forty or more notes. Eventually, further small pieces of text were added to expand a melody through responsorial singing – *tropes*.

[T]ropes encouraged rhythmical and emotional variations which reflected the mood of a text – where the material was sad the syllables could be prolonged, where it was joyful they could be sharp and lively. . . . So it became possible to

reflect the emotional and physical action of the text in the music, and the musical characterization of any biblical personage whose words were being sung became almost inevitable.

(Harris 1992:27)

Early troping practice in the tenth century set to music one biblical passage of key importance to Christians. It begins, “*Quem Queritis in sepulchre, Christicolae*,” meaning “Whom do you seek in the tomb, followers of Christ?” The words are those of an angel greeting the three Marys, including Jesus’s mother, who came to the tomb to which Christ had been taken after his crucifixion in order to properly anoint his body. The words were sung in plainchant (or plainsong, a single melodic line in free rhythm). The women (all roles were performed by men or boys) reply, “Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, heavenly ones.” The angel’s reply is of supreme importance for the young Christian community: “He is not here. He is risen.” This is the first confirmation of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, which for Christians carries with it the possibility of redemption for all humankind (the episode is related in Matthew 28:1–7 and Mark 16:1–7). Many versions of the sung text exist. Sometimes they were performed in the introductory portion of the Easter morning Mass. Sometimes they were performed in a prior midnight service, heightening the drama of the discovery of the empty tomb and Christ’s defeat of death.

At the second hour after midnight on Easter morning, the bells of the abbey were set joyfully ringing. The great Paschal Candle was lifted onto the altar, and six smaller lighted candles were added to it, three on each side. . . . The bells still continued to ring, whilst a procession formed at the altar and travelled round the building, eventually returning to the “sepulchre” . . . [where] two acolytes concealed inside the structure, representing the angels at the tomb, sang in Latin . . . “Whom do you seek in the sepulchre, Christian women?” The two singing

deacons replied . . . “Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, heavenly ones” . . . [To which the angels replied] “He is not here. He has risen as predicted. Go! Proclaim the news that he has risen from the tomb!” A priest dressed in a white alb then emerged from the sepulchre carrying the special Easter chalice containing the *Corpus Christi*, or “body of Christ.”

(Harris 1992: 29–30)

In the tenth century, the Bishop of Winchester wrote out detailed instructions for the performing of this scene in the all-male Benedictine monasteries. Other tropes were soon used for other holy seasons, including the celebration of Christ’s birth. While moving and dramatic, tropes were not plays as such, but were designed for a heightened experience of personal/collective worship and devotion commemorating Christ.

Biblical dramas, Latin and vernacular

As early as the tenth century, a few stories associated with Christ’s birth were being dramatized in Latin within churches but perhaps not as part of the liturgy proper. Early biblical plays in Latin dramatized the visit of the shepherds to the manger to see the newly-born Christ, performed on Christmas morning, and the visit of the Magi – the wise men or Three Kings who bring gifts to the Christ child – performed on January 6. By the end of the eleventh century, the *Procession of the Prophets* was being performed, based on a popular sermon from the fifth or sixth century. After the initial spectacle of a musical procession, costumed priests playing Old Testament prophets, including Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Moses, stepped forward to deliver their prophecies of the coming of Christ. The monastery of Benedictbeuren in Bavaria combined this so-called prophets play with its Christmas plays.

One of the most sophisticated examples of Bible music-drama in Latin is *The Play of Daniel*, derived from the Old Testament story of Daniel in the lion’s den. It was performed in the cathedral of Beauvais

sometime during the Christmas season in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Here the prophet Daniel from the Old Testament prefigures the Messiah. In this play, there are at least nine opportunities for processions through the cathedral, making use of harps, zithers, and drums to accompany chant singing. Daniel sings a musically compelling passage in which he deciphers the mysterious handwriting on the wall that predicts the fall of King Belshazzar. (*The Play of Daniel* and *The Play of Herod*, another Latin music-drama based in scripture, were staged and recorded by the New York Pro Musica in the mid-twentieth century.  See the list of references following this chapter.) The scenes in *The Play of Daniel* and other early music-dramas were staged on elevated platforms set up in the open spaces of the cathedrals (there were no fixed pews), such as the nave or in the choir or chancel – spaces near the altar for the choir and clergy. These platforms, sometimes designated in Latin as *mansions*, were not self-contained, illusionistic stages. Actors moved freely from one mansion to another, using the common floor area, referred to in some stage directions as the *platea*. This was, in effect, a neutral, unlocalized playing area, with mansions bordering it. The *platea* could be whatever the text required at a given moment; the actor's lines identified the locale and atmosphere for the audience. The idea of the *platea* carried over into the later vernacular Bible plays staged outside the church. The fluid, open stage that Shakespeare later wrote for was somewhat indebted to this staging tradition.

During the later twelfth century, the biblical plays began to be written in vernacular languages and performed outside churches. These were still based on incidents in the Old or New Testaments but were more dramatic in structure and inventive in characterization. An important early example is *The Play of Adam* (c.1150) from Norman France. It dramatizes the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden and the story of their sons, Cain and Abel. The detailed stage directions make clear that it was performed adjacent to a church or cathedral, and the stage directions provide many details about scenic décor, costuming, and acting.

During the late Middle Ages – from the fourteenth century – there was a flowering of vernacular Bible drama in towns throughout England and the European continent. As discussed below, drama flourished for three reasons: (1) the institution of the new Feast of Corpus Christi; (2) the growth of towns and municipal governments as entities independent of feudal lords; and (3) the gradual development within towns of the medieval trade guilds – the bakers, tailors, and goldsmiths who trained apprentices and eventually regulated wages and working conditions. Alan E. Knight asserts that while on the surface the dramas of the period re-enact biblical history, behind that surface late medieval social structures, values, and political realities were being mirrored (Knight 1997:1–2). Indeed, the staging of late medieval dramas was thoroughly urban, bourgeois, and informed by constant trade and transaction between continental Europe and England.

The promotion of the new Feast of Corpus Christi in 1311 by Pope Clement V, widely observed by 1350, was key to the development of the vernacular Bible plays. It was created to celebrate the importance and meaning of the priest's consecration at Mass of the bread and wine, understood to become, by virtue of that consecration, the actual body and blood of Christ, as established by Christ at the last supper. The feast of Corpus Christi was created to celebrate the redemptive power of this sacrament and the presence of Christ in the world in general. It was observed near Trinity Sunday, between late May and late June. In a common Corpus Christi ritual, priests processed through the city displaying the “Host,” a consecrated wafer encased in a vessel known as monstrance that signified the real (not symbolic) presence of Christ in the world. The procession of the Host was often accompanied by tableaux of biblical scenes representing Christian sacred history and testifying to the humanity of Christ. In this way, the “cycle plays” may have developed. In Paris in 1313, actors began to recite the story of the Passion – the suffering of Christ in the events leading up to and including his crucifixion and resurrection – as part of a living tableau. Short speeches were introduced in Innsbruck, Austria, in 1391 with the appearance of

Adam, Eve, and the twelve disciples of Christ. By 1394, sets of plays based on key biblical episodes providing a whole history of salvation – “cycle plays” – were being performed in York, England, using pageant wagons (see Figure 2.5). Religious, civic, and commercial motives were involved in the production of the religious plays. In communities like York and Chester, the annual cycles attracted numerous visitors and provided a major economic boost for the community.

From as early as the late thirteenth century, most townsmen in cities such as York, England, came to identify themselves by occupation. Although people were known by the crafts they practiced, R.B. Dobson argues that prior to the Black Death (1347–1350), when a quarter of Europe’s population died from the plague or other disasters, there were very few organized or “genuine craft guilds” (1997:99). These loose associations of craftsmen did, however, take on responsibility for charitable projects, such as sponsorship of the production of plays. A Noah’s ark play would be produced by shipwrights or fishermen and the play of the three kings by the goldsmiths. These associations of craftsmen on whom the early production of plays depended often existed without formal structures and “their methods of ‘social bonding’ were still largely restricted to

acts of communal worship before an altar in the cathedral or parish church” (1997:103). It was not until the early fifteenth century that York crafts developed “a rudimentary officiate – masters, searchers, and indeed pageant masters – which provided the fraternity with real administrative cohesion” (1997:103).

While the feast of Corpus Christi and the cycles of plays appealed to all sectors of society – urban and rural at the time – what emerges from recent studies of the historical records is the sense that it was the merchant/entrepreneurs who controlled, sponsored and even initiated these great “annual feat(s) of corporate ritual within their cit[ies]” (1997:105). Dobson argues that it was the increasingly important mercantile elite of towns such as York who used the annual production of Corpus Christi plays as a means of identifying, controlling, and extracting “not inconsiderable sums of money from the craft fraternities to finance the city’s most elaborate and expensive exercise in ceremonial and religious display” (1997:103–104). Only by means of levying fines payable to the civic chamber was the civic council able to exert power over the craft fraternities.

Among the stories the vernacular Bible plays dramatized in these annual cycles were those of the

Figure 2.5

Detail from a painting of a city procession honoring the visit to Brussels in 1615 of Spain’s Archduchess Isabella, then Governor of the Spanish Netherlands. This pageant wagon carries a scene of Christ’s nativity with actors in tableau. Joseph and Mary hover over the Christ child at the corner of the stable; the scene includes admiring shepherds, animals, and apparently a blacksmith. This wagon was one of nine in the procession that represented subjects both religious and secular. The painting is an important source for our knowledge of medieval pageant wagons, although they are in use here to display tableaux rather than as stages for the performance of plays.

Painting by Dennis Van Alsloot. © the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



creation of the world; the building of Noah's Ark; Abraham's sacrifice of his son; the Nativity, with the visits of the shepherds and the Magi; Herod's attempt to slay the new child-king by dispatching his army to slay all newborn children; Christ's raising of his friend, Lazarus, from the dead; and Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Forty-eight plays survive in manuscript from York, the longest of which is 546 lines and the shortest 86. Thirty-two plays survive from Wakefield, and 25 from Chester. Not being attached to the liturgy as such, vernacular Bible dramas of all types combined instruction with dramatic freedom, creating local characters and providing comic humor. God talks like one's neighbor, shepherds suffer from oppressive landlords, and Noah's wife seriously doubts her husband's big ark project. The plays are episodic and certainly not Aristotelian, mixing comedy and tragedy and held together by the frame of God's plan of salvation, not by chronology. They abound in anachronisms. At Christ's birth, King Herod can swear by "the Trinity," referring to God the Father, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit, a concept not possible until after Christ's death. Some plays reflect the then-common anti-Semitism; Jews were blamed for Christ's death.

Inventive means were used to stage these cycle plays. Where pageant wagons were used, they provided stages for the tableaux in the processions and/or for performances at certain stations along the way in the processions ("processional staging"). In some cases, some of the wagons might have been moved into some contiguous staging arrangement, perhaps adjacent to a large platform, a city square, or a green that would have provided a neutral playing area – a *platea*. More than a single pageant wagon 12 feet wide would have been necessary for the final play of the Chester cycle on the Last Judgment. In it Christ appears to determine the fate of the souls of all humankind and the action requires four contiguous mansions, including Heaven, Hell, and Earth, and 20 characters. It is not clear that all the plays in these surviving manuscripts were played in these cities in every year; the manuscripts were written by different hands at different times. One disputed source for the city of Chester says its 25 plays were played over three days.

Some vernacular religious plays were performed on fixed stages and over several days. The illuminations and stage directions of the text for the 1547 performance of the *Mystère de la Passion* in Valenciennes, France, indicate elaborate fixed stage arrangements that allowed complex scenic spectacles, including the descent of an angel, flying devils, and the ascension of Christ into the clouds with angels. The late sixteenth-century passion play at Lucerne, Switzerland, was performed in the city's Weinmarkt over two days. The three-part Cornish play known as the Cornish *Ordinalia* used mansions in a circular arrangement, perhaps within a circular earthen embankment, and it played over three days. Our one, unique visual record of a medieval play in performance shows fixed, raised scaffolds – mansions – bordering a playing area – the *platea*. A hand-painted illumination in a fifteenth-century French prayer book shows a scene from the lost play *The Martyrdom of St. Apollonia*, with actors in the *platea* and up on the scaffolds (see Figure 2.6). In the face of disasters or the horror of a plague like the "Black Death" so common at the time, some towns organized Bible plays to give thanks for their deliverance. The Catholic community of Oberammergau in the Bavarian Alps began to perform its Passion Play in 1634 in fulfillment of a pledge to God that if the plague would cease, they would perform a play on Christ's sufferings every ten years. This the village has done, with few exceptions, until the present, with various script changes since the 1960s to remove anti-Semitic passages.

Other Christian religious plays

Vernacular religious dramas of other kinds included saints plays, devoted to the lives of the saints, especially their miracles, and the morality plays, probably derived from sermons given by the clergy to elaborate important points from the day's scriptural readings.

One spectacular drama still performed to celebrate the Assumption of Mary each year on August 14–15 in the Basilica de Santa Maria in the city of Elche (Spain) is the *Misteri d'Elx* (*El Misterio de Elche*). (For a translation, see King and Salvador-Rabaza in the Key References.) Most scholars agree that the play in two parts dates from the second half of the fifteenth century. The first part,



Figure 2.6

A scene from a lost medieval play, *The Martyrdom of St. Apollonia*, as represented in an illumination by Jean Fouquet in a French prayer book, the *Livre d'Heures pour maître Etienne Chevalier* (c.1452–56). According to legend, Apollonia was once tortured by the extraction of her teeth. Among the scaffolds around the *platea* or playing area are those representing heaven (left) with its angels, and hell (right) with its devils and a hell-mouth into which the damned were to be shepherded. The King's throne is at the rear, and the figure with book and baton may be the director, in ecclesiastical dress. The raised scaffolds seem to form a semi-circle around the *platea*, but in this and other details we may be seeing the painter's compositional strategies for representation in a book. See also Figure 2.7.

© Musée Condé, Chantilly, France. Photo RMN.

La Vespra – performed on August 14 – commemorates the death of the Virgin Mary – surrounded by the apostles. It begins when Mary (still played today by a boy in a curly wig and with a halo) progresses through the church door accompanied by a wind band, and announces that she is about to die. Not long after, high above the congregants gathered below, the dome of the church – painted to represent the sky and heavens – opens as if by magic, allowing five angels (two boys, three men – four of whom are singing) to descend to Mary.



The apparatus transporting the angels is known as *la magrana* (pomegranate). It dates in its present form from the sixteenth century and is similar to other simple but effective theatrical mechanisms utilized during the period in Spain. Part II, *La Festa* – performed on August 15 – commemorates the assumption of the Virgin and her coronation as her soul arrives in heaven. Here the silk-clad, dead Virgin is transported heavenward in “the pomegranate” – surrounded by four of the angels. As she rises toward the heavens the trap door opens once again allowing the holy trinity (played by two boys and a man) to descend on a separate apparatus to the Virgin – and fix the crown of heaven upon her head. Witnessing the performance in 2006, David Ward describes how

[b]oth contraptions then rise and are steered carefully through the skylcloth . . . The audience holds its breath until the delicate double docking manoeuvre is complete. Then all heaven breaks loose: golden rain falls from paradise and again the organ plays, bells ring, fireworks bang and the audience claps and cheers.

There are cries from all around the church of “Long live the mother of God!” and everyone shouts “Viva!”.

The apostles sing a Gloria of thanksgiving and we stagger out into the square, amazed.

(Ward 2006)

As performed today, the *Misteri d’Elx* is a syncretic montage of religious as well as secular performance

elements which have accrued over the centuries. When amateur congregant singers began to perform the play in the nineteenth century, taking over from the priests and choirboys, it preserved the performance tradition; of course, the fact that the roles are still sung by men and boys in twenty-first-century Europe reinforces a conservative gender hierarchy. Its music ranges from medieval plainsong, with later additions from the Renaissance and baroque musical styles. Maveena McKendrik observes how this major Church feast combines the procession of the penitents, fireworks, and other secular revelry to create a “potent mix of public fiesta and religious piety” (1989:239) for the local congregants and numerous tourists who attend each year.

One of the earliest of the morality plays was authored by Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), a learned and gifted Benedictine mystic, abbess, healer, and author. She experienced religious visions about which she wrote at length. Her creative musical output included the composition of 77 songs and a musical morality play, *Ordo Virtutum* (c.1155). Like her songs, the *Ordo* was probably composed and written for performance by nuns within her convent, not for a general public. Drawing upon the fourth-century Latin work by Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, this sung-drama features the battle for a human soul between the forces of evil and 16 personified virtues. Morality plays developed widely during the fourteenth century. Allegorical in nature, the publicly-performed plays were locally produced by groups of citizens, sometimes elaborately. They usually focused on an “everyman” figure who faced a choice between good and bad behavior. This idea of the Christian “in conflict” is taken from St. Paul:

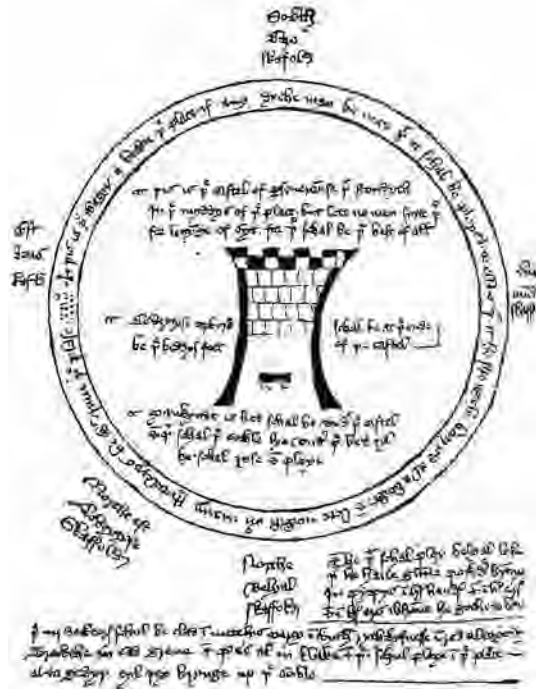
Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rules of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

(Ephesians 6:11–12)

Figure 2.7

Plan of the mansions and playing area for the morality play, *The Castle of Perseverance*, c.1400–1425, possibly for a performance in an ancient earthen round. Mankind's castle is at center, the location of the five mansions is indicated outside the circle, and the direction within the double circles reads: "This is the water about the place [platea], if any ditch be made where it shall be played, or else let it be strongly barred all about."

The Folger Shakespeare Library. All rights reserved.



Since God had given humankind “free will” to choose good or evil, the individual who chose badly would suffer the consequences – damnation and the fires of Hell. In *The Castle of Perseverance* (c.1400–1425; Figure 2.7) the main character, Mankind, is seduced by the Bad Angel who tells him there will be time in old age to be virtuous. Mankind then encounters a wide range of allegorical characters who attempt to influence him. They include the Seven Deadly Sins, the figures of Conscience, Confession, and Penance, and the Virtues, including Meekness, Patience, Charity, and Chastity. At Mankind’s trial before God, Mercy and Peace plead for him against Righteousness and Truth. God judges mercifully in the end.

A late example of the saint’s play genre is the play *Mary Magdalene* (late fifteenth century). It dramatizes incidents, scriptural and apocryphal, in the life of the fallen woman saved by Christ, who came to be his

follower. Its staging requires a large cast, several mansions, including heaven and hell, and a wheeled ship on which Mary Magdalene sails around the *platea* to several destinations. The play includes Jesus and Peter alongside several allegorical characters like those in the morality plays, including Pride, Lechery, Flesh, and Curiosity.

Dramas of Christian conquest: “In this sign”

A sense of “struggle” has been part of Christian history since its inception as a millenarian religion – an expectation that there will be an end to human history and its replacement by a different order. In the early centuries the struggle was for survival of communities of believers in an overtly hostile climate. Once Christianity was established as the religion of the Roman Empire, the struggle turned within where factions

fought over interpretations of doctrine, for control of decision-making power at formative church councils, or, externally, for control of civil power. When medieval Christian power was eventually concentrated in Rome and in the figure of a pope, the Church constructed the idea of the “Holy Land,” that set of sites where sacred history had unfolded – and it became a site of Christian pilgrimage.

From the eleventh century, it also became a site of bitter, bloody struggle for power and ascendancy in a series of engagements eventually described as the “Crusades.” (The term first appeared in Spain in the thirteenth century.) In these wars, Christian Europe sought to “liberate” Jerusalem from the Muslim “infidels.”

“Crusade” has from the beginning been a floating, highly mobile and adaptive term, precisely denoting very little but replete with connotations. It has always been a versatile theory. Popes championed a useful concept that allowed them to declare a holy war on any individual or group, proscribing them as enemies of Christ. There were holy wars against Muslim infidels; against heretics like the Albigensians of Provence; against recalcitrant Christian monarchs; even against humble towns that failed to toe the papal line. But the first category, war against the Muslim infidel, was always popularly regarded as the true war “for and by the Cross.” Sanctified war was an innovation within the Christian Church, which had for centuries struggled to impose the peace of God upon adversaries.

(Wheatcroft 2004:187)

The sense of holy empowerment and the accompanying evangelistic zeal to conquer under the “sign of the cross” exemplified the spirit of the Crusades. It ignited the re-conquest of the Iberian peninsula in which Arab Islamicists who had occupied it for centuries were defeated. It also fired the first Spanish and Portuguese quests to conquer and colonize – Spain to the West (the Americas) and Portugal to the East (India

and beyond). This expansionism was fed in part by a complex set of social/civic performances of privilege and power embedded in the growth and expansion of medieval chivalry – a set of practices that performed heroic and romantic gestures in song, jousting, and court pageantry.

When Christian kingdoms began to re-conquer the Iberian peninsula and/or colonize the world, a variety of dramas of conquest resulted. In some, Western Christian modes of performance were imposed on indigenous populations, as happened in Mesoamerica. The second case study in this chapter analyzes one from a genre of dramas of conquest that involved battles between the Christians and the Moors.

Even as the newly emergent kingdoms of Europe colonized much of the world, secular drama and performances, long suppressed or controlled by church or civic authorities, gradually gained ascendancy under newfound royal patronage. Performances of morality plays were sometimes played in banquet halls as were other kinds of entertainments. Biblical dramas were being suppressed by the latter half of the sixteenth century, in part because of the struggle between Catholics and emergent militant Protestantism. King Henry VIII’s split with the Roman Catholic Church effectively ended the Bible play tradition in England, although Shakespeare seems to be remembering a performance of a *Play of Herod* in Hamlet’s well-known speech of advice to the players. The morality plays, less explicitly tied to Catholic doctrine and traditions, died a slower death. They provided some reference point for the development of secular plays, written by individual authors for public stages. Theatre, religion, and the state, once closely bound together in Western history, were evolving toward new and often conflicting relationships.

Islamic commemorative mourning “dramas”: The *Ta’ziyeh* of Iran and beyond

In this section we briefly examine the historical emergence of Islam and *Ta’ziyeh* – an important Islamic

form of commemorative “drama” in which public mourning plays a central role. “Islam” is an Arabic word meaning submission to God. In the Islamic tradition, God revealed his message to Muhammad in a series of visions from 612 C.E. For Muslims the Qur’an (often rendered as “Koran”) is nothing less than the transmission in simple, clear Arabic language of a divine archetype that is kept in heaven for eternity, and is graven on the “guarded Tablet.” It was that archetype that was directly revealed to Muhammad. Muhammad said he did nothing except transmit the message of Allah, adding and removing nothing. Muhammad probably did not read and would have transmitted what he received orally. The word “Qur’an” is from a verb originally

meaning “vocal recitation.” It was only after 622 that some of Muhammad’s disciples began to inscribe fragments of what they heard onto bits of leather. After the Prophet’s death, the Qur’anic revelations were gathered into a number of corpora, collected by the first Caliph, Abu Bakr.

For several centuries, written versions provided little more than a guide to memory for repeating aloud a text already memorized. The writing of the Qur’an grew in significance, becoming a sanctifying act and done in elaborate calligraphy, the most esteemed art in Islam (Figure 2.8). Islam generally prohibits pictorial representation of living or dead people in order to maintain a clear distinction between the Creator and the created,



Figure 2.8

Qur’an fragment, showing the heading for Chapter 32, “The Prostration” (al-Sajda). Arabic text in kufic script on vellum. Ninth century C.E., Near East, possibly Iraq.

© The Trustees of the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin.

but the Qur'an can be illuminated. Texts are often decorated with geometric vegetal patterns. Each of its 114 chapters can be marked by a decorative heading, and marginal roundels guide one's reading, indicating places for required ritual prostration

Sultans, shahs, princes, and members of the aristocracy or wealthy merchants throughout the Islamic world have also valued secular Islamic books and manuscripts highly. From at least the ninth century onwards, two attributes of royalty in Iran were maintaining a library and patronage of the making of fine manuscript. Persian princes themselves were often artists or calligraphers. Other arts such as poetry, music, dance, solo-storytelling (*al-hakawati*), shadow theatre (*khayal al-zhil*), picture-performances (*parda-zan*), and puppet theatre (*Aragoz* in Egypt; *Abderrazak* in Tunisia) also flourished under the patronage of Islamic rulers.

Commemorative mourning rituals and the development of *Ta'ziyeh*

Just as the life of Christ and biblical events play a central role in the development of commemorative liturgical and biblical dramas within Christianity, a major historical event in the history of Islam became the central inspiration for the development of the Islamic commemorative drama, *Ta'ziyeh*. When Muhammad died in 632, the Muslim community faced a crisis over his successor. Those who believe that the Prophet passed special, divine knowledge to his son-in-law and cousin Ali (d. 661) and his direct descendants to serve as imams (prayer leaders who serve as religious guides) were called Shi'ites (members of the Shi'i sect). Others (members of the Sunni sect or Sunnites) held that the succession should fall to the best person (caliphs), not necessarily a direct relative of Muhammad. The two main branches of Islam – Sunni and Shi'i – reflect this historical and theological struggle over succession of the Prophet. The fundamental disagreement between Sunnites and Shi'ites was accentuated by both political and theological differences which led to divergent legal and ritual practices (Aghaie 2005:42–43; Combs-Schilling 1989:77ff.). Most followers of Shi'i Islam live

in present-day Iran, Iraq, Yemen, and Bahrain, with smaller communities in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. The Sunnis constitute about 85–90 percent of the world's Muslim population and live in the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, and Indonesia.

Among Shi'ites, a form of commemorative performance known as *Ta'ziyeh* – from “an Arabic verb, ‘*azza*, meaning to mourn,’ ‘console,’ ‘express sympathy with’” (Chelkowski 2005:13) – became central to their version of Islam. The roots of today's *Ta'ziyeh* lie in the violent struggle over succession to the Prophet. When Ali's father and older brother were murdered, Hussein (Ali's son and the grandson of the Prophet) led a rebellion to regain control. But Hussein, his family, and followers were surrounded by the opposing army on the plain of Karbala (in present day Iraq). On the tenth day of Muharram in the Islamic year 61 (October 10, 680), after ten battle-filled days without water in which all the males – except a single small boy – were massacred, Hussein himself was killed and the women taken captive. The battle became a source for most Shi'ite ritual because all those martyred modeled the ideal behavior in the struggle to follow the right path toward God.

The first month of the Muslim lunar calendar, Muharram, soon became a period for Shi'ites to perform mourning rituals to commemorate the moment when Hussein, his family, and followers were martyred. Since at least the tenth century, ritual processions in Baghdad featured mourners with black-painted faces and disheveled hair, singing songs of lamentation and beating their chests in mourning. (Acts of self-flagellation have remained a central part of participants' identification with the martyred Hussein to the present day.)

Shi'ite practices were consolidated during the sixteenth century with the establishment of a Safavid dynasty on the Iranian Plateau. The popular orator, Hussein Vaiz Kashefi, composed *Rawzat al-shuhada* (*The Garden of Martyrs*) – a work which synthesized “various historical accounts, elegiac poems, theological tracts, and hagiographies into a chain of short narratives that together formed a much larger narrative” (Aghaie 2005:45). It stressed “the courage, piety, and sacrifice of

Hussein and his followers at Karbala” (2005:45). Reading it aloud at religious gatherings, orators improvised sermons based on the text whose intention “was to move the audience to tears through his recitation of the tragic deaths of the Battle of Karbala” (2005:46).

During the Qajar period (1796–1925), the same narratives became the basis for an even more elaborate ritual performance called *Ta’ziyeh*. The events surrounding Hussein’s martyrdom form the narrative core recounted in these commemorative dramas. A cycle of ten *Ta’ziyeh* plays is performed during the first ten days of Muharram, one each day (for a translation of one play, see Pettys 2005). Each chronicles a single episode of the brutal events, or focuses on the heroic deaths of specific members of Hussein’s family and followers. The only

prescribed play is the death of Hussein – always performed on the tenth day. Observances often continue through the remainder of the month of Muharram and into the month of Safar, specifically to mourn the torment of Hussein’s female relatives taken as captives to Damascus. Some communities perform less ornate *Ta’ziyehs* not necessarily about the events of Karbala throughout the year.

Non-representational “reading” and representation in *Ta’ziyeh*

Ta’ziyeh was originally performed at a crossroads or in other outdoor areas. By the early nineteenth century, special performance spaces (*Takiyeh*) were built for *Ta’ziyeh*. Some staging elements may be remnants of

Figure 2.9

A nineteenth-century performance of *Ta’ziyeh*. In the 1870s, the *Takiyeh Dowlat* shown here was erected in Tehran in the royal compound. Its walls, canvas ceiling, and circular stage were copied in *takiyehs* and *husseinyehs* all over the country.

Photograph, Tehran 1976, of an original painting by Kemal-Mulik © Peter Chelkowski.





Figure 2.10

In a *Ta'zieh* commemorative performance, Nabiollah Habibabadi (on horseback) is seen in the role of Shemr, the general who beheads Imam Hossein. In the background, Yazid, the Umayyid Sultan who ordered the killing. In Habibabad near Isfahan, Iran.

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pre-Islamic entertainments and rituals, including a mourning ritual for the legendary prince Siyavosh, a sinless hero unjustly killed, like Hussein.

Ta'ziyeh is performed in the round, with a raised central platform surrounded by a huge circular, sand-covered space used for spectacular effects, such as equestrian events and foot battles. Additional raised stages erected around the edges of the circular space are used for subplots, enemy camps, or special scenes. These often extend into the audience area. Corridors stretch from the central stage through the audience so that messengers and processions of horses, camels, and vehicles can pass. Battle scenes can surround the entire audience. Audience and performers alike are immersed in a whirling, centrifugal experience of tumultuous action, songs, music, recitations, and battles (see Figures 2.9 and 2.10).  Properties and costumes are simple and sometimes symbolic. A basin of water represents the Euphrates River. Protagonists wear green or white and sing in lyrical Persian chants, while the antagonists wear red and declaim in a fierce, uncouth manner. Women's roles are played by veiled males dressed in black. Some characters, such as demons, are masked. *Ta'ziyeh* participant-performers are not “actors” who represent characters. They do not memorize lines. Rather, they are “readers” who sing or recite in a non-realistic manner from segments of the script held in hand. Like many forms of commemorative ritual-drama, *Ta'ziyeh* has all the trappings of “theatre,” as Westerners would understand the term, but in its most traditional form it is not theatre. Rather, it is a participatory, epic re-enactment of an historical event that makes the past present for Shi'ite participants and spectators.

To participate in *Ta'ziyeh* is to participate in a deeply religious event filled with intense grief, mourning, and lamentation. Hussein's martyrdom at Karbala exemplified supreme self-sacrifice, human suffering, and a profound act of divine redemption. The pain participants inflict on themselves is the pain of Hussein.

Ta'ziyeh ties contemporary Shi'ites to their complex past, reminding them of their intimate connection with

Hussein and the Shi'a battle of resistance against a powerful, alien invader. For those who participate, *Ta'ziyeh* brings the past into the present, and the site of performance becomes the physical locus of martyrdom. *Ta'ziyeh* remains of central importance in Iran, but is also performed today in South Asia, the Arab world, and the Caribbean. *Ta'ziyeh* was performed at theatre festivals in Avignon in 1991, Parma (Italy) in 2000, and in New York in 2002 at Lincoln Center (Chelkowski 2005).

Summary

In this chapter we examined two early forms of drama and theatre – commemorative religious/ritual “drama” in Egypt, Mesoamerica, medieval Christian Europe, and Persia (Iran), and literary drama in Athens. Several striking commonalities exist among these diverse forms of early drama and theatre. Most involve the physical act of processing in the context of a religious festival. Processions incorporate a specific local topography, and usually inscribe onto that locale a cosmic, sacred geography. Processions are a means of incorporating large numbers of people in an activity with a common purpose – the annual celebration of a deity or a specific act of devotion. Processions are also a means of reminding all that the act of celebration or devotion is set aside in a special frame, a “time out of time.” They are also performative spectacles, offering a means of elaborating key symbols associated with a god or cosmic power. They bring private symbols into the public domain, offering the community at large an opportunity for individual or group celebration and/or devotion.

As we have seen, commemorative religious/ritual dramas are a means to an end – providing spectator-participants or devotees with immediate and synesthetic encounters with the cosmic/divine in a ritual/religious context. Other examples of commemorative drama include *Ramlila* and *Raslila* in India (see Chapter 3), Tibetan Buddhist Cham, and the closely related *Mani-Rimdu*, performed by the Sherpas of Nepal (Jerstad 1969). While there are often elements of humor, satire, or comic caricature within religious/ritual dramas or a festival, as a whole, these moments enhance or reinforce

divine and/or civic authority. “Drama” or “theatre” then are not wholly adequate terms to describe such a diverse set of commemorative religious/ritual practices. While many forms of commemorative, religious, ritual drama continue to exist today, others were lost with the collapse of such great early civilizations as Egypt, or when Western colonial powers suppressed the commemorative rites of indigenous peoples, as in Meso- and Native America.

In the context of fifth-century Athens, the earliest forms of dialogic literary dramas were invented for performance as part of religious festivals honoring Dionysus. Greek comedy and tragedy represented conflicts over issues that would have invited social, political, and aesthetic debate in a volatile, competitive culture. The Greek plays, as well as the physical theatres within which they were performed, were transformed in both Rome (see Chapter 3) and the Renaissance. In the Renaissance, the dramas of Athens, Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the Roman poet Horace’s *Ars Poetica* (c.19 B.C.E.), and Vitruvius’s studies of the architecture of Greco-Roman theatres (c.15 B.C.E.) were “re-discovered” and deployed in the academy in the service of humanism’s project of demonstrating the reasoned ordering of knowledge of a well-ordered world. Nothing to do with Dionysus.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Greek theatre

Athens: The Dawn of Democracy, featuring historian Bettany Hughes, produced by the Public Broadcasting System, U.S.A., 2008. DVD 120 minutes, available from the PBS online shop: www.shoppbs.org. Click on the listing for all video titles.

The Ancient Theatre Archive, a Virtual Reality Tour of Greek and Roman Theatre Architecture (2003/2009), by T.G. Hines: www.whitman.edu/theatre/theatretour/ephesus/commentary/Ephesus.commentary.htm.

Rabinal Achi

YouTube videos: (1) Relato de Rabinal Achi; (2) Rabinal, Baile de la Conquista; (3) Baile del Rabinal Achi Feria de Rabinal. Smithsonian Global Sound recording: sample available online: “Rabinal Achi: (a) Son del Quiche Achi; (b) Son del Rabinal Achi.”

Rabinal Achi, audio recording by P. Socub *et al.* Visit: www.smithsonianglobalsound.org/#6982. Recorded in Guatemala.

Medieval Christian theatre

The Play of Daniel, New York Pro Musica, Noah Greenberg, musical director. Music transcribed by Bishop Rembert Weakland. Charles Bressler as Daniel and Russell Oberlin as the angels. Decca Records, DL 79402 (1958).

The Play of Herod, New York Pro Musica, Noah Greenberg, musical director. Scored by Noah Greenberg and staged by Nicholas Psarcopoulos. Brayton Lewis as Herod. Decca Records, DL 710,095–6 (1964).

Mystery of Elche (Misteri d’Elx), YouTube videos: (1) “Misteri d’Elx” (Part I: descent of the angels from heaven to Mary); (2) “Coronation of the Virgin Mary” and/or “Coronación Elche” (the conclusion of Part II); (3) “Misteri o festa” (series of images from Parts I and II).

Medieval drama

For links to online resources, such as medieval play texts and bibliographies; to databases of research projects such as Records of Early English Drama; and to various groups devoted to research on, and production of medieval plays, see: www.netserf.org/Drama/.

Islamic commemorative mourning dramas:

Ta’ziyeh

YouTube video: see “Ta’ziyeh” (commentary in French), 12 November 2006, from www.peyman.org.

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CASE STUDY: Classical Greek theatre: Looking at *Oedipus*

By Bruce McConachie

Oedipus the King in classical Athens

Although the initial presentation of *Oedipus the King* cannot be dated with certainty, most historians assume that the play was staged in Athens in 427 B.C.E. The citizens of Athens were recovering from a plague that year, and Sophocles (496–404) probably desired to connect his play to this recent social crisis. The first scene of *Oedipus* features a plague afflicting the ancient city of Thebes, where the play is set (Sophocles 1993:45). The playwrights, performers, and producers in fifth-century Athens often presented plays that commented on current social and political problems, and it is likely that *Oedipus* fulfilled this expectation for his Athenian audience.

In the drama, King Oedipus must discover who killed Laius, the former king, in order to prevent the plague from killing more Thebans. Through keen detective work and his own memory, Oedipus learns that he himself was the killer and that Laius was his father. In 427 B.C.E., the Athenians were fighting a war with Sparta, another Greek city-state, and they needed strong leaders who were not afraid to face the consequences of their past actions. *Oedipus* is partly a play about the need for leadership in the midst of a political crisis.

The tragedy is also about roots. In pursuit of the truth, Oedipus interviews characters from the many places of his past. He discovers the place that gave him birth and the womb that nurtured him. Believing at first that he was born in Corinth, Oedipus learns he was born in Thebes and that his wife Jocasta, the former Queen of King Laius, is also his mother (Figure 2.11). Recognizing his lack of true vision and knowledge, Oedipus blinds himself, prophesizes the barrenness of his two daughters, and seeks exile from Thebes. In *Oedipus the King*, as in many other Greek tragedies, people are tragically linked to place; Oedipus gains self-knowledge by learning his true place in his family, his city, and in the Greek cosmos.

Ironically, classicists have much to say about Sophocles's use of place in the text of his tragedy, but they know little for certain about place and space in the initial staging of *Oedipus*. In the theatre today, architects, designers, and directors work to make sure that the spatial dynamics of a production – the interior of the theatre, the setting on stage, the blocking of the actors, their use of stage properties, and other spatial considerations – complement and amplify the emotions and meanings they wish to communicate to the audience. While the architecture, statuary, vases, and other remains of classical Greek civilization leave no doubt



Figure 2.11

The scene on this fragmentary bowl (Sicily, c.330s) may represent the moment in *Oedipus the King* in which Jocasta (at right, half covering her face), hearing the Messenger's story, realizes that her husband is her son. Oedipus is turned to face the Messenger, at left. In this positioning on the stage, he would not see his wife/mother's face and not recognize the implications of the Messenger's story of Oedipus's origins.

© Syracuse Archeological Museum.

that the Athenians used space with great sophistication, there is little that can be said with certainty about the spatial dynamics of their theatrical productions. In none of the surviving texts of the plays from this era – 44 in total, written by Aeschylus (c.543–456), Euripides (480–406), and Aristophanes (c.448–c.380) as well as Sophocles – are there stage directions. (All surviving texts date from the Middle Ages.)

Playwrights staged their own dramas during the fifth century B.C.E. and thus had no need to write out separate instructions for the performers. Also, the plays of classical Athens grew out of an oral tradition linked directly to performance; they were not stand-alone literary texts headed for print. The more than 1,500 plays produced in fifth-century Greece might have told us more about staging conventions, but only fragments of a few others beyond the 44 complete extant plays remain.

Nonetheless, we can draw some conclusions about staging from the remaining plays and from other ancient texts. Later writers noted that the Greeks were only allowed to use three actors, who might play several roles, for their dramatic contests. The text of *Oedipus the King* can be played by this number. Many plays also demand an interior, offstage space where the performers could change costumes and masks and prepare for entrances through double doors. Tableau representations of interior scenes could also be wheeled out through these doors on a wagon, called an *ekkyklema*. But what did the acting area look like, where was the nearby interior space, and how many doors did it contain? In *Oedipus*, as in several other plays, much of the action occurs around a significant set piece – an altar in the case of Sophocles's tragedy. This property may have been placed center stage, but the evidence for this is not conclusive. Like other Greek tragedies, *Oedipus* demands a performing chorus, probably fifteen dancers and singers led by the player of an *aulos*, a double pipe instrument that may have sounded like an oboe. Again, however, the surviving evidence does not permit the historian to reconstruct the sight and sound of the chorus in the initial production of *Oedipus* with accuracy. The best the historian can do in considering the possible staging

of *Oedipus* in the fifth century is to put forward a hypothesis based on a careful reading of the play in the context of the culture and the physical evidence.

The physical evidence

The primary physical remains of the classical, fifth-century B.C.E. Greek theatre include the rough stone outlines of two small *theatrons* ("seeing places") in small communities near Athens, and a few stones from a retaining wall on the hillside at the base of the Athenian acropolis (most of the remains of theatres are from the late fourth century B.C.E. and after). When *Oedipus* was produced in 427 B.C.E., the Athenians relied on the downward slope of a hill, augmented with low wooden grandstands that probably hugged the contours of the hillside, for seating the 15,000 or so spectators that attended. The playing area was apparently a flattened hollow near the base of this long hillside that curved around the *orchestra* ("dancing place") on both sides (see Figure 2.12). As classicist Rush Rehm notes, the *theatron* of ancient Athens was "less a building than what we would call landscape architecture" (Rehm 2002:37). Scattered written evidence suggests that the spectators looking downhill at the performers in the *orchestra* sometimes responded with stomping, whistling, and prolonged noise-making, as well as hearty applause.

The precise shape of the fifth-century *orchestra*, however, has been a source of much controversy. Although some later *orchestras* were designed as full, or nearly full circles, the evidence for the classical era suggests that the *orchestra* at the theatre in Athens was more rectangular or even trapezoidal in shape. Before moving their festival performances theatre to the hillside, the Athenians had mounted productions in the marketplace. The wooden bleachers built there would most likely have produced a rectangular playing space. One of the surviving theatres from the classical era, at Thorikos, has a rectangular *orchestra*, curved at the edges facing the audience when stone seating was added later. Several of the later Greek theatres with circular *orchestras* show evidence of an earlier orchestral shape on the site that was roughly rectangular or trapezoidal.

The construction of wooden bleachers fronting a playing area in a hollow created by three sides of a hill – the configuration of the *theatron* in Athens – would likely have created a trapezoidal *orchestra* (see Figure 2.12). Later *orchestras* built during the Hellenistic era, such as the theatre at Epidauros (Figure 2.13), were circular. But the evidence for a trapezoidal *orchestra* in fifth-century Athens is strong.

For the interior house behind the *orchestra*, the offstage area for changes and entrances, some of the best evidence comes from paintings on vases and vase fragments dating from the classical era and later. This evidence must be approached with care, however, because the vase painters stylized their figures and structures, rather than rendering them realistically. Several show actors and others framed by pole-like columns and horizontal beams, a type of structure that could only have been made of wood. Other evidence points to the

use of such wooden structures in dithyramps, the choral dance and chants performed by members of the ten tribes of Athens on the day before the play contests began. The sources suggest that a 50-member dithyramb chorus might have entered into the *orchestra* through double doors, one pair on each side of this house. (Athenians competed in *dithyramb* contests long before their play contests; the origin of the term *orchestra*, or dancing place, probably refers to the use of the space in *dithyramps*.)

The Greeks called this wooden building a *skene* and fragments from ancient vases suggest that its double doors on each side of the building jutted into the orchestra through extensions on the *skene* house, called *paraskenia* (see Figure 2.12). Several of the plays require actors to perform on the roof of the *skene* or to “fly” on the crane that rested on or behind the *skene* house. The crane, called a *mechane*, was generally used to lower actors playing gods

Figure 2.12

Speculative drawing of the configuration of the fifth-century theatre in Athens, in which wooden bleachers fronting a playing area in a hollow created by three sides of a hill would have resulted in a trapezoidal *orchestra*.

Source: Bruce McConachie.

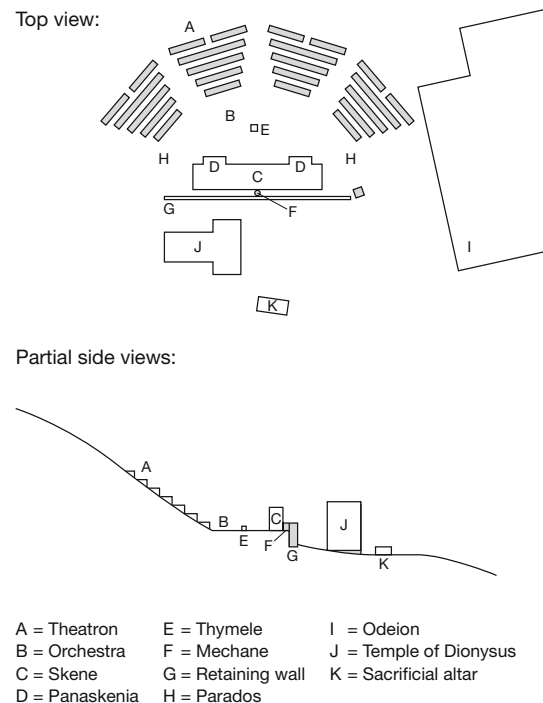




Figure 2.13

The Hellenistic theatre at Epidauros (340–330 B.C.E.), showing the *theatron*, *orchestra*, and *parodoi* (see double gates right and left at the ends of the *theatron*). At the top of the circular *orchestra*, archeologists have laid out remaining fragments of the rectangular *skene*. The extant Greek stone theatres were built in the fourth century and after, although they likely derived some features from fifth-century theatres.

Photo © Gary Jay Williams.

into the *orchestra*. (The Latin term, “*deus ex machina*,” or “God from the machine,” derives from this practice and came to indicate any dramatic device that miraculously resolves matters in the last act.) The *skene*, then, was probably an enclosed and roofed wooden building at the rear of the *orchestra*, with colonnaded wings extending from double doors on either side. Many classics scholars suppose that the *skene* house also had a large central door

between the *paraskenia*, but there is no firm evidence for this. All of the extant plays can be performed with two doors; a third door in the center is unnecessary.

While the *dithyramb* dancer-singers probably continued to use the *skene* for their entrances, the much smaller chorus of 15 for the plays of Sophocles likely entered into the *orchestra* on one side of the *skene* building, through a passage called the *parodos*.

In ancient Athens, the *parodos* passage was initially part of a road leading out of one part of the city into the surrounding countryside. When the Athenians moved their *theatron* to the hillside, they likely incorporated this road into their open-air theatre. By the time *Oedipus* was produced, the road wound around a large building called the *Odeion* on the eastern side of the *orchestra* (audience left), opened into the *orchestra*, and then continued on the other side of the *orchestra* and *skene* building into the countryside. On their first entrance, then, the 15-member chorus for *Oedipus* may have entered through the *parodos* near the *Odeion*, at the eastern side of the *orchestra*, and, after remaining in the *orchestra* for the duration of the play, exited through the *parodos* on the western side (Figure 2.12). Evidence from the plays suggests that actors playing characters also occasionally entered and exited through the *parodoi*; a character arriving from or exiting to the countryside might have conventionally used the *parodos* on the western side of the *orchestra*.

The first scene of *Oedipus* features an actor playing an old priest with some children gathered around him as they offer sacrifices at an altar. Evidently, this scene occurred in the *orchestra*, but where in the *orchestra* was the altar located? To propose an answer to this question, we need to move from the immediate context of the space of performance into the wider arena of fifth-century Athenian culture.

Cultural evidence

The Athenians produced theatre to honor Dionysus, the god of fertility associated with wine, drunkenness, and male sexuality. On the first day of the Great Dionysia, the priests of Dionysus slaughtered bulls, a symbol of the god, and distributed their meat to Athenian male revelers. The altars for the Dionysiac rituals, however, were not the same as the altar used by the Priest in *Oedipus*. At the base of the hillside *theatron*, downhill from the *orchestra* and *skene*, was a small grove of trees with a temple and altars for the worship of Dionysus (see Figure 2.12). It is likely that the procession on the first

day of the City Dionysia ended in this grove and that the bulls were slaughtered and roasted on the large altars near that temple. In contrast, the altar on the *orchestra* stage was probably a much smaller, portable, stage property altar. While *Oedipus* requires an altar, other plays need tombs or statues for their performance and all of these properties would have been removed after the production of each play.

Where was the prop altar for *Oedipus* located? Perhaps at the center of the *orchestra*, placed over a flat stone called the *thymele*. Archaeologists have discovered such a stone embedded in the ground of the *orchestra* in several ancient theatres, usually at or near the geometric centers of their circles or trapezoids. For the audience looking down at the *orchestra* from the three sides of the *theatron* hill, the *thymele*, or a prop covering it, would have provided a significant focal point for their view. It may be that the *thymele* also organized some of the on stage movement of the actors and chorus. Some vase paintings show the *aulos* player, who led the chorus into the *orchestra* and accompanied their chanting and movement, standing on this center stone. Historians have conjectured that the *thymele* or a prop in the same location provided the central axis around which much of the choral movement probably swirled.

Such speculations, however, depend upon general cultural orientations to spatiality, that is to say, the social use of space. How did the classical Greeks think about and use space? The evidence thus far for theatrical space suggests two general orientations: inside/outside; and center/periphery. Quite simply, the plays and the space of performance allowed actors to locate themselves either inside or outside of the *skene* building. Also, actors and chorus could place themselves near the center of the action, at the *thymele*, or on its periphery, at the edges of the *orchestra* or even in the *parodoi*. This spatiality is very different from the ways in which actors in contemporary theatres generally use the space of the stage and theatre. For a perspective on the spatial orientations of different cultures, it is helpful to look at spatiality through the lens of cognitive studies.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Cognitive spatial relations

Theatre scholars have been using insights from cognitive studies for several years to explore the construction of narrative in drama, to understand acting and audience response, and to analyze the spatiality of a performance. In brief, cognitive linguists, psychologists, and philosophers are exploring how humans perceive the world, engage emotionally with it, and make meaning from their experiences. Most have concluded that the mind/brain sorts experience into categories that are largely the result of human evolution and early childhood learning. Further, this process of categorization takes place at mostly unconscious levels. Cognitive linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson speak of “basic level,” “spatial relation,” and “bodily action,” metaphors that derive from these categories in the mind/brain and shape all notions of human action, culture, and history. For example, the “source-path-goal” concept, learned in infancy by crawling toward an object, is one of many bodily action metaphors. This pattern charts goal-oriented movement from one place, the “source,” across a “path,” to an end location, or “goal.” This category in the mind/brain allows us to conceive of future purposeful action and to enjoy reading a narrative or following a piece of music with a beginning, a middle, and an end (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:30–36).

In *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), Lakoff and Johnson devote significant discussion to the several ways in which humans experience space. Categories in the mind/brain relating to spatiality include inside/outside, part-whole, center/periphery, balance, up/down, near/far, and link. In early childhood, we learn differences between what is inside of us and what is on the outside, what is nearby and what is far away, and how to keep our bodies in balance. Like the source-path-goal schema, humans learn these concepts of spatiality through their bodies; later applications of balance, for instance, to notions of symmetry in architecture and ideals of justice in legal systems derive from this embodied knowledge. When we consider making a telephone call, counting the peas in a pod, or inviting another person to join a group circle, we are using categories in the mind/brain based on the spatial relations concepts of link, part-whole, and inside/outside. Further, these orientations to space shape human behavior in all cultures. Drawing on cross-cultural linguistic experiments, Lakoff and Johnson point out that human beings everywhere use language that organizes their relations to space through these same general categories.

Because specific historical societies emphasize different spatial relations concepts, however, historical cultures differ significantly in their orientation to space. These cultural differences are evident in the organization of space in a typical dwelling, in a town or city, and in the theatre. Since the Renaissance, Western Europeans (and, later, settlers in the Americas) have been putting frames around the space of the stage to separate the fiction of the on stage action from the audience and from the natural world. This frame, called a proscenium arch, was not a part of Greek theatre practice, which provided no architectural separation between the audience and the performers and sited the theatrical experience in the midst of the natural world. Consequently, the general orientations we use to build and comprehend proscenium productions today – the importance of the downstage center position for an actor, the significance of strong verticality in scene design, the ways directors treat the transition from the offstage “wings” to the on stage playing area, and the logic of scene changes to indicate a change in locale – probably would have not worked for classical Athenians producing and enjoying plays in their *theatron*, *orchestra*, and *skene*. From the perspective of cognitive studies, modern proscenium production generally emphasizes the spatial relations concepts of inside/outside, up/down, balance, and link. It is not difficult to see that these spatial relations concepts massively shape Western orientations to space today.

These are some key questions to ask in thinking about cognitive studies, spatiality, and staging.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 What mental concepts have humans unconsciously used in their historical cultures to shape their spatial relations?
- 2 Among these spatial relations concepts, which were the primary ones used by people in a specific culture to locate themselves and others in space?
- 3 How did these dominant concepts shape theatre architecture and staging practices in that culture?

Spatiality in Athenian culture

If the concepts of inside/outside and center/periphery oriented the classical Greeks to the spatiality of their theatrical productions, the historian would expect to find these orientations in many other areas of fifth-century Athenian culture. Certainly the concept of inside/outside exerted significant pressure in Athenian life. It shaped gender roles, for instance, because women were generally expected to stay inside their fathers' or husbands' dwellings, while Athenian society looked to males for most of its exterior, public life. City walls surrounding Athens and extending down to its seaport clearly separated an inside "us" from an outside "them." This separation was made more acute by the political practice of ostracism, which occurred when the male citizens of Athens voted to permanently exclude a resident from the city.

Ostracized Athenians were effectively banished from the center of society to the periphery. This practice, in other words, points not only to the category of inside/outside, but also to the prominence of center-periphery in generating and maintaining much of Athenian spatial practice. The spatial organization of Greek temples, which drew worshippers from surrounding areas to the center of each temple, also underscores the importance of this category. Ancient Greek biologists considered the heart to be at the center of the body and wrote about blood circulation as a flow from the periphery to the center and back again. When the classical Greeks drew

maps of the world, they placed Greece at the center and arranged other lands and continents on the periphery around it.

Consequently, when fifth-century Athenians went to their *theatron* on the hill to watch *Oedipus the King* in 427 B.C.E., they came with minds/brains already accustomed to organizing space in the world through the categories of inside/outside and center/periphery. Further, it is clear that the tragedy itself took advantage of these spatial orientations in the minds of its audience. Sophocles used the *skene* house to represent the palace in which Oedipus was born – even, symbolically, the womb from which he sprang. In the course of the tragedy, the palace became firmly associated with Jocasta: she tries to keep the family feud between Oedipus and Creon inside of its doors, and she ultimately kills herself within the *skene*. Regarding center/periphery, Rush Rehm notes that in many Greek tragedies characters are “pulled in from far away [to a center] as if drawn by a magnet” (Rehm 2002:44). This was certainly true for the production of *Oedipus*. Characters came from the periphery – from the nearby town of Thebes and from Delphi, Corinth, and Mount Cithaeron – to the religious and political center of the city, the altar in the *orchestra* in front of the palace. And in the end, the blind Oedipus sought ostracism from Thebes, a type of banishment that drew on both inside/outside and center/periphery orientations.

Historians cannot know for sure how Greek audiences understood the spatial organization of their theatre and,

specifically, the spatiality of the initial performance of *Oedipus the King*. But they can assemble the evidence of spatial practice from the physical and textual remains and examine it through the lens of cognitive spatial relations to arrive at a probable hypothesis.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

The Ancient Theatre Archive, a Virtual Reality Tour of Greek and Roman Theatre Architecture (2003/2009), by T.G. Hines. Photos

of, and data on, many sites of stone theatres from the Hellenistic period and after: www.whitman.edu/theatre/theatretour/ephesus/commentary/Ephesus.commentary.htm.

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CASE STUDY: Christians and Moors: Medieval performance in Spain and the New World

By Bruce McConachie

A play of conquest

To celebrate their conquest of New Mexico (the present-day southwest of the United States) in 1598, Spanish *conquistadores* threw themselves a week-long party, which included a variety of performances. According to one participant, there were: “Tilts with cane-spears, bullfights, tilts at the ring, / A jolly drama, well composed, / Playing at Moors and Christians, / With much artillery, whose roar / Did cause notable fear and marveling, / To many bold barbarians. . .” (Harris 1994:145).

How might we understand this important historical document? Many Spanish-speaking cultures continue to enjoy “bullfights,” of course, and “tilts with cane-spears” is easily explained as jousting matches on horseback with breakable lances (so as to avoid injuring the riders). Similarly, “tilts at the ring,” another game dating from medieval tournaments, challenges the rider to thrust his lance through a small ring. But what was the “jolly drama” with “Moors and Christians” that involved noisy “artillery”? And why might a drama about Moors, the Spanish term for Muslims living in northern Africa, be performed to celebrate the conquest of land in North America?

Plays that focused on a symbolic fight between Moors and Christians derived from the tournament tradition of medieval aristocratic culture in Spain. By the time Spaniards in the New World crossed the Rio Grande to claim New Mexico, Christian kings, princes, and counts in Spain had been staging *moros y cristianos* spectacles for popular and aristocratic audiences for over three hundred years. These choreographed battles typically pitted two groups of knights against each other – blackfaced Moors in exotic silk gowns and Christian crusaders in shining armor. Following exchanges of verbal abuse from both sides, the Moors usually won the initial battles, but the Christian knights always triumphed in the end, sometimes returning with facsimiles of Moorish heads on their lances. In other performances, the Moors would recognize the error of their ways, convert to Christianity, and bow down before a symbol of Catholic power. By 1598 in New Mexico, these symbolic gang wars between rival religious fanatics had been modernized to include swords rather than lances and noisy harquebusiers, the forerunner of the shotgun.

Why were the *moros y cristianos* performances popular in medieval Spain, how did these performance events compare to other kinds of medieval theatre, and why do they retain their popularity today?

The medieval context

Medieval Spaniards' desire to stage and enjoy *moros y cristianos* performances had to do with the ongoing struggle between Christian and Islamic powers for control of the Iberian peninsula for most of the Middle Ages (Figure 2.14). Following victories in the eighth century over Christian kingdoms on the peninsula, the Moors established a culture and society in what is now present-day Portugal and most of Spain that was more advanced and tolerant than the rest of medieval Christian Europe. The Christian kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, from their mountain strongholds in the north and east, waged intermittent wars against the Moors that finally culminated in the expulsion of Islamic forces from the peninsula in 1492. This 700-year crusade left an indelible impression on Spanish history and culture. Hardened by

constant warfare, the Christian aristocrats of Castile and Aragon forged a culture of religious fanaticism and military valor that shaped the Catholic Inquisition at home and Spanish conquest abroad. After 1492, the rulers of Spain expelled all infidels from the peninsula, tortured thousands of *Moriscos* (Christians of Moorish background) and *Marranos* (Christians of Jewish background) suspected of un-Christian belief, and extended their crusade of conversion or extinction to the natives of the New World. When the *conquistadores* of New Mexico performed the “jolly drama” of *moros y cristianos*, they were honoring a tradition of militant Christianity that had brought them victory for hundreds of years. There can be little doubt that the Spaniards rejoiced in the “fear and marveling” that the spectacle produced among the Native Americans who were watching the show.

As in the New Mexico production of 1598, performances of *moros y cristianos* in medieval Spain normally occurred in the midst of a festival. In January and February of 1461, for example, Count Miguel Lucas de Iranzo, the Castilian ruler of Jaen, threw a party for the populace of the town that lasted for 21 days. In addition to celebrating his wedding, Lucas's festival was also designed to shore up his power and prestige in the wake of a recent plague and frequent attacks by the Moors. For his wedding celebration, the Count and his retinue claimed the blessing of God by dressing themselves in images of Christian power. Lucas transformed the entire town into a stage using an array of torches, symbolic tapestries, and musicians to heighten the effects of the processions, games, dances, and plays. Mock battles between Christians and Moors occurred in the midst of other dramatic spectacles, such as the freeing of Christian captives from a Moorish dragon and the conversion of the King of Morocco to Christianity. Like many of his subjects, Lucas appeared both as himself, a magnanimous ruler, and as a performer, enacting one of the kings who visits the Christ child in Bethlehem in a nativity play, for instance.

Count Lucas's wedding festival of 1461 illustrates several aspects of late medieval performance in Spain. Just



Figure 2.14

Map showing extent of Christian and Moorish territories in 1490.

Source: Bruce McConachie.

as many of the people of Jaen participated both as actors and spectators, most public spaces in the town could be used for either acting or spectating, depending on the occasion. Fixed stages and fixed distinctions between performer and spectator were unnecessary. The genres of such carnival entertainment were also fluid; aristocratic games of combat flowed into popular dances, and church rituals could inform pageant processions. For his winter wedding celebration, the Count likely re-used

some of the same pageant wagons that paraded through the streets to celebrate the spring feast of Corpus Christi, a celebration of Christ's redeeming presence in the world in which plays depicted episodes in Christian salvation history. Festival celebrants made few distinctions between religious observance and secular practice. Finally, politics was never far from the center of these pageants, tournaments, and plays. Lucas, like other kings and counts in Castile and in all medieval Christian

kingdoms, notes one historian, staged his festivals as “deliberately complex symbolic ceremonies, frequently laden with polemical or propagandistic intent” (Holme 1987:5). (The Count’s lavish spending on celebrations seems to have made little difference in his political

fortunes, however; rivals in Jaen murdered him in 1473.) Overall, the performances sponsored by Count Lucas in late medieval Spain were like a stained-glass window of religious and political symbols brought to life and set to music.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Cultural hierarchy

Many cultures use verticality to signal ethical differences. Thus, whatever is “high” – the human head, a mountain top, heaven – becomes “good,” while the “bad” is associated with the “low” – sexual organs, the sewer, Hell. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White use this human proclivity to align ethics with verticality in order to analyze how cultures create images of what they term “the low other.” When mainstream cultures classify minority groups as immoral, dirty, noisy, and/or unworthy, they are defining these people as “low others.” By separating themselves from “low others,” people in the dominant culture create an image of themselves as “high” and “moral.” As Stallybrass and White comment, “the human body, psychic forms, geographical space, and the social formation are all constructed within interrelating and dependent hierarchies of high and low” (1986:2).

Although usually excluded from normal participation in society and politics, “low others” remain objects of fascination and attraction to people in dominant groups. Stallybrass and White note the “psychological dependence” of the dominant culture upon images of “low others.” They conclude that “this is the reason that what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central” (1986:5). The insights of Stallybrass and White have obvious relevance to the interactions between many dominant and subordinate groups throughout history, including “white” and “black” Americans, Eastern Europeans and Jews, and Castilians and Moors in medieval Spain.

Students of theatre history can begin to read for the “low other” in past performances by asking these questions.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 How did make-up, costuming, characterization, and other modes of theatrical communication denigrate specific kinds of roles, social groups, and/or forms of belief?
- 2 What types of characters and beliefs were made to appear “high” through the contrast with these “low others”?
- 3 What were the historical reasons for and the consequences of depicting this ethical contrast between the “high” and the “low”?

The “low other” in medieval performance

Performances in medieval festivals and religious holidays, especially of plays like *moros y cristianos*, often defined proper Christian behavior by denigrating and defeating its un-Christian opposite. Because vertical relations of authority and belief were so important in medieval Christian culture, stereotypes of “low others” proliferated in European performances from the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries. Characters associated with vice in morality plays designed for ethical instruction – the female temptress, Sloth, Gluttony, Pride, the rest of the Seven Deadly Sins, and Lucifer himself – were typically costumed and played in ways that aligned them with dirt, feces, and rampant sexuality (Figure 2.15). In the day-long religious plays depicting important incidents of

Christian history, Jews, Romans, and infidels were often characterized as buffoons, villains, or other “low” types. Mummers plays, Christianized versions of pagan rituals designed to ensure the return of spring after the winter solstice, often featured a blackened Turk as the antagonist of a white Christian knight. Another winter solstice performance, the Sword Dance, symbolically sacrificed a hairy wild man or a “greenman” from the forest to incite the resurrection of the springtime sun (and the Christian Son of God).

In medieval Spain, Moors and Jews became the primary symbols of the “low other” in festival performances. Medieval writers often characterized Moors as treacherous and cowardly in *moros y cristianos* plays. The Jews who served as advisors to King Herod were usually foolish buffoons. Before 1492, when all



Figure 2.15

Stonework depicting a sexualized Lucifer tempting Christ. Carved on a capital of Autun Cathedral in France in the twelfth century by Gisilbertus.

© Abbé Denis Grivot, Autun, France.

Moors and Jews who refused to convert to Christianity were driven out of Spain, however, the Castilians often sought to include these minorities living within their cities in their religious festivities. Records from earlier in the fifteenth century indicate that actual Jews were sometimes asked to perform the roles of Jewish rabbis in the cycle plays and that Moors were invited to perform their own dances during Christian religious processions. Nonetheless, anti-Semitic and anti-Islamic prejudices, coupled with the desire to purify Catholic Spain, eradicated the previous Spanish toleration of minority religious groups after 1492.

Moros y cristianos in New Mexico today

The legacy of Spanish medieval theatre continues to shape popular and religious celebrations in Spanish-speaking countries today. It is especially evident in nativity plays at Christmas, scenes deriving from the cycle plays performed during the Easter season, and *moros y cristianos* mock battles presented at festivals in

the countries of Latin America and the southwestern United States. A grant from the United States National Endowment for the Arts in 1976 enabled Latinos in Chimayo, New Mexico, to upgrade their performances of *moros y cristianos* with new costumes and properties. During a June fiesta, about two dozen men and women dress in thirteenth-century costumes, mount horses, wield swords and scimitars, and engage in symbolic battle. To create the illusion of darker skin, the Latinos playing Moors also wear black veils, thus continuing the tradition of the Moor as “low other.” As during the days of Spanish imperialism, the ideology of militant Christianity continues to shape the ending of the play. Convinced by the outcome of the battle that their own religion is false, the Moors convert to Christianity, and all performers join together in a hymn of praise to the Holy Cross.

Some Native Americans living in the southwest also perform versions of *moros y cristianos*, partly to honor their conversion to Christianity under Spanish rule but also to gain a wry revenge against their historical

Figure 2.16

1942 drawing of a Native American as a Spanish Christian saint on a horse in a *moros y cristianos* production on Christmas day at San Felipe Pueblo. Anonymous artist.

From Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters. © The Michigan Academy of Science, Arts and Letters.



persecutors. These performances typically involve Indians on hobby-horses playing both groups of antagonists, with historic Native Americans on one side and Spaniards and “white” Americans on the other (Figure 2.16). Instead of dramatizing conquest and conversion, however, the performance points up the foolishness of the “whites,” who, in this revised version of *moros y cristianos*, flee a symbolic bull, portrayed by an Indian.

In 1598 when the Spanish conquerors first performed the dance drama, they understood the Native Americans as symbolic Moors, to be converted or exterminated. Today, in situations in which American Indians control and perform the dance, they have turned white soldiers, saints, and traders into the “low others” that Indians once had been.

Key references



Audio-visual references

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

For “Christians and Moors Festivals in Spain,” visit www.carnaval.com/spain/moors. Scroll down to subject. Click on the photograph.

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Early theatre in court, temple, and marketplace: Pleasure, power, and aesthetics

By Phillip B. Zarrilli

Chapter 2 focused primarily on the religious and socio-cultural contexts within which early forms of drama and theatre originated and were performed. In this chapter, we consider the aesthetics of performance, that is, the ways in which dramatic performances deliver particular kinds of pleasure(s) for particular audiences through dramatic and theatrical means. Any discussion of aesthetics necessarily involves an analysis of the cultural context, so we also consider the relations of certain kinds of social formations to certain theatrical pleasures. Different kinds of theatre were produced for an “elite” audience at court in fourteenth-century Japan and for the general public who gathered in the second century B.C.E. for a play in the marketplace adjacent to a Roman arena. Specific kinds of pleasures are enjoyed today by the devotees who participate in a public commemorative devotional drama in northern India, and by those who gather in a temple to witness a performance considered pleasing to a deity.

Where “interpretive communities” develop, we find specialized works that reflect on the structure, form, artistic techniques, and conventions of performance – that is to say, criticism. We consider in this chapter Aristotle’s *Poetics* (c.330 B.C.E.), Horace’s *Art of Poetry*

(Rome, c.19 B.C.E.), Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* (India, between the second century B.C.E. and the second century C.E.), the treatises on *nō* drama by Zeami (Japan, 1363–1443 C.E.), and the theory of theatre of Li Yu (China, 1611–1680?) in *Casual Notes in a Leisurely Mode* (*Xianqing ouji*, also known as *A Temporary Lodge for My Leisure Thoughts*, 1671).

A second manifestation of literary self-consciousness in such communities is when art forms themselves demonstrate an awareness of their artistry and conventions. Drama/theatre takes itself as an object by calling attention to its performance conventions. One example of a theatrical convention is the aside – a moment where an actor playing a specific role talks directly to the audience without other characters on stage being aware of the exchange. When theatre becomes conscious of its own conventions, it openly points to itself through asides, monologues, role-playing, eavesdropping, or the play-within-a-play, and such devices are non-illusionistic. As Niall Slater explains, “As the theatre games become ever cleverer and cleverer, the object of the audience’s admiration becomes the dramatic skill, not the illusion” (Slater 1985:15). As we shall see in this chapter, both the plays of the Roman playwright,

Plautus, and the Sanskrit dramas might be described as often “meta-theatrical” in so far as the theatrical performance is, at times, about theatre. Such reflexivity is exploited for its own (often comic) sake, and sometimes invites reflection on the culture.

In some historical societies, where there was wealth and hierarchical control that allowed for the sustained royal patronage of performance, we find the development of specialists – copyists, teachers, priests (keepers/interpreters of sacred texts), poets/dramatists, actors, dancers, musicians, and grammarians, or critics. In such (momentarily) stable contexts, artists were able to concentrate and reflect on the nuances of their artistry. Because court life often isolated powerful rulers from “the people,” this sometimes allowed the development of idiosyncratic behavior, the indulgence of particular likes and dislikes, and the creation of intricate networks of socio-political intrigue in which courtiers competed for influence and power within a court. Some arts or artists find favor and are promoted, while others fall out of favor and are censored or even banished.

We explore very different kinds of early theatre/performance in very different kinds of interpretive communities in this chapter – in the court, temple, and marketplace. We consider theatre/performance during the periods of the Roman Republic and Roman Empire, and the emergence of early literary and commemorative drama and theatre in India, China, and Japan. We will see here – as we did in Chapter 2 – that these cultures have in common their use of archaic, epic stories. In the hands of playwrights, familiar stories become “new” as they are transformed for changing audiences. Here, and in our case study on *kathakali* especially, we consider such changes in relation to the way societies change.

Drama, theatre, and performance in the Roman Republic and Empire

Greek drama and theatre were disseminated under Alexander the Great throughout the greater Mediterranean region during the fourth century B.C.E. By 300 B.C.E., theatres were to be found throughout all of

Greece. Actors became powerful public figures enlisted for political negotiations or as ambassadors, and some became wealthy. At the end of the fourth century, the choruses were put under the command and budget of a state official, the *agonothetes* – “arranger of contests.” This in effect meant both a more formal institutionalizing of the theatre and another step in the professionalizing of it – moving it further from its complex origins toward the interests of skilled presentation. In the bristling fifth century, the theatre had given expression to all the contestations of a dynamic, evolving civic and religious sphere. As the theatre began to be professionalized and the support of the choruses was institutionalized, the role of the community in engendering and producing Athenian dialogic drama seems to have effectively diminished.

The decline and defeat of Athens at the end of the long and agonizing Peloponnesian wars in 404 B.C.E., to which Athenian expansionism had contributed, virtually ended the era of Athenian Old Comedy, with its broad socio-political satire. Aristophanes and his successors could no longer lampoon generals and politicians. Old Comedy was replaced by domestic comedies (New Comedy) – exemplified in the work of the highly popular playwright, Menander (c.341–291 B.C.E.). What little we know of Menander’s output is from two complete or nearly complete plays – *The Bad-Tempered Man* and *The Woman of Samos* – and fragments of others (Figure 3.1). Their domestic plots focus on love affairs and family relationships, with somewhat generic characters, defined by gender, age, or class. Menander’s plays were considered at the time to reflect and speak to everyday social concerns. Aristophanes of Byzantium once commented, “O Menander and Life! Which of you imitated the other?” Clearly, the expectations of audiences in Athens and throughout Greece had changed from those informing fifth-century reception of Old Comedy.

Comedies in the Republic’s “marketplace”

When the Greek playwright, Philemon, died (c.263 B.C.E.), New Comedy did not develop further until it

was reinvented in Rome as *fabula palliata* – “plays in Greek dress” and Greek locations. Two Roman playwrights of note adapted Greek New Comedies from the previous 200 years for their Roman audiences: Titus Maccius Plautus (254–184 B.C.E.) and Publius Afer

Terence (195/185–157 B.C.E.). In the context of the Roman Republic (fourth century to mid-first century B.C.E.), drama was no longer dialogic as it had been in fifth-century Athens. Drama became one of many professional entertainments for consumption as part of



Figure 3.1

An image probably of the popular Menander, with three masks of Greek New Comedy: the mask of a young man (in his hand), and masks of a young woman and an older man or a comic slave. Marble relief sculpture of the first or second century, after a third-century B.C.E. work.

© 2004 The Trustees of Princeton Museum. Photo: Bruce M. White.

the festivities of public holidays known as *ludi* – “games” – the counterpart of the Greek festivals.

The largest of these, the *Ludi Romani* was held early in September to honor Jupiter. The Elder Tarquin (616–578 B.C.E.), the fifth of Rome’s seven legendary kings, is credited with its founding. Many additional *ludi* were later added, including festivals in other months in honor of Flora, Jupiter, and Apollo. While the Greek festivals had celebrated specific deities with specific kinds of events, such as the plays celebrating Dionysus at the City Dionysia or the athletic games performed in honor of Zeus at Olympus, the Roman *ludi* were eclectic, including a variety of games and entertainments. Chariot and horse racing were among the earliest events, followed by boxing, gladiatorial contests (264 B.C.E.), and dramatic performances (240 B.C.E.).

Ludi were also held to celebrate great funerals, birthdays, or state occasions, such as military victories. Romans worshiped a conglomeration of indigenous deities such as the great Jupiter and deities borrowed from Greek and oriental cultures. To find favor with these deities, worship was undertaken by a special priesthood using rituals that were legalistic and magical. A college of priests developed a complex system to foretell the future, read omens, and practice augury – reading signs revealed in the viscera of freshly sacrificed animals.

It was at the *Ludi Romani* in the mid-fourth century that plays (*ludi scaenici*) were first presented as part of the festival. The first play was produced as part of the *Ludi Romani* in 240 B.C.E., authored by the former Greek slave, Livius Andronicus. All of his comedies and tragedies were reworkings of Greek plays – adaptations or translations. Andronicus seems to have been unique among Roman authors in that he produced and acted in all his plays.

Along with adaptations of Greek comedies and tragedies, mimes (*mimos*) were also popular. Mime originated in Syracuse and was performed as early as the fourth century B.C.E. in Athens. Featuring both men and women as performers in masks, mime used monologue, dialog, dance, song, and skills such as

acrobatics to elaborate on everyday scenes or on incidents derived from mythology. While the plays could rely on plot devices and characterization of masked actors to sustain interest, the worldless performer or mime relied on his/her expressive physical abilities.

Plautus transformed Greek New Comedy beginning with his first production in 205 B.C.E. by bringing to his adaptations some of the conventions of indigenous Italian performance, especially those of the southern Italian tradition of the Atellan farce (*fabulae atellanae*). These were improvised from simple core narratives, with easily recognizable stock characters weaving together jokes and comical stage business. An audience would expect an old man to oppose his son’s amorous adventures and the slave to cleverly thwart his old master. Both early Atellan farces and Plautus’s dramas were performed on temporarily constructed wooden stages set up for each *ludi*. This simple playing space was not bound by a realistic depiction of locale or space; it could represent a harbor front or a street. A scene building backed the playing space, and the three openings in it serviced many different plots. Actors wore masks for all performances, and music played an important role, especially in Plautus’s plays (see Figure 3.10).

Because dramatic performances took place in the context of public games, Roman playwrights had to write plays that captured the attention of a popular audience. This is exemplified in the prolog to Plautus’s *Poenulus*. An actor steps on the stage and directly addresses the raucous audience:

Hush and be silent and pay attention; that you listen is the order of the general-manager, that both those who have come hungry and those who have come well-filled may cheerfully be seated on the benches. Those of you who have eaten have done much more wisely, but you who haven’t eaten can have your fill of the play. . . . Arise, Herald, order the people to be silent. . . . Let no worn out harlot sit in front of the stage, or the lector or his rods make a sound, nor the usher roam about in front of people or show

anyone to a seat while the actor is on the stage. Those who have had a long leisurely nap at home should now cheerfully stand, or at least refrain from sleeping. Keep slaves from occupying the seats, that there be room for free men, or let them pay money for their freedom. If they can't do that, let them go home and avoid a double misfortune – being raked with rods here, and with whips at home if their masters return and find they haven't done their work.

(Duckworth 1941: I, 727–728)

This passage reveals how the Roman state/religious festival context was in essence a “marketplace” where the increasingly wide variety of popular entertainments offered had to vie for the short attention span of its mass public.

The era of the mid-Republic during which Plautus wrote has been described as conservative in the extreme. Spartan, puritanical, and moralistic “blue law” legislation, as well as official and semi-official educational propaganda, all attempted to constrain behavior and encourage a return to virtues of the past. The ancient virtues embedded in restrictive laws were founded on “the way of the fathers” (*mos maiorum*) and clearly shaped the expectations of Roman audiences. Looking to legends of the past that embodied virtues such as honor, dignity, and uprightness, Romans were expected to subordinate their individual personalities to the larger social good.

The male head of each family (*pater familias*) held absolute power over members of his household legally. In 340 B.C.E., Manlius Torquatus had his son executed for disobeying orders during the Great Latin War, even though his son's unauthorized attack resulted in military victory. Every Roman institution operated as a sacred patriarchy, and each family was a state in miniature. Two types of behavior shaped and constrained Roman males during the Republican period: *pietas* and *gravitas*. *Pietas* is usually translated as “respect for elders,” but also implies respect for authority, loyalty of wife to the husband, and devotion to the gods. Usually translated

as “dignity,” *gravitas* is a weighty quality, ideally manifest in behavior that is sober and enduring.

Plautus's comedies, known primarily for the fast traffic of their comic plots and low antic business, are also interesting because they turn patriarchal order and *gravitas* on their heads, as we will see in the case study following this chapter. Those with the least power in the Roman hierarchy – slaves, wives, and sons – are often those who win out (albeit the stakes are not large). The reference to the rod and whippings for slaves in the prolog to *Poenulus* cited above reflects the reality that Roman slaves were the lowest among the low in Roman society – objects with no rights who could be tortured or killed. In Plautus's plays, the clever slave often outsmarts his master.

The later comedies authored by Terence – who had been a slave brought to Rome from northern Africa and educated by a wealthy family – were more constrained than those of Plautus. From his first production in 166 B.C.E., Terence followed the model of the Greek comedies, with four of his six extant plays based on Menander's. He probably appealed to a more cosmopolitan strain of the Roman audience. His characters were less in the vein of stock types and drawn with somewhat more dimension than those of Plautus. Terence's language is often elegant and witty. In his six extant plays, he often combines plots and characters from several Greek comedies into one play with nuanced action.

In spite, or perhaps because of this, Terence at times had trouble holding the attention of his Roman audience. At the first performance of *Hecyra*, written for the *Ludi Megalenses* in 165 B.C.E., the audience left to go and see the rope dancers. At a second staging, they left to see the gladiators fight. In these two instances at least, Terence was not competing well with other more popular entertainments in the Roman marketplace. Others of his plays were more successful. His plays became important in Latin education in the medieval period and informed the development of drama and performance during the early Renaissance.

The well-known politician, philosopher, and teacher Lucius Annaeus Seneca (5/4 B.C.E.–65 C.E.) authored

nine tragedies loosely based on Greek originals, including his *Medea*, *Phaedra*, *Oedipus*, *Agamemnon*, and *Thyestes*. Informed by the late Roman version of stoicism, which taught self-sufficiency and the avoidance of high emotion, his plays are characterized by instances of sensational violence and horror. Although the issue is open to debate, it is likely that Seneca's plays were not staged, but written for recitation at small, elite gatherings. As important as Terence to the Renaissance, Seneca's philosophical essays and plays influenced Montaigne and Shakespeare respectively.

Imperial spectacles

The powerful patriarchy operating throughout the Roman Republic eventually gave way to a centralized authoritarian state with the establishment of the Roman Empire in 27 B.C.E., when Caesar Octavian received the honorific title of Augustus. Absolute power was surrendered by noble/landed families to a now all-powerful emperor, later called the father of the country (*pater*

patriae). The service due to one's family was now to be extended to the state.

Immediately before the advent of Empire, in the period of the late Republic, dramatic performances increasingly depended on spectacle to create their impact, sponsored by wealthy men who sought to enhance their reputations through these public (self-)presentations. By the end of the first century B.C.E., both comedy and tragedy ceased to be viable dramatic forms that could be used by new writers to reflect new sensibilities or to create a dialogic encounter with issues of immediate concern or recent history. They were replaced by spectacular re-stagings of extant dramas, or alternative forms of popular entertainments, often including bloody contests – all of which reflected both the hierarchical ordering and expansive power at the center of empire.

Rome's first permanent theatre was built by Pompey the Great in 55 B.C.E. (Figure 3.2). This grand building sat 20,000 spectators and featured a stage 300 ft in width, backed by an architecturally elaborated three-story

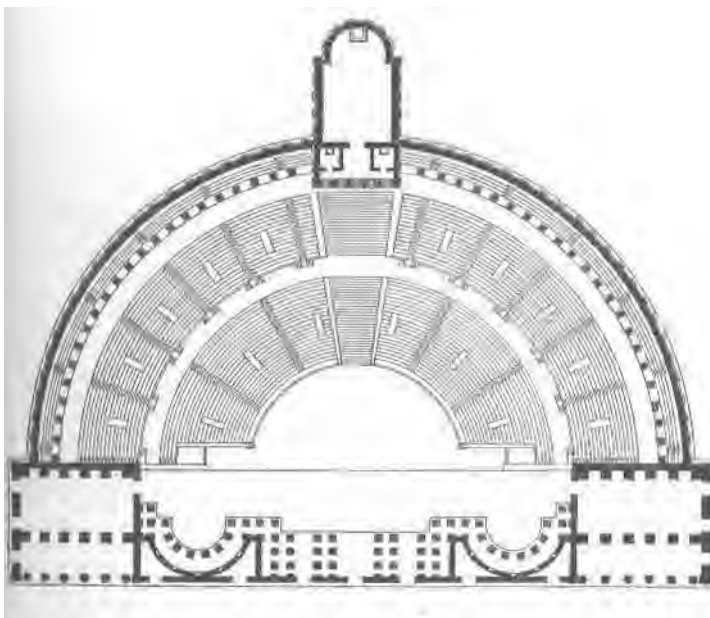


Figure 3.2

Ground plan of the Theatre of Pompey (55 B.C.E.), Rome, as reconstructed in the Renaissance. Connected to the rear of this theatre was an enormous public plaza with open colonnaded structures, which the Greeks had called a *stoa*.

Source: Margarete Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1961, p.181.

façade (*scaenae frons*), decorated with statues.  It was constructed less to serve the art of drama than to be a highly visible platform where Pompey (and subsequent rulers) could preside over the gathered populace, displaying his authority and the grandeur of Empire. With the decline of new dramatic writing, it was an artistic anachronism. A large temple was incorporated into the outer wall of the auditorium (*cavea*) for Venus Victrix, perhaps so the goddess could oversee each spectacle or perhaps because this allowed Pompey to build a permanent theatre at a time when, for legalistic religious reasons, theatres were usually erected temporarily for special occasions and then dismantled. In any case, the religious purpose of the *ludi* to honor Venus Victrix seems by this point to have been purely vestigial.

In addition to the revival of tragedies and comedies, both mime and a relatively new art called pantomime were popular in the early Empire. In pantomime, a chorus and/or musicians accompanied a solo, non-speaking actor (in a mask with a closed mouth), who played all the roles in a lavishly staged myth or the re-staging of a drama. A young boy, Paris, who was the Emperor Nero's favorite pantomime dancer, was reportedly put to death by him because he was so much better a dancer than the Emperor. In the second century C.E., Lucian wrote of pantomime:

You will find that his is no easy profession, nor lightly to be undertaken; requiring as it does the highest standard of culture in all its branches, and involving a knowledge not of music only, but of rhythm and meter, and above all of your beloved philosophy, both natural and moral . . . The pantomime is above all things an actor; that is his first aim, in the pursuit of which he resembles the orator, and especially the composer of declamations, whose success, as the pantomime knows, depends like his own upon verisimilitude, upon the adaptation of language to character: prince or tyrannicide, pauper or farmer, each must be shown with the peculiarities that belong to him. (Nagler 1952:28–29)

Pantomime and mime artists were often controversial figures denied citizenship (as were all actors), but nevertheless they gained a large public following and were treated as stars. When Julius Caesar served as dictator of Rome (48–45 B.C.E.), the noted producer and actor of mime, Laberius, was called out of retirement by Caesar himself to celebrate Caesar's victories. When Laberius appeared as a beaten slave in one mime performance, he was bold enough to say on stage, "Henceforth, O citizens, we have lost our liberty!" When Laberius reportedly said, "He must fear many, whom many fear," it is reported that the entire audience of 20,000 turned to see Caesar's reaction to Laberius's words. While Caesar awarded the palm of victory for acting to Laberius's rival, Publius Syrus, he nevertheless treated Laberius genially and tolerantly.

Such was not often the case with the increasingly popular and bloody spectacles taking place in specially built circuses. Circus Maximus was built during the second century B.C.E. in Rome. After it was destroyed by fire, when reconstructed in 200 C.E. it had a seating capacity of 250,000. Spectacles included chariot racing, animal fights (*venationes*), gladiatorial contests (*munera*), and *naumachiae* – the staging of sea fights based upon episodes from Greek history. The games were free – all citizens had a right to attend. Roman passions ran high when it came to chariot racing, with teams easily identifiable by their colors (red, green, white, and blue), with chariots pulled by two, four or more horses. Passions could run high at the races and even boiled over, leading to violent clashes between opposing supporters.

Gladiatorial contests, animal fights, and sea battles were competitions where blood freely flowed. Gladiatorial contests (*munera*, literally meaning "debt" or "obligation") originally took place as a "ritual response to the death of prominent members of the community" and therefore took place at tombs of dead patricians to pacify their spirits (Plass 1998:17). When incorporated into public games, gladiatorial combat became institutionalized. Gladiators were most often slaves, prisoners of war or criminals. They were schooled in specialist forms of combat – some heavily armed wearing

helmets, others lightly armed with sword and shield, and still others with net, dagger, and trident – all fighting to the death.

Animal fights included animals pitted against armed men, animals fighting animals, and men and women exposed to animals that had been starved – such as individuals tied to a stake who were wheeled into an arena in which a hungry lion had been set loose. During the reign of Augustus Caesar, 3,500 animals were killed in the course of 26 different festivals. To celebrate the completion of the Coliseum in 80 C.E., 9,000 animals were killed in such games.

One of the sea battles (*naumachia*) staged in 46 B.C.E. and commissioned by Julius Caesar re-enacted the battle between Tyre and Egypt on an artificial lake in Rome. In 52 C.E., Claudius staged a fight between Rhodes and Sicily using 19,000 prisoners.

Historian Paul Plass's analysis of the Roman games can help us understand how and why such massive public bloodshed with the "hideous damage done to men or animals" had both social and symbolic meaning. The games and their bloody entertainments allowed daily "routines to be routinely broken" at festival time (Plass 1998:10). The "intensity and scale" of violence allowed them to seem extraordinary. The public nature of the games allowed extreme violence to become the norm. Since they were mass public events, probably no individual felt responsibility for the lethal spectacles taking place. Rather, all citizens present participated in a new and separate "mass identity" (1998:17). The violence of these "sports" allowed an overt expression of both a sense of "power and gratification at survival" (1998: 31). The spectators were as important as the spectacle in that "their attendance in great numbers at a public event *was* the show in a political and social sense" (1998: 43). Therefore, the games proclaimed the fruits of building the Empire, the breadth of its world conquest, and the extent of its prosperity. The very extravagance of the games demonstrates an excess of "conspicuous consumption" that was fed by "copious supplies of [human and animal] blood." The games were a form of political capital serving to demonstrate the

"unrestrained power" of the Emperor and the state (1998:48).

By the end of the Roman Empire, although performances ostensibly still took place in a religious/festival context to honor the Roman deities, the worship of the gods was vestigial. The huge theatres and circuses of the Roman Empire had become a mass "marketplace" – a public space/place where the voracious appetite for what can please the public most, and please it most easily, was fed.

The Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312, and by the early fifth century, there was some decline in the more excessive blood spectacles. The games and the theatre had long been opposed by the growing Christian community. By the end of the second century, the Christian writer Tertullian had urged Christians to look instead to the spectacle of the church. In 398, the church decreed excommunication for anyone going to the theatre rather than church on holy days. Actors were forbidden the sacraments unless they renounced their profession, a decree that remained in force down through Molière's lifetime and into the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, Roman *ludi* continued, with festivals in the fourth century lasting as much as 100 days. With the economic and political decay of the Empire and its division into independent parts, ruled by Rome and Constantinople, a weakened Rome fell in 476. The last record of a Roman theatre performance is dated 549 C.E.

Indian literary and commemorative drama and theatre

If fifth-century Athens produced the earliest examples of literary drama, the Indian subcontinent was a second location where multiple types of both literary and commemorative drama flourished. The early history of drama in India is difficult to reconstruct, but one source of early dramatic activity no doubt originated in the variety of early forms of story-telling, such as picture-recitation (see Chapter 1), which developed from antiquity. *Kathā* is the Sanskrit word for "story," most

often understood as something “which is true” – that is, a story involving consequences that reverberate throughout cosmic history. The Sanskrit root, *kath*, means to “converse with, tell, relate, narrate, speak about, explain.” *Kathā* then might be better translated as “telling or narration” (Lutgendorf 1991:115). Listening to interesting and inspiring stories told, narrated, sung, and/or enacted was a common practice from the early Vedic period. Learned teller-scholars have long offered discourses on the meaning of a story as part of each telling/singing. The legacy of story-performance is still very much alive today in numerous genres that exist across the sub-continent such as Tamil Nadu’s *Kathākālakṣepa* – literally “spending time listening to stories.”

These “stories that matter” might be classified today as “myths,” “epics,” or “tales,” but any *kathā* that matters carries its own important “truth,” and therefore is understood as needing to be heard. Some of India’s greatest “stories” that became important sources for playwrights composing literary or commemorative dramas are the two great pan-Indian epics known as the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, and the *pūrāṇas* – specific collections of traditional stories, lore, wisdom, genealogy, and techniques, gathered into books at a certain time in history impossible to pinpoint precisely. For neither the *Mahabharata* nor the *Ramayana* is there a single authoritative version. Rather, each region of India possesses its own version in the regional language. Valmiki’s Sanskrit version of the *Ramayana*, dating from between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E., is held in the highest regard, but it is only one of many Sanskrit versions. When regional languages developed, Valmiki’s Sanskrit version was replaced with easily accessible vernacular versions. The *Mahabharata* is eight times the length of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* combined, and it dates back to at least the mid-first millennium B.C.E. Many other compendiums of stories exist, such as the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, or “An Ocean of Streams of Stories,” a Sanskrit compilation by Soma of 22,000 stanzas (c.1063–1081 C.E.). This storehouse of myths, epics, and tales is the primary resource authors began to mine when literary and commemorative dramas were invented.

The story of the origins of drama and the Nāṭyaśāstra

The fact that stories have always mattered in India is nowhere better seen than in the story of the origins of drama and theatre contained in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* – an encyclopedic work on all aspects of drama (*nāṭya*) attributed to the sage, Bharata, authored or collected between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. It is unclear if the author, “Bharata,” was a single historical person, an assumed name, a name representing a school of thought/practice, or an acronym in which the first syllable, *Bhā* stood for *bhāva*, the states of being/doing embodied by the actors (Vatsyayan 1996:6). Whoever he was, the author/compiler was an accomplished, modest practitioner/theorist following a lineage of practice: “I am not able by any means to exhaust all the topics about drama; for knowledge, and arts and crafts connected with it are respectively manifold and endless in number.” Although focused primarily on theatre, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* became the authoritative sourcebook for subsequent practice and aesthetic theory in all India’s arts, including literature, music, architecture, painting, and sculpture.

The story of the origin of drama relates how Indra organized a group of the gods to approach the creator, Lord Brahma, to request that he create a pastime that would provide all manner of people with visual as well as auditory pleasures. Brahma accepted their argument, and, using his yogic powers, resolved to add to the four existing Vedas – books of hymns sacred to the Hindus – a fifth. This Veda was on

the *Nāṭya* [drama] with the Semi-historical Tales (*īthāsa*), which will conduce to duty (*dharma*), wealth (*artha*) as well as fame, will give guidance to people of the future as well in all their actions, will be enriched by the teaching of all authoritative works (*śāstras*), and will give a review of all arts and crafts (1:15).

(Ghosh 1967:1)

It is thought that when Brahma created the Veda of drama, he gave this gift to the sage, Bharata, and gave

his hundred sons the task of putting this form into practice. Drama was to represent people from all walks of life and be accessible to all. Its aim was to educate and teach by dramatizing stories that could hold people's attention through their depiction of the experiences of life in all its diversity, from war to sexual sensuality. It was

to offer "good counsel" and "guidance to people" (Ghosh 1967:2–3; 14–15). A performance was to result in an ideal aesthetic experience in which an audience would "taste" (*rasa*) the states of being/doing (*bhāva*) conveyed by the characters. The term *nāṭya* usually translated as "drama," does not mean, then, simply the

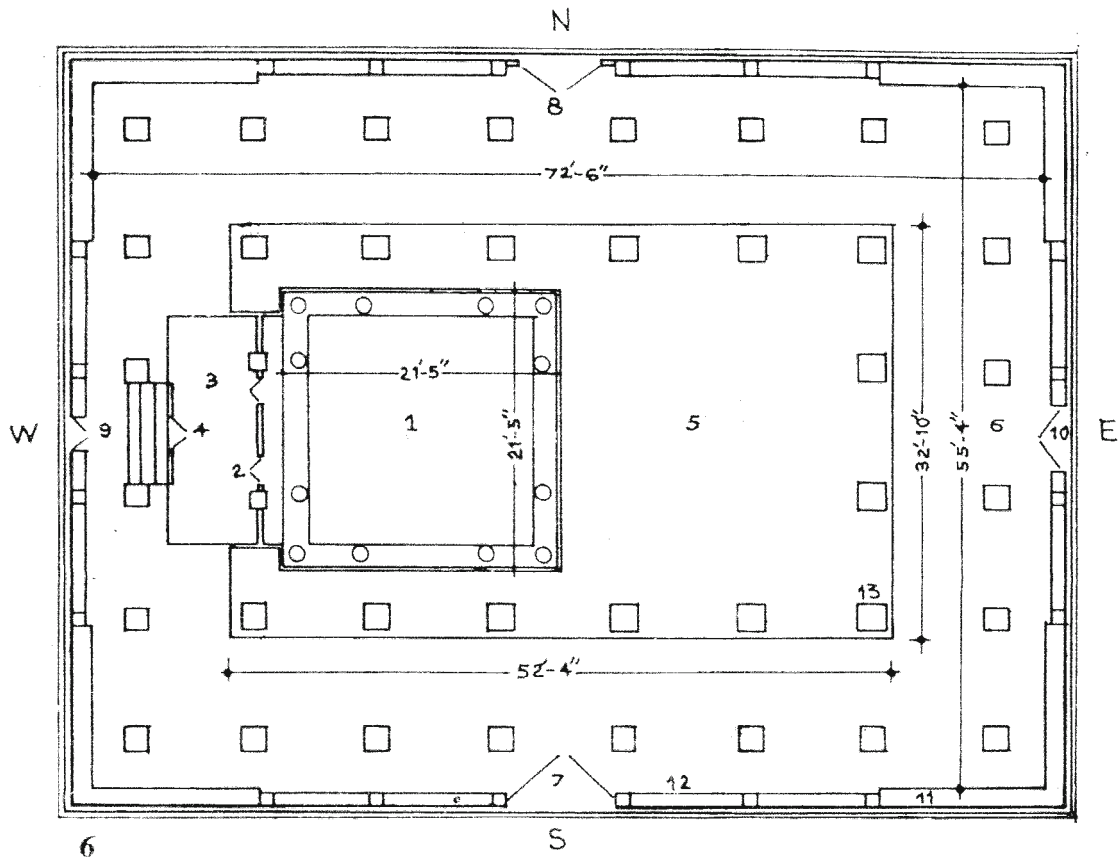


Figure 3.3

Floor plan of a playhouse for Sanskrit theatre in India, as described by Bharata in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, to be constructed on a consecrated piece of land on an East–West axis, and divided into equal halves for dressing room and acting areas. The audience is to be seated on the floor or a raked bank of seats in the east half.

Source: Line drawing. After Sketch No. 3, p.47 in Tarla Mehta, *Sanskrit Play Production in Ancient India* (1995) New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U.A. Bungalow Rd., Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 100 007.

written dramatic text. Rather, *nāṭya* embraces all aspects of dramatic production through which artists skillfully embody the work and provide an audience with an aesthetic experience.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* is the single most important source we have on the early history of Indian drama and theatre. As with many “authoritative” texts dating from antiquity, no manuscripts exist from the period of its composition. The earliest extant version dates from 1,000 years or more later. Today scholars construct editions from 52 different copies. Nevertheless, as a *śāstra* it is still considered an authoritative guide to both the theory and practice of theatre, just as *śāstras* are authoritative in other fields of practice such as medicine or architecture. Its 36 chapters classify and describe in minute detail every aspect of production necessary for an acting company to achieve success. It traces the origins of drama and explains how to construct an appropriate theatre building (Figure 3.3). It explains how to worship the gods prior to performance, discusses types of plays, and provides a guide to playwriting, including rules governing metrical patterns and prosody. It provides instruction in costuming and make-up and in the types of characters and the behavior appropriate to each. It categorizes and describes movement and gesture and the internal methods of acting the moods and states of being of characters. Although the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is considered authoritative by some, the text is unknown to practitioners of many traditional genres of Indian theatre. In this chapter’s case study on a south Indian regional style of performing Sanskrit dramas (*kutiyattam*) even where the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is known, practitioners have not necessarily followed what is described or prescribed in this “sacred,” authoritative text. Like other *śāstras*, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* is honored as a divine gift, like a respected elder, but not slavishly imitated.

Early Sanskrit dramas

Sanskrit is a highly melodic language within the Indo-Aryan language subgroup closely related to Latin, Greek and most European languages. As discussed in Chapter 1, the earliest Sanskrit texts date back some 3,000 years to

the oldest collection of Hindu hymns, the *Rg Veda*. The earliest Hindu sacred texts, as well as dramas and the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, were composed in Sanskrit. Reflecting the social hierarchy of the period, Sanskrit dramas use Sanskrit only for high-status male characters, while all women, children, men of inferior status, and the stock comic character (*Vīḍusaka*) speak in varieties of *Prakrits* – dialects evolved from Sanskrit.

Of the many types of Sanskrit dramas, the best known are heroic dramas, such as *Sākuntala* by Kalidasa (c.100 B.C.E.–C.E. 400), a seven-act play based on well known epic sources; invented dramas such as *The Little Clay Cart* by Sudraka (active sometime between the third and sixth century C.E.); and minor forms such as one-act farces. Regardless of type, Sanskrit dramas follow a set of conventions. All begin with an invocation (*nandī*), followed by a prolog, and conclude with a benedictory prayer. The prolog is in effect a metatheatrical playlet in which the *Sutradhara* – the leader of the company of actors who often played the leading male role – engages with another actor in a brief conversation that foreshadows the plot and reflects upon the characters and the theatrical conventions of the performance to come.

More than 500 Sanskrit dramas exist today. Their language alternates between simple prose and ornate verse in a variety of meters. Both are chanted and/or sung to musical accompaniment, though perhaps some small prose sections may be spoken. The purpose of the verse passages is not to carry forward the narrative, but to allow reflection, commentary, and a deepening of the state of mind of the main character(s).

Sanskrit dramas intended for performance are known as *nīpaka*. *Rūpa* literally means “form,” and *nīpaka* specifically refers to a form of poetry meant for representation on stage as opposed to poetic forms intended only for hearing or reading. While these dramas have characters and plots, the focus is on how the *performance* produces a satisfying aesthetic experience pleasing for its ideal audience of connoisseurs.

Like their Greek counterparts, when Indian playwrights dealt with traditional stories drawn from epic and puranic sources, they used their imaginations to

reinvent and reinterpret each traditional story. Authored some time in the fourth century C.E., Bhasa's one act drama, *The Breaking of Thighs (Urubhangam)*, is based on a story in the *Mahabharata*. In the epic itself, the leader of the Kauravas, Duryodhana, is the primary force for unleashing tremendous conflict and therefore "evil" in the struggle for supremacy between two sets of warring cousins. However, in the play, Bhasa creates a Duryodhana who is the central sympathetic character of the play and serves as a vehicle for the audience's aesthetic experience of *rasa* – the pleasure of "tasting" the various aesthetic sentiments that live theatre offers.

Early troupes and performances, patronized by the courts, were also often part of religious festivals. Ideally, performances took place in specially constructed theatres (see Figure 3.3) or in halls at court, intimate enough for the nuances of an actor-dancer's performance to be appreciated. The stage was conventionally assumed by audience and actors to be divided into zones. Actors moving from one part of the stage to another indicated a shift in locale. This convention also allowed the action to shift back and forth between two groups of actors on stage.

The earliest indication of the art of acting is recorded in Panini's *Astādhyāyī*, c.500 B.C.E. Given the highly developed nature of dramaturgy and performance practice recorded in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* it is safe to assume that early literary drama and the conventions and aesthetics governing its performance developed between 500 and 200 B.C.E. Highly professional companies included male and female performers specializing in specific role-types, led by a male manager/actor (*sutradhara*).

As described in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* actors followed a rigorous training regime that included a special diet, full body massages, yoga, and extensive training in "dance postures, physical exercise . . . [and] rhythm" (Kale 1974:57–58). Actors trained rigorously in order to embody each role mentally and physically and thereby "carry forward" (*abhinaya*) the appropriate experience for an audience to "taste." Their regimen included training in body movement, the language of hand-gestures,

voice, emotional expression, and costumes and make-up. Actors learned physical vocabularies for representing both the ordinary things in nature – for the miming of a deer – and for abstract concepts. The Indian actor's body was to become a vehicle through which the performance of each role allowed the audience to "taste" the experience. Emphasis was on developing fourfold expression in bodily movement, including hand gestures, vocal expression, inner expressivity of emotions, and external aspects, especially important being costumes and make-up since scenery was minimal.

The decline of Sanskrit theatre, the birth of kutiyattam and other popular regional forms of performance

By the ninth and tenth centuries C.E. Sanskrit theatre reached its zenith in most of India. Gradually, there was more scholarly debate about the art than actual theatrical practice of it. As the active use of Sanskrit became increasingly restricted to priestly castes and as the dialects (*Prakrits*) died out and were no longer understood, new forms of regional performance using regional languages replaced the staging of Sanskrit dramas. Oddly enough, just as Sanskrit theatre performances declined in most of India, around 900 C.E. in the far southwest coastal region of Kerala a distinctive style of staging Sanskrit dramas known as *kutiyattam* ("combined acting") emerged under the patronage and direct involvement of King Kulasekhara Varman. As discussed in a case study later in this chapter (see p. 133), this highly literate and poetic style of staging Sanskrit dramas began to deviate from the norms governing early performance of Sanskrit dramas as explained in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.  In spite of its deviation from the norm, *kutiyattam* continues to be performed today for a small elite, learned audience of connoisseurs.

Although Sanskrit drama died out in most of India, elements of its literary, poetic, aesthetic, and performance legacy are manifest in many unique forms of popular regional theatre that emerged much later between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One of many such

regional genres is Kerala's *kathakali* dance-drama which is performed in a highly Sanskritized form of the local language, Malayalam. The content of its dramas is based on India's epics and collections of stories. Although *kathakali* developed under the patronage of local rulers and wealthy landholders and follows many of the conventions of the earlier tradition of Sanskrit drama staged in the *kutiyattam* style, its performances were traditionally held in temporarily defined public spaces accessible to its more broad-based, popular audience. As discussed in detail in the case study in this chapter, performances of *kathakali* took place in the virtual marketplace just outside local Hindu temples during annual festivals. (The case studies following this chapter list video sources for *kathakali* and *kutiyattam*.)

Commemorative devotional drama

Kutiyattam and *kathakali* are part of the direct legacy of Sanskrit literary drama and theatre. They are patronized by relatively small, elite audiences interested in enhancing their aesthetic experience of performance. In contrast are the early Indian commemorative devotional dramas that are performed for mass, popular audiences. Devotional dramas allow devotees immediate access to an encounter with one of many specific manifestations of the divine – an experience sometimes described as *bhakti rasa* – an aesthetic experience of deep devotion that is a creative interpretation of the *rasa* aesthetic.

We examine here one of many commemorative devotional dramas, North India's *Rāmlīlā* – an enormously popular, pluralistic form of open-air performance that re-enacts episodes from the life of Ram. Its present form is attributed to a disciple of the poet Tulsidas about 1625. *Līlā* literally means an act of cosmic or divine “play,” that is, a moment when the divine interacts with the human world. In the case of *Rāmlīlā* and its earlier quasi-dramatic precursors, the divine's vehicle for this interaction is Ram (or Rama) – one of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu (the preserver of the universe). The story of Ram is recorded in the various versions of the epic mentioned above, the *Ramayana*, and since its first telling, the *Ramayana* has

been a source for performance. The earliest evidence for worship of Vishnu (as Ram or Krishna, etc.) in the region of Uttar Pradesh, North India, is established in legend. The first direct citation of this fact is from Greek geographers drawing on documents of the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. Norvein Hein (1972) postulates that the earliest forerunners of today's immensely popular *Rāmlīlā* were dramatizations of parts of the *Ramayana* under royal patronage during the early centuries C.E. One early text, the *Harivamsa* (no later than 400 C.E.), relates how part of the *Ramayana* was sung by a background chorus while actor-dancers in the foreground danced/enacted the story. Hein suggests that this early form of dance-drama eventually died out in North India under Muslim rule (1200–1500) but that elements of the early performance were still reflected in the rebirth of devotional drama during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the popular Bhakti devotional movement swept across north India (Hein: 1972:124).

We focus here on the relatively late but extant *Rāmlīlā* tradition as it emerged after 1625. Since Vaishnavite concern is with creating a devotional experience in which a devotee enters into “the fabric of mythic narrative” (Lutgendorf 1991:251), *Rāmlīlā* has become a highly participatory form of drama. It draws millions of pilgrim-devotees from across India – especially the north and central regions. In the very geographical location where it is assumed that Lord Rama was born (Ayodhya) and lived in the distant past, *Rāmlīlā* re-enacts the trials and tribulations of Ram. Some performances last three to five days and others for over a month. Audiences can exceed one hundred thousand – including not only Hindus, but also minority Muslims and Christians. Performances culminate with the festival of Dussehra in which an effigy of the evil ten-headed demon-king, Ravana, is burned – a spectacular celebration of the victory of good over evil (see Figure 3.4). The vast majority of these are based upon the lengthy poem, *Rāmcharitamānas*, authored by the poet Tulsidas (1532–1623), in a special local dialect of the regional vernacular – Hindi. The performances are done by amateur casts under the sponsorship of wealthy patrons.



Figure 3.4

Ravana, the ten-headed demon-king as an effigy as part of the Ramnagar *Rāmlīlā*.

Photo © Richard Schechner.

In contrast to the highly decorative mode of composition of Sanskrit poetry still in use at the time he wrote, Tulsidas authored his version of the *Ramayana* in accessible language. He records the moment he began composing his version of the story:

Now reverently bowing my head to Shiva
I narrate the spotless saga of Ram's deeds.
In this year 1631 I tell the tale,
laying my head at the Lord's feet.
On Tuesday, the ninth of the gentle month,
in the city of Avadh, these acts are revealed.
1.34.3–5 (Lutgendorf 1991:8)

In performance, Tulsidas's version of Ram's story is mapped onto the specific geographical locations understood to be dear to Lord Ram, so in effect, "the pageant came to express notions of cosmography and pilgrimage that aim at reclaiming and transforming the mundane world" (Lutgendorf 1991:255). The entire year becomes "for sadhus and other mobile devotees, a series of pilgrimages that re-enact the Lord's own movements and bring worshipers to the sites at which they re-experience his salvific deeds" (1991:250). Therefore, for Vivah Pancham – the celebration of Ram and Sita's wedding anniversary – the ideal site is pilgrimage to Mithila (Janakpur) in Nepal. The pilgrims able to travel there "identify themselves as members of Ram's . . . wedding

party, and they trade humorous insults with the people of the bride's hometown" (1991:250). All *Rāmlīlās* involve the re-enactment of specific events from Ram's life and role-playing. Some are brief, while others are elaborated at length.

On the marriage day in Ayodhya . . . wedding processions mounted by major temples wind through the city for hours. They consist of lampbearers, drummers and shehnai players, "English-style" marching bands (all requisites of a modern North Indian wedding), and of course the bridegrooms – Ram and his three brothers – astride horses or riding in ornate carriages. The grooms are usually *svarups* – young Brahman boys impersonating deities [Figure 3.5]. But a few processions feature temple images borne on palanquins. After receiving the homage of devotees before whose homes and shops they briefly halt, the processions return to their sponsoring establishments, where a marriage ceremony is performed. The crowds of devotees attending these rites are not merely spectators; they are encouraged to take the roles of members of the wedding party.

(Lutgendorf 1991:251)

At the most famous re-enactment at Ramnagar near the city of Banaras, after a special set of offerings is given

Figure 3.5

A *Rāmlīlā* *svarup* on Hanuman's shoulders. Such young pre-pubescent boys play the holiest roles of Ram and Sita in performances where they are worshiped as the gods.

Photo © Sam Schechner.



(*pūjā*), Tulsidas's version of Ram's sacred story is chanted/sung in its entirety by a group of 12 men known as Ramayanis. They are accompanied by a *mṛdaṅgam* drum. A prescribed number of couplets are sung daily. Only on the tenth day of recitation do the Ramayanis arrive at couplet 175 when the *Rāmīlīlā* re-enactment of scenes per se begins. Their singing is then incorporated into the larger context of the *līlā*, and continues until they reach the last book of the *Rāmacharitamānasa*, when the *līlā* ends. But the recitation of the full text is not complete, so the Ramayanis continue their quiet reading until each word of the text has been read so that the final ritual passing of a flame (*aarti*) is held in Ayodhya, closing the full performance of 30–32 days.

Since the text is chanted, the actors do not simply recite the text of the drama, but rather, like the dancers of old, they “bring to life and . . . interpret the words of the recitation” (Hein 1972:124). All actors are males, with the roles of Sita, Ram, and his brother taken by prepubescent boys. They are worshiped as divine embodiments of those they impersonate (see Figure 3.5). Other characters such as Hanuman the monkey king who helps Ram and the ten-headed demon-king Ravana, wear masks, and all the performers are amateurs. Some actors of a specific *Rāmīlīlā* claim that their roles are inherited within their families, such as one actor playing the role of Ravana in 1990 who claimed the role had been in his family since the time of Ishvari Prasad Narayan Singh (1835–1889). The performance style is a combination of wordless tableaux and processional drama, in which actors move from place to place with occasional dialog that most of the devotees will not hear. Some locations are specially constructed for a *līlā* while others are actual landmarks in the town.

A deep, personal piety and devotion is at the heart of the *Rāmīlīlā*, and motivates devotees to participate annually. The heartland of *Rāmīlīlā* enactments is in the Banaras region where it is presumed the tradition was born, and the most famous dates from the nineteenth century under the sponsorship of the royal house of Banaras, where the Maharaja and Rama become “mirror

images of each other, the twin heroes of the Ramnagar Ramlila” (Schechner and Hess 1977:74). In modern, secular, democratic India the identification of the Maharaja as upholder of the cosmos is a vestige of the past. Since Indian independence, kings no longer have any political power at all.

The staging of *Rāmīlīlā* for mass audiences is, however, not simply a devotional experience. Given the thousands of pilgrims who inundate locales where the *Rāmīlīlā* is staged, the area of its staging becomes an economically important marketplace for traders and vendors. Wherever festival performances are held, and whoever patronizes such performances, pilgrim/devotees must be fed and provided for. Local merchants are more than happy to accommodate the influx of pilgrims.

In 1987–1988, the extraordinarily popular Indian television serialization of the “Ramayan” was based primarily on Tulsidas's version. Hindu nationalists have recently recast Ram's kingship as a narrowly militant ideology that excludes minority Muslims and Christians who used to attend the *Rāmīlīlās* in large numbers.

Early Chinese and Japanese drama, theatre, and performance

Song, dance, and impersonation central to Siberian-type shamanism in Korea constituted some of the earliest archaic forms of ritual and performance in pre-literate China and Japan (see Chapter 1). In China, male and female shamans date from before the Zhou dynasty (1027–256 B.C.E.). Early Chinese performance also featured court entertainers, dancers, jesters, and a form of story-telling in which the performer took on some roles during the telling.

In the state of Northern Qi during the sixth century, some performances integrated song, dance, and acrobatics with enactments based on actual events, such as “The Big Face,” which tells of a beautiful prince who donned a terrifying battle mask in order to scare his enemies. This is said to be the origin of one type of elaborate face-painting used in what is known today as Beijing Opera, or *jingxi* “drama of the capital,”

also commonly known as *jingju*. Similarly, the swinging arms of an abused wife in “The Stomping-Swaying Wife” is thought to prefigure the graceful movements of the long, flowing “water sleeves” that some characters wear. The Chinese word *xi* (seen at the end of *jingxi* and similar terms) means both “game” and “play,” and refers “to virtually any entertainment, acrobatics, sport, jest, or children’s amusement” (Dolby 1976:4). The lay Chinese story-tellers discussed in Chapter 1 gave picture-recitation performances of both sacred and secular stories from as early as the Tang period (618–906 C.E.) and represent the first extended vernacular narratives in China.

The first significant dramatic musical performance (Figure 3.6) enacting an extended narrative appeared during the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368). Yuan dramas (*zaju*) are popular variety plays consisting of song, dance, monologues and even farce, most often written in four acts with a shorter “wedge.” Each act featured a single singing role and musical mode, though these modes might change for each of the four acts. Only the wedge might contain variations. Male and female actors performed roles of either gender. Performances took place as part of temple or court ritual occasions, as well as in large urban theatres or teahouses as commercial

enterprises. Many of these plays were written by classically educated Confucian scholars who had been deprived of their court positions by Mongol invaders. Yuan dramas therefore contain both highly literate and highly entertaining elements, including crusading bandits fighting corrupt officials, romantic adventures, and supernatural rescues. In composing their dramas, Yuan playwrights drew on literary tales, dynastic histories, and popular oral narratives in which Confucian values were embedded. Many deal with lawsuits and justice (including murder cases), suggesting that the ousted scholars harbored and tapped into an undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the Mongol rulers. One of the best is *Injustice Done to Dou E* (*Dou E yuan*, also known as *Snow in Midsummer*) by Guan Hanqing (active late thirteenth century). It concerns a chaste young widow who is framed for murder by a man with whom she refused to have sex. At her execution, she calls on heaven to exonerate her, and indeed, the three miracles she prays for occur. After several years, her ghost appears to her long-lost father, now a righteous judge who is investigating corruption. The actual murderer is punished, and the girl’s name is posthumously cleared.

This type of music drama continued to be popular even after the Yuan dynasty was replaced by the Ming

Figure 3.6

Thirteenth-century (Song dynasty) music drama (*zaju*). The period is just before the Mongol invasion that ushered in the Yuan dynasty. From a thirteenth-century tomb sculpture.

Source: In William Dolby, *A History of Chinese Drama*. N.Y.: Barnes and Noble, 1976, Figure No. 1 facing p.100. Original source: Shao Jingshen, *Xiqu bitan*, Peking: Zong-hua Shuju Publishers, 1962, p.234.



dynasty (1368–1644). Among the most well-known of all classical Chinese plays is the Ming drama, *The Peony Pavilion* (*Mudan ting*, 1598). Written in the same decade as *Romeo and Juliet*, this work by Tang Xianzu (1550–1617) also tells of a young couple's star-crossed love. However, *The Peony Pavilion* ends happily. Here a young girl dreams repeatedly of a lover she has never met, finally dying of longing. The young man sees the dead girl's portrait, falls in love, and braves the underworld to bring her back to life. Her father refuses to believe in her resurrection and accuses the young man of fraud. Political intrigues create further complications, but supernatural intervention leads to a happy ending. The music dramas that developed during the Yuan and Ming dynasties set the stage for the later development of numerous forms of regional sung dramas.

Chinese writing became the vehicle for the spread of Chinese models of culture, civilization, and values throughout East Asia. From its inception as a character-based system of early writing (c.1545–1500 B.C.E.), Chinese calligraphy evolved a distinctive aesthetic. Each individual character can be seen as an individual work of art; therefore, like Arabic, Chinese calligraphy developed into an art as important as any other – music, painting, or poetry.

In Japan, there had been no system of writing prior to the fourth century. This fact helps to explain the continuing power of the oral tradition in Japan (for example, story-telling and the presence of a chorus or narrator in many plays). After Japan invaded Korea in 370 C.E., Chinese writing and literature were introduced to the Japanese court by the Korean scholars who were brought there to educate the Crown Prince. However, since Japanese and Chinese are not related linguistically, Japanese scholars were forced to learn Chinese. The influence of Chinese writing and culture on Japan increased when Chinese Buddhism became the official religion of Japan during the mid-sixth century. By 645, Japan had established a Confucian-based central administration, and Chinese writing was adapted to communicate old Japanese. Eventually, a complex system

of writing developed that combined Chinese characters and Japanese phonetic writing.

The earliest pre-Buddhist/pre-Chinese forms of Japanese performance are Shinto-inspired forms of shamanistic propitiatory ceremonies and dances. Shinto is a set of utilitarian ritual practices intended to harness the natural forces of the environment in which it is assumed that everything – trees, birds, seas, animals, mountains, wind and thunder, etc. – has its own soul or spirit (*kami*). *Kami* are the natural energies and agents understood to animate matter and influence human behavior, and are sometimes identified as gods or goddesses.

When Buddhism came to Japan, it did not displace Shinto; rather, Buddhas and *kami* were and are often worshiped side by side. Interaction with China also brought the religious and philosophical influences of Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism emphasizes maintenance of social harmony through hierarchical relationships in which the subordinate person (such as a child or wife) remains obedient and loyal to the higher-ranked person (such as a father, older brother, or husband) who behaves beneficently to the individual below. The influence of Taoism in Japan is seen in the official incorporation of Taoistic practices into the state structure where, for example, a Bureau of Divination determined the auspicious timing of state occasions and officially interpreted good and bad omens.

One of the most significant Buddhist practices for the majority of Japanese became rituals honoring one's family ancestors. As we shall see, Japanese *nō* drama eventually became suffused with issues of the resolution of the pain or agony of restless, wandering spirits, both living and dead.

Along with Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, contact with Chinese culture in the sixth century also brought the introduction of prototheatrical court performances, including several types of masked dance dramas such as *bugaku* and *gigaku*. Some *gigaku* and *bugaku* masks depicting warriors, gods, and semi-mythical beasts dating from the Nara period (710–784) are preserved in temple collections. These early masks

may have influenced the design of some masks later used in *nō* theatre.

It was under the leadership of Kan'ami (1333–1384) and his son Zeami (1363–1443) that *nō* evolved into a unique form of Japanese theatre and drama. Kan'ami was head of a troupe of *sarugaku* (“monkey music”) actors that included Zeami. Originally, *sarugaku* was one of several types of traveling entertainments popular throughout the country. It was filled with visual variety and lively acts. In 1374, the troupe was offered patronage by the shogun, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu (1305–1358). Kan'ami's troupe began to live at court, and *sarugaku* became more refined as it transformed into a courtly genre. At court, the teenage Zeami not only performed, but he was trained in traditional aristocratic arts, including classical poetry. The new rulers of the Ashikaga clan were brash samurai warriors rather than elegant aristocrats. It was important for them to demonstrate their legitimate right to rule. With this in mind, they moved the seat of government back to the old imperial capital of Kyoto and began to adopt the tastes and practices of the aristocrats they replaced. Thus their rule gradually reunified the cultural and political centers.

Kan'ami's greatest innovation was the combination of popular mimetic drama with an elegant, aristocratic

style. After his father's death and with continued patronage at court, Zeami continued to refine artistic practice and transformed the social perception of formerly outcast actors. *Nō* came to be considered an elegant, refined, and philosophically self-reflexive set of artistic practices. As he matured, Zeami wrote many *nō* plays and a series of highly sophisticated treatises on the arts of acting and playwriting. These were meant only for his descendants, and they did not come to public attention until the early twentieth century. Today, Zeami is acknowledged as one of the world's most important dramatic theorists.

Today, *nō* is appreciated as a distinctive theatrical art drawing on many sources including indigenous shamanic and Shinto ritual practices, early performance traditions, and Buddhist spirituality and philosophy. It draws on literary masterpieces such as *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*), written by the court lady Murasaki Shikibu around 1000 C.E., often considered to be the world's first novel. It also is indebted to historical accounts of clan warfare, such as are chronicled in *The Tale of the Heike*. All these elements were creatively adapted and crafted into plays by Kan'ami, Zeami, and their descendants. For example, at the important point when masks were adopted as part of the early development of *nō*, it was “a practical move by performers,

Figure 3.7

A Japanese *nō* stage. It achieved the shape shown here by the sixteenth century. At first a separate structure, located in a courtyard, as seen here at the Buddhist temple of Nishi Honganji in Kyoto, it was housed within a larger building by the late nineteenth century. The stage proper remained covered by its own roof and linked to the green room by a raised passageway (*hashigakari*).

Source: Figure 1.9, p.14 in *Dance in the Nō Theatre: Volume One. Dance Analysis* by Monica Bethe and Karen Brazell. Cornell University: China-Japan Program. Ithaca, 1982. The Cornell East Asia Papers series. Published with permission. © Monica Bethe and Karen Brazell.



intended to increase the credibility of, and give poignancy to their performances in the roles of supernatural beings and ghosts” (Ortolani 1984:179). As the *nō* stage evolved, it began to be modeled on the architecture of Shinto shrines (Figure 3.7). 🖨️

Although the period of Ashikaga rule (1336–1573, also known as the Muromachi period) was created by samurai warriors, the *nō* plays they preferred to watch were seldom about military victory. Rather, in keeping with the tastes

of the aristocrats they had displaced, they preferred plays dealing with tragic love affairs, unrequited passions, the agony of defeated warriors, the elegance of old age, or supernatural events. The majority of the approximately two hundred and forty *nō* plays still performed today were written during the Muromachi period.

The centrality of supernatural beings and ghosts and the traces of shamanic practices in the early development of *nō* can be seen in the Japanese *nō* play, *Aoi no ue* (*Lady*

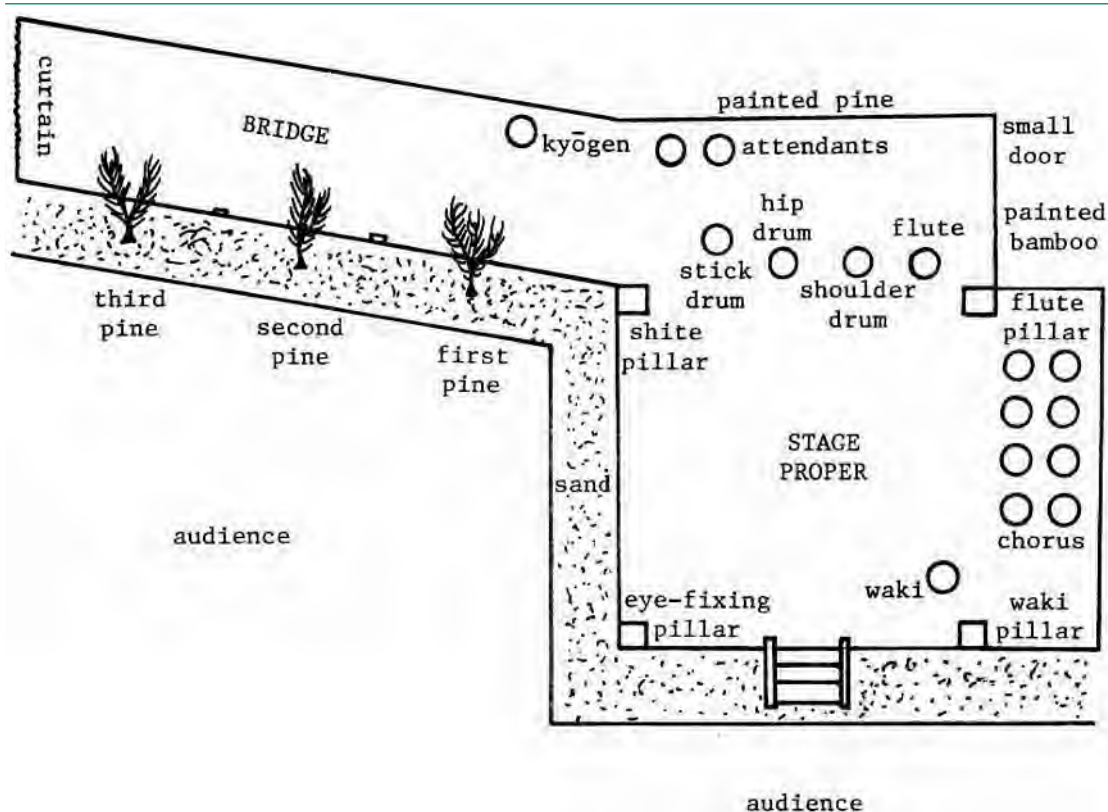


Figure 3.8

Nō stage plan, indicating locations of musicians, chorus, and attendants. The painted pine and bamboo on the upstage wall and the three pine trees arranged along the passageway reflect the outdoor origins of the theatre. Stage and passageway are separated from the audience by a strip of sand or gravel.

Source: Bethe and Brazell, as in Figure 3.7: Figure 1.11, p.151. © Monica Bethe and Karen Brazell.

Aoi, c. fifteenth century as revised by Zeami). The play was inspired by a chapter in *The Tale of Genji*. At the opening of the play, the audience sees an elaborate folded robe in the middle of a highly polished wooden floor of the stage (see Figures 3.7 and 3.8). The empty robe represents the prostrate figure of the mortally ill Princess Aoi, the pregnant wife of Prince Genji. She has been possessed by the angry, restless spirit of Lady Rokujō, Genji's former mistress, whose living spirit leaves her body when she sleeps. A Shinto shamaness performs a ritual to call forth this spirit that is possessing Lady Aoi. At the far end of the bridgeway (*hashigakari*), the curtain is lifted by stage attendants, and from the green room emerges the spirit of Lady Rokujō, performed by a male actor in an exquisitely carved female mask. Lady Rokujō eventually reveals her identity:

In this mortal world ephemeral as lightning,
I should hate nobody,
nor should my life be one of sorrow.
When ever did my spirit begin to wander?
Who do you think this person is
who appears before you now
drawn by the sound of the catalpa bow!
I am the vengeful spirit of Lady Rokujō.
(Goff 1991:135)

Since the shamaness only has sufficient power to call forth but not exorcise this invading spirit, a male Buddhist mountain priest (a “warrior priest” or *yamabushi*) is summoned to perform the exorcism. For feminist critics today, his successful exorcism, together with other factors, marks an interesting difference between the male-authored play and its female-authored source. In the original tale, Lady Aoi dies. In the male-authored play, the male Buddhist priest succeeds where, in the female-authored tale, the female Shinto shamaness does not. In the case study following this chapter, the feminist critical approach is seen to be fruitful in the analysis of another famous *nō* play, *Dōjōji*.

Although *nō* plays are characterized by and appreciated for their finely crafted, suggestive poetry, Zeami

was most concerned with the performer's superior artistry as shaped by Zen Buddhist thought and practice. This concern with the development of artistic skill is revealed in the remarkable set of treatises that Zeami wrote, in which he considers both the practical and philosophical “secrets” of his evolving artistry. His texts cover key principles such as finding ways to please an audience, the rhythmic development of plays and performance (*jo*, *ha*, *kyū*, “introduction, intensification, and rapid close”). Zeami offers an analysis of mask/character types and advice on how to play each, metaphysical reflections on the path of the actor, treatises on writing plays, and complex discussions of aesthetic principles.

The concern with artistic elaboration that constitutes *nō* performance is also reflected in the acting versions of *nō* plays in their recording of the scores chanted by the actors of each of the five schools. Figure 3.9 provides a modern example of a syllable-by-syllable translation of the text as it is vocally elaborated in specific chant styles cued by the score. Because Japanese syllables end in vowels – “*kyo . . . o . . . o . . . mo . . . I . . . ta . . . tsu*” – chant styles developed that allowed the actor to elaborate and elongate the vowel that ends each syllable.

The vagaries and uncertainties of court patronage that first produced *nō* are revealed in the fact that Zeami, in his seventies, was banished to the island of Sado in 1434, to be granted an amnesty in 1441. The case study on *nō* following this chapter provides a further description and analysis of this earliest form of Japanese drama and theatre.

Summary

Throughout Part I, we have explored the earliest forms of performance and then drama and theatre as they emerged in several different regions of the world. All of the performances examined thus far developed in cultures where mass printing had not yet developed. Where “texts” played a key role in the development of certain theatrical genres, they were either transmitted orally or in manuscript form. Aural repetition, copying and/or inscribing were central to transmission.

次
 第立木
 (小ノリ) 強 東寺
 WAKI & WAKIZURE

I 小 SET	KYO 止 TO-
TSU 小 EYES	O 小 DAY
TO 小 ON	O 小 WE
SA 小 MI-	MO 小 BOLD-
DA 小 YA-	I 小 LY
ME 小 KO	TA 小 PUT
N 小 AGAIN	TSU 小 ON
	TA 小 OUR
	BI 小 TRA-
	GO 小 VE-
	RO 小 LING
	MO 小 CLOTHES
	KYO 止 TO-
	O 小 DAY
	O 小 WE
	MO 小 BOLD-
	I 小 LY
	TA 小 PUT
	TSU 小 ON
	TA 小 OUR
	BI 小 TRA-
	GO 小 VE-
	RO 小 LING
	MO 小 CLOTHES
	KI 小 AND
	RA 小 WHEN
	KU 小 SHALL
	O 小 WE

Figure 3.9

A modern *nō* acting score for *Funa Benkei*, showing the first part of the chanted text in Royall Tyler's performance translation of the Kita School acting score of the play, directed by Matsui Akira in Madison, Wisconsin (1982). Reading down the right column, one can see that the English acting version has been scored syllable-by-syllable to match the original Japanese, allowing English-speaking actors to chant the text as closely as possible to the original.

In this chapter and in the case studies that follow, we often focused on formal, aesthetic issues, trying also to consider the socio-cultural and religious context that produced each mode of appreciation and pleasure. One striking similarity among Greek, Roman, Indian, and Japanese playwrights is their utilization of archaic, epic stories as the basis for their creative work. The case studies that follow allow us to see how four playwrights – Plautus in Rome, King Mahendravarman of Kerala, the unknown author of *Dōjōji*, and Kerala's Mandavapalli Ittiraricha Menon – reinvented familiar stories and played with theatrical/aesthetic conventions and character types in ways that surprised and provided unique pleasures for their respective audiences – for Plautus, the audience in the marketplace of the Roman games; for *Mahendravarman*, a learned, high-caste audience in select Kerala temples; for the author of *Dōjōji*, the members of the Japanese court elite; and for Kerala's Ittiraricha Menon, a diverse audience gathered in a public space outside the temples.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Extensive listings of performances of *kutiyattam*, *kathakali*, *nō*, and *kyōgen*, in online video clips and on DVDs, will be found at the end of the case studies following this chapter.

Beacham, R. and H. Denard, “The Pompey Project,” a paper, with computer graphic illustrations, on the digital research and reconstruction of Rome's first permanent theatre, the Theatre

of Pompey: www.nyu.edu/its/humanities/ach_allc2001/papers/beacham/.

Hines, T.G., *The Ancient Theatre Archive, a Virtual Reality Tour of Greek and Roman Theatre Architecture* (2003/2009). Includes photos of the ruins and data on the later stone theatres of the Roman Empire: www.whitman.edu/theatre/theatretour/ephesus/commentary/Ephesus.commentary.htm.

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CASE STUDY: Plautus’s plays: What’s so funny?

By Gary Jay Williams

Comedy has been more important to the human race than the history of Western dramatic criticism would suggest. Tragedy dominated that history for over two thousand years. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) devoted his famous *Poetics* (c.330 B.C.E.) to Greek tragedy, only glancing at comedy. If his promised book on comedy

was ever written, it has never been recovered (Janko 1984: Parts I, IV). In Western theory since, comedy has played second fiddle to tragedy because of tragedy’s high-born characters, its elevated language, the moral weight of its issues of human suffering, and its ultimate idealism about human potential under duress. Yet the early Greek philosophers did recognize that the theatre’s rendering of human experience would be incomplete

without a comic vision. Socrates, while drinking with friends, once made the fruitful suggestion that the genius of comedy is the same as that for tragedy (Plato 1942:215–216). The Greeks and Romans kept the two separate, however, unlike Shakespeare, who mingled kings and clowns in his tragedies such as *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* – a sore point for the neoclassical critics who came after him. This case study looks at selected plays of the Roman comic playwright, Titus Maccius Plautus (254–184 B.C.E.) in the light of the comic theory of French philosopher, Henri Bergson (1859–1941), whose book on laughter in 1900 took comedy seriously.

First, it will be useful to consider some of the major Western notions about the formal characteristics of comedy as a genre, including Aristotle's brief comments. Aristotle's critical method was inductive, reasoning from a number of specific Athenian examples toward what he believed to be universal laws for the drama. Distinguishing between tragedy and comedy, he reasoned that comedy "tends naturally to imitate men worse, [tragedy] to imitate men better, than the average." Comedy will be populated by "characters of a lower type," he observed, while tragedy's chief characters will be from great and "illustrious" families (nobility or ruling families) (Aristotle 1957:376; Aristotle 1984:2319, 2325).

Comedy's home, it follows, is not the court but the domestic household or neighborhood street. Comedy's affairs being on a domestic scale, it may be added, comedy's plots almost invariably involve food, money, sex, or social status. Also, as the principal character in a tragedy will, according to Aristotle, have a flaw leading to his/her fall, so too, it may be inferred from Aristotle, will the chief character in comedy. The chief humor of comedy, Aristotle says, will derive from a defect that is neither painful nor destructive (Aristotle 1957:183).

Following Aristotle's mode of formal analysis, later theorists made distinctions between high and low comedy. In high comedy, much of the humor derives from ideas and witty language. (The more socially oriented critic would point out that these are the prerogatives of an economically privileged class.) In low comedy, the humor derives less from refined reflection than from fast-developing events and physical action, with the body being a major player. The erect phallus is a standing joke in the oldest of Western comic forms – built into the costumes of the characters in the Greek satyr plays. To these major ideas about Western comedy may be added Northrop Frye's fruitful observation in his archetypal theory of comedy that comedies usually end with some festive ritual, such as

Figure 3.10

This Roman marble relief shows a performance of masked characters typical of Roman comedy, including the two older men at left and the young man at right with a scheming servant at his side. Between them, a musician plays the double-reed aulos, suggestive of the use of music and song in some of the comedies. Behind the actors is a door in the façade backing the stage and a small curtain (*siparia*), perhaps concealing a painted panel not relevant to this particular scene.

© Museo Nazionale, Naples.



dinner or a wedding, signaling the formation of a new society (Frye 1957:163–168).

Plautus wrote some 130 plays according to contemporary reports, sometime between 205 and 184 B.C.E. The 21 extant plays show the work of an experienced theatrical craftsman. They are characterized by inventive fast-moving plots in domestic Roman settings, with efficiently-defined characters, clever language, and broad physical business (Figure 3.10). Parts of the texts are in a meter designed to be sung. In their

overflow of comic energies, they stand in contrast to the comedies of Terence (c.195–159 B.C.E.), which are built around relatively more complex characters and ideas and are somewhat more rational and constrained. In Plautus's comedies, there are many examples of the operation of Henri Bergson's principles of the comic.

Vanity, in Bergson's opinion, is one of the best fuels for the mechanized comic character, who is usually comic in proportion to his ignorance of his own faults (Bergson 1956:171–173, 71). The central character of

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH, PART I: Henri Bergson's theory of laughter

Bergson was a philosopher known especially for his philosophy of vitalism, a spiritualized concept in which he saw evolutionary life processes and personal development being informed by a vital impulse, an *élan vital* that materialism and science cannot explain, a force always working toward perfection. (George Bernard Shaw's Fabian "life force" was a variation on the idea; see Chapter 9.) In Bergson's philosophy was in some part a resistant response to the scientific rationalism of his time and also to the increasingly clockwork mechanization of humanity in the workplace and in middle-class life generally.

His theory of comedy suggests that we find it funny when "something mechanical is encrusted on something living." He writes, "The attitudes, gestures, and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine" (Bergson 1956:84, 97, 79). We laugh when we watch a human being so single-minded that he or she "resembles a piece of clockwork wound up once for all and capable of working automatically" (1956:156). We laugh at the character who behaves less like a fully engaged human being and more like an automaton, driven by some fixed idea (1956:180). The ingredients of comic character, Bergson suggests, are "rigidity, automatism, absentmindedness, and unsociability" (1956:156). Laughter is society's corrective for such asocial creatures (1956:187–189).

Below are some questions that might be asked of any comedy when analyzing it using Bergson's theory.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 In which dramatic character(s) do we see human behavior that makes us laugh because it is comically machine-like, rigid, inflexible, unsociable?
- 2 Where does the action of the play seem to take on a mechanized life of its own?
- 3 Where does the language of the play seem to take on a mechanical life of its own?

Plautus's *The Braggart Soldier* (*Miles Gloriosus*, 205 B.C.E.) is wholly infatuated with himself, bragging about his victories, his strength (he says he killed an elephant with his fist), and his sexual prowess. His slave, who struggles to carry his master's oversized shield, feeds his ridiculous appetite for flattery, once describing his master as "Destiny's dashing dauntless debonair darling" (Plautus 1963:9). Late in the play, sure that every woman wants him, the vain soldier flatters himself preposterously, confiding that he was born only one day after Jove and is the grandson of Venus (1963:80). His servant's scheme, and the play's whole purpose, is to wind him up to strut like this. When a collaborating servant girl greets him with "Hail, you gorgeous creature! / Oh, man of every hour, beyond all other men / Beloved of two gods —" he interrupts her to ask, "Which two?" (1963:90). In Plautus's *The Pot of Gold*, the miserly old Euclio is Bergson's automaton. Euclio is obsessed with money and so fears that someone will steal the pot of gold he has hidden that he suspects everyone, including the rooster he finds scratching near it, which he instantly kills. The foxy slave of his daughter's suitor does steal Euclio's gold, and when Euclio ultimately gives the suitor permission to marry his daughter, he does so only because that will get him his pot of gold back.

Bergson's idea of the mechanization of the human as a source of humor extends to plot situations and sequences. We laugh when "the history of a person or of a group . . . sometimes appears like a game worked by strings, or gearings, or springs" (Bergson 1956:116). So it is in Plautus's *The Menaechmi*, which features identical twin brothers (a happily practical idea for a theatre in which all characters wore masks). Long lost to each other by misfortune, the twins are reunited by fate in the city of Epidamnnum, but only after a chain of events in which each brother is repeatedly mistaken for the other. In twins, there is the momentary suggestion that life's reproducing machine was inadvertently left turned on. Twins pose the disconcerting possibility that people are but an arithmetic of interchangeable features, destabilizing our assumptions about individual identity. In *The Menaechmi*, the plot is a calculus of complications set off by the presence of

the twins. Menaechmus II, from Syracuse, searching the world for his brother, arrives in Epidamnnum where his brother, Menaechmus I, lives. The mistress of Menaechmus I, Erotium, mistakenly invites Menaechmus II into her house, supposing him to be her lover. So, too, the angry wife of Menaechmus I and all the household servants of MI mistake MII for MI. Each twin concludes that the world around him has gone mad. Everyone else believes the twins to be mad, including the doctor who is called in by Erotium's father. In exasperation at one point, Menaechmus II feigns madness to be rid of them all. Plautus multiplies the confusions by repeatedly having one twin exit by one door just as the other enters by another. All the characters revolve in and out of the doors of the houses of Erotium and Menaechmus I like figures on a mechanical clock gone haywire. (The Roman stage consisted of a platform backed by a façade with two or more doorways representing the houses.) The audience is always in on the joke because Plautus is always careful to have the entering twin identify himself clearly. At the play's climax, the twins finally meet at center stage, mirroring one another, and to the relief of everyone, they sort out the confusion.

Bergson's mechanization principle can also be seen operating in portions of Plautus's dialog. Near the end of *The Rope*, Daemones and the slave, Trachalio, who serves the suitor of Daemones's daughter, have a rapid-fire exchange of lines in which the response "All right" is repeated seventeen times. After Trachalio exits, Plautus caps the sequence:

DAEMONES: All Right, all right, nothing
but "all right". He'll find all right's all wrong
one of these days, I hope.

[Enter Gripus, another slave]

GRIPUS: Will it be all right [Daemones
jumps] if I have a word with you, sir?

(Plautus 1964:145–146)

A moment later, Trachalio has a series of exchanges with his young master, Plesidippus, who is in love with Daemones's daughter:

PLESIDIPPUS: Do you think we shall be
betrothed today?
TRACHALIO: I do.
PLESIDIPPUS: Do you think I should
congratulate the old man on finding her?
TRACHALIO: I do.
PLESIDIPPUS: And the mother?
TRACHALIO: I do.
PLESIDIPPUS: And what do you think?
TRACHALIO: I do.
PLESIDIPPUS: You do what?
TRACHALIO: I think.
PLESIDIPPUS: You do think what?
TRACHALIO: I do think what you think.
PLESIDIPPUS: Don't you think you could
think for yourself?
TRACHALIO: I do.
(Plautus 1964:147–148)

In both cases, the robotic responses of the slave, Trachalio, produce a comic momentum that threatens to unravel language itself (see Figure 3:10). (Compare Abbot and Costello's famous skit "Who's on First?" in which the two men are using simple words and names to mean very different things, producing comic frustration over a simple baseball game.) 

Bergson offers other ideas about what is funny, such as inversion (the robber robbed or the parent being lectured by the child) and the snowball effect (something sets off a chain reaction of events that accelerates toward total collapse) (Bergson 1956: 121–122; 112). To Bergson's ideas we may add a final source of humor: the theatre mocking its own conventions. Consider the following lines in Plautus's prolog to *Amphitryo*, which is delivered by the god Mercury in disguise as a lowly servant.

But I still haven't told you
About this favor I came to ask of you –
Not to mention explaining the plot of this
tragedy.
I must get on . . .

What's that? Are you disappointed
To find it's a *tragedy*? Well, I can easily change
it.
I'm a god after all. I can easily make it a
comedy. . . .
(Plautus 1964:230)

The passage is amusing not only because Mercury is treated with irreverent familiarity, but also because Plautus is mocking theatrical conventions here, including prologs. Overall, this prolog suggests Plautus's familiarity with comic performance, a fact that would support the speculation that Plautus was himself a comic actor. The middle name that he took, Maccius, may be derivative of Maccus, the name of a clown figure in the ancient Atellan farces (see Chapter 3) who was greedy and gluttonous, the type of character that Plautus might have played (Plautus 1964:8–9).

Plautus was apparently happy entertaining a relatively broad-based audience. In *The Rope*, he mocks comedies that pretend to aspire higher. After the character Daemones gives a pretentious speech about how wonderful it is to be as moral as he is, his slave comments: "Huh! I've heard actors in comedies spouting that sort of stuff, telling people how to behave, and getting applause for it. But I never heard of any of the audience behaving any the better for it, after they got home" (1964:147).

Plautus's plays have had staying power. One century after his death the critic M. Terentius Varro put together a collection of 20 of his 21 plays that have survived. They may well have been performed – or variations on them – down through the early years of the Roman Empire. Plautus brought over some of his stock characters and plots from the prolific Greek comic playwright, Menander (342–291 B.C.E.) (see Figure 3.1), but only one of Menander's plays survives – *Dyskolos*, translated as *The Grouch*. So, it is through Plautus that many classical prototypes – characters and plots – survived down through the early modern period and beyond. Among the many descendants of Plautus's *miles gloriosus* – the braggart soldier – are the Capitano and

Scaramouche of the *commedia dell'arte* and Shakespeare's Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part 1* (1598). Plautus's *The Menaechmi* is the source of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* (1598), to which Shakespeare added a second set of identical twin slaves from Plautus's *Amphitryon*. The *Comedy of Errors* was the source for Rodgers and Hart's musical comedy *The Boys from Syracuse* (1938), adapted by George Abbot. *Amphitryon* was the source for no

fewer than 38 versions down to Jean Giradoux's *Amphitryon 38* (1929), and Plautus's *The Pot of Gold* was the source of Molière's *The Miser* (1668). The 1962 American musical comedy *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (book by Burt Shevelove, Larry Gelbart, and music by Steven Sondheim) was a long-running concoction derived from Plautus (a 1966 film version is a tiresome catalog of unfunny mugging).

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH, PART II: Bergson's theory in historical perspective

To some degree, all theories reflect the cultural discourse of their time. As Bergson set out at the end of the nineteenth century to theorize universal laws of comedy, he was doing so from his position as a French white male of some privilege in a nation that had long been a major colonizing power, especially in Africa. His examples are preponderantly French, from the seventeenth-century plays of Molière to the nineteenth-century plays of Eugene Labiche.

Some parts of his analysis are painful to sensibilities today. In a discussion of comic disguise, Bergson asks "Why does one laugh at the negro?" His answer is that a black face, "in our imagination, is one daubed over with ink or soot . . . though the black . . . color is indeed inherent in the skin, we look upon it as artificially laid on, because it surprises us" (Bergson 1956:86–87). His use of the third person plural not only designates what he believes to be a consensus of the experience of whites but carries in it the underlying assumption that this is a norm which whites have a right to establish. To be white is to be empowered to generalize philosophically about what is true of human nature. A century later, the concept of fundamental human rights has made possible some progress toward making it repugnant to use race or color as bases for oppressive judgments. Toward the end of his life, Bergson, a Jew, was himself a victim of discrimination in the anti-Semitic practices of France's Vichy government as it collaborated with the invading Nazis.

Bergson's Victorian ideas of gender also inform his analysis. When illustrating a point about comic effects in language, he uses as an example the phrase "*Tous les arts sont frères*" ("all the arts are brothers"). To say, "*Tous les arts sont soeurs*" ("all the arts are sisters") would be comic, unexpected, because the masculine *frères* always will be understood as symbolizing humankind. To use "sisters" would have a comic effect, he explains, because women would never be understood as having that symbolic function (1956:135–136). Here, Bergson represents as a matter of universal law what was in fact the result of the demeaning social status of women in his time. Not surprisingly, in his essay, male characters form the basis of his "universal" proofs. Bergson, like many critics down to the present, also does not inquire into the relations between Plautus's depiction of comic slaves and the conditions of their real counterparts in Roman society (see Figure 3.11).

To dismiss Bergson's work entirely for such embedded values would be to overlook some insights that remain of interest. But the case is instructive for us. The study of theatre brings with it ethical responsibilities to identify the values, implicit or explicit, in any historical or critical coverage. Reading a variety of sources and interpretive approaches in theatre history helps one to form one's own critical sensibilities and to make ethically informed decisions.



Figure 3.11

Statue of a masked slave character from Roman comedy, leaning casually on a pillar. Archaeological Museum, Istanbul.

Photo © Gary Jay Williams.

By GJW

Key references



Audio-visual references

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

For the Abbot and Costello skit, watch the YouTube versions available, e.g. www.youtube.com/watch?v=sShMA85pv8M.

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CASE STUDY: *Kutiyattam* Sanskrit theatre of India: *Rasa-bhāva* aesthetic theory and the question of taste

By Phillip B. Zarrilli

Sometime in the fifteenth century, a highly educated local connoisseur/scholar, writing in Sanskrit, attacked the “unfounded foul practices” of a specialized community of male and female actors (*cākyārs* and *nangyārs*) in Kerala, India. In his “Goad on the Actors,” the unknown author wrote:

Our only point is this – the sacred drama (*nāṭya*), by the force of ill-fate, now stands defiled. The ambrosial moon and the sacred drama – both are sweet and great. A black spot mars the beauty of the former; unrestrained movements that of the latter. “What should we do then [to correct these defilements]?”

Listen. The performance should strictly adhere to the precepts of Bharata [author of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*]. Keep out the interruption of the story. Remove things unconnected. Stop your elaboration. . . . Reject the regional tongue. Discard the reluctance to present the characters.

. . . Always keep the self of the assumed character. This is the essence of acting. One follows the principles of drama if things are presented in this way.

(Paulose 1993:158–159)

Today the Kerala actors still perform Sanskrit dramas in their distinct regional style, known as *kutiyattam*.



The fifteenth-century author was attacking the *kutiyattam* actors for their “blasphemous” and “illogical” deviations from precepts for staging Sanskrit dramas found in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, written at least 1,200 years earlier, which he considered definitive. (See Chapter 3 for a description of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.) The “defects” were obstacles in the path by which he expected to come to a proper aesthetic experience of Sanskrit drama. From this learned critic’s perspective, the *kutiyattam* style of staging Sanskrit dramas did not allow him as an audience member to enjoy an uninterrupted flow of dramatic action and characterization.

In this case study we use reception theory to interrogate how and why there could have been such a

negative reaction to the unique regional style of staging Sanskrit drama known as *kutiyattam*. We will analyze the content and *kutiyattam* way of staging of a one-act Sanskrit farce, *The Hermit/Harlot*, authored by King Mahendravarman in the seventh century.

The Hermit/Harlot as an example of Sanskrit drama

Along with *The Drunken Monk*, *The Hermit/Harlot* is one of two one-act farces written by King Mahendravarman in the seventh century. Both have “invented” storylines – that is to say, unlike most Sanskrit dramas they were not based on the epics or other traditional stories. They draw on situations and characters common to the historical period in which the plays were written.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, all Sanskrit dramas follow certain conventions of composition and use of language. *The Hermit/Harlot* begins with a prolog that establishes both the structure and comedic tone of the farce to follow. The *Sutradhara*, leader of the troupe and main actor (later playing the role of the *Bhagavan*), announces to the *Vidusaka* (played by the actor who later plays Shandilya) that their acting company will soon be invited to perform a play “at the royal palace,” and that they must be pleasing to the King.

VIDUSAKA: What type of play, sir, are you going to put on?

SUTRADHARA: [After consulting various] critical treatises on drama . . . [and considering] the various *rasas* discussed . . . the primary, the most important *rasa* is the one that provokes laughter. Therefore, I’m going to put on a farce.

VIDUSAKA: Sir, though I’m a comedian, I know nothing about farce!

SUTRADHARA: Then learn!

The *Sutradhara*’s conclusion that he should put on a farce because it is the “most important *rasa*” is amusing because farce is a “minor” dramatic form. In the more important full-length dramas, comedy always takes

secondary place to the heroic and erotic sentiments. A meta-theatrical layer of humor is created by the fact that the company of actors is, at the moment, performing a farce written by the King himself.

Following the prolog, the play proper begins: a young man, Shandilya, has become a wandering mendicant who also “must learn” at the feet of a supposedly learned teacher/practitioner, *Bhagavan*, who belongs to a severe Hindu *Saivite* sect that practices yoga and austerities. The opening passage of the play proper illustrates the difference between the highly florid Sanskrit verse and its simple, straightforward prose. The ill-tempered *Bhagavan* enters looking for his wayward student, and calls out:

Shandilya! Shandilya! He’s not to be seen. Quite fitting for one who is surrounded by the darkness of ignorance. For:

*The body, a mine of diseases, subject to old age,
Poised on the brink of hidden Death,
Is like a tree on a river bank,
About to be uprooted by the ever-battering wave.*

*And though such human embodiment is earned
Through numerous good deeds, yet,
Deluded by materialism intoxicated with his strength,*

Good looks, and youth, man is blind to those defects grave.

Therefore, really, this poor fellow can’t be blamed. I’ll call him once again. Shandilya! Shandilya!

(Lockwood and Bhat 1994: Part II:20)

The Sanskrit verse (*italics*) provides the actor with numerous images rich for psycho-physical elaboration.

On his entry, Shandilya explains how he “was born in a family which flourished on the remains of the food of crows . . . [with] tongues untouched by learning. . . . [With] no food in our house, I became a convert to Buddhism. But because those bastards eat only once a day . . . I gave up that religion too [to follow the *Bhagavan*].”

As mendicants, the *Bhagavan* and his wayward disciple begin their daily round to beg alms from households with their skull-bowls. Along the way, the *Bhagavan* attempts to teach Shandilya certain precepts of correct yogic practice. But he can never learn correctly. When they stop for repose and meditation in a garden, the *Bhagavan* begins his meditation, but Shandilya spots a young courtesan awaiting her lover, falls in love with her, and therefore meditates on “wine, women, and song.” The play title derives from the subsequent exchange of souls between the courtesan, whose soul has been mistakenly taken by the servant of the god of death (*Yama*), disguised as a serpent, and the *Bhagavan* himself, who uses his powers to inject his soul into the body of the courtesan in order to teach his recalcitrant student, Shandilya, a lesson. The plot turns on farcical mistaken identities with a distinctly yogic twist.

King Mahendravarman’s farce is an entertaining as well as trenchant send-up of the religious orders of seventh-century South India. The *Bhagavan* is a “teacher” who becomes caught in the (il)logic of his own philosophical speculations. The “student” is one who, like the *Vidushaka* in the prolog, ought to be learning but cannot.

The stage was conventionally assumed by audience and actors to be divided into zones. Actors moving from one part of the stage to another indicated a shift in locale. This convention also allowed the action to shift back and forth between two groups of actors on the stage. In *The Hermit/Harlot* the comedic exchange of souls between the *Bhagavan* and the courtesan takes place in two locales – the part of the garden where the *Bhagavan* is undergoing his meditation and the part where the courtesan awaits her lover.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Reception theory

Reader-response and reception theory first developed in German literary studies during the 1960s and 1970s in order to shift focus from the meanings assumed to be *in* texts to a more interactive model. Reception theorists explore how a reader makes sense of a book or how an audience understands its experience of a production. This more interactive view sees audiences as being active agents in the process of meaning-making at a theatrical event. Analyses of audience reception have used a variety of tools, from quantitative use of data derived from questionnaires to qualitative studies making use of interviews of audience members.

Focusing on reception in a given historical period and culture involves exploring: (1) the nature of the culture’s theories/expectations of aesthetic experience; (2) the conventions through which its art forms attempt to create this experience; and (3) the ways in which the theories have been interpreted and changed over time. Literary scholar Stanley Fish has argued that there is no meaning inherent in any work of art except that which is constructed by an “interpretive community” within a particular historical moment (Fish 1980). One way that the historian can identify a particular interpretive community is to focus on the *negative* reactions of critics or audiences (even a riot). Such responses are often reactions to changes in one or more modes of theatre production. These may be responses to changes in artistic practices – acting, playwriting, scene design, or theatre architecture, or to changes in business practices – ticket prices. The expectations of members of a particular interpretive community can reflect a fierce sense of ownership of the standards for an art form, as in the trenchant critique of the Kerala actors above.

Welcome as the move of Western criticism toward examining audience reception is, it belies the fact that many non-Western aesthetic theories have, from their beginnings, been much less concerned with (ostensibly) self-enclosed meanings in texts than with the ways in which *performances* of plays can provide heightened experiences

for the audience, including considerations of adaptive strategies. Western theory and philosophy often have been driven by a *logocentric* focus on the text (logo = word) and interpretation. Even Western theories of reception have somewhat limited themselves to trying to determine what a performance means by “reading” its codes, which is to say parsing other kinds of (ostensibly) fixed “texts.” It remains to be seen whether this process can account fully for the multi-sensory experience of a complex and particularized performance, such as those of Sanskrit theatre are, and in which music, song, dance, spectacle, and acting seek to create a “total” experience. In Japan, Zeami specified the means for achieving the proper aesthetic effects of performance in *nō* theatre. These Eastern practitioner-philosophers were offering performance-oriented systems of production and reception.

Unlike Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which was largely devoted to analyzing the attributes and effects appropriate to a particular genre of scripted drama – tragedy, Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra* articulated theories of how performance could produce the experience of what was known as *rasa*. This case study examines India’s *rasa* aesthetic theory and its development within a special interpretive community in Kerala.

Reception theory can be useful to the performance historian, of course, in many periods and cultures. Below are two examples of questions one might ask using reception theory.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 **How do audiences and critics in other historical periods show agency (that is, overtly exercise or express their views) on the occasion of a performance they have seen or in response to issues of production?**
- 2 **How does reception of a play change over time? For example, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* received extremely negative reviews when first produced in the U.S.A. Now it is considered a modern “classic.” What historical and/or critical shifts are reflected in this change in reception and perception?**

Rasa-bhāva aesthetic theory in practice

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* clearly establishes the *rasa-bhāva* aesthetic as the central theoretical and practical organizational concept for theatre when it states, “nothing has meaning in drama except through *rasa*.” *Rasa* is so called “because it is capable of being tasted” (Bharata 1967:105). The analogy of *rasa* as the tasting or savoring of a meal is offered to explain the process by which a theatrical performance of a play attains its coherence. “The ‘taste’ of the various ingredients of a meal is both their

common-ground and organizes them as its end” (Gerow 1981:230). What the actors offer as the “meal” to be tasted is each character’s state of being/doing (*bhāva*), which is specific to the ever-shifting context of the drama in performance. The accompanying *rasas* are made available to the audience to “taste” as each *bhāva* is embodied and elaborated in performance.

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* identified eight permanent states of being/doing (*sthayibhāva*), each with its accompanying *rasa* (see diagram). These basic states are enhanced by many other transitory and involuntary states.

<i>bhāva</i> (states of being/doing the actor embodies)		<i>rasa</i> (“tasted” by the audience)
pleasure or delight (<i>rati</i>)	corresponds to	the erotic (<i>sṛṅgāra</i>)
laughter or humor (<i>hāsa</i>)		the comic (<i>hāsyā</i>)
sorrow or pain (<i>śōka</i>)		pathos/compassion (<i>karuṇā</i>)
anger (<i>krōdha</i>)		the furious (<i>raudra</i>)
heroism or courage (<i>utsāha</i>)		the heroic/valorous (<i>vīra</i>)
fear (<i>bhaya</i>)		the terrible (<i>bhayānaka</i>)
disgust (<i>jugupsa</i>)		the odious (<i>bībhatsa</i>)
wonder (<i>vismaya</i>)		the marvellous (<i>adbhuta</i>)

Rasa theory operates simultaneously on two levels: (1) the audience’s experience of the various states or moods arising from the actor’s embodiment of the character; and (2) the process of aesthetic perception of the whole. Playwrights and composers structure their work around those modes most useful for elaboration. In this sense, the “seed” of the *rasa* experience is implicit in a drama and made explicit by the actors as they perform. In the rather simple one-act farce, *The Hermit/Harlot*, the prolog as well as the play proper elaborates the comic (*hāsyā rasa*), although the forms that this takes can vary with the performance circumstances. Here is what the *Nāṭyaśāstra* has to say about the physical expression of the comic (*hāsyā*):

This is created by . . . showing unseemly dress or ornament, impudence, greediness, quarrel, defective limb, use of irrelevant words, mentioning different faults, [etc.; the result is represented] . . . by consequents [*sic*] like the throbbing of lips, the nose and the cheek, opening the eyes wide or contracting them, perspiration, color of the face, and taking hold of the sides.

(Bharata 1967:172)

In *The Hermit/Harlot*, the gamut of comedic situations ranging from obvious physical humor and byplay to the subtler play of philosophical ideas would have given rise to an equally wide range of audience responses.

Although the basis of the permanent states of being/doing embodied by actors are the emotions we experience in everyday situations (becoming angry or guffawing with laughter), these everyday emotions are not the same as the ultimate aesthetic experience of *rasa*. To understand this dimension of *rasa* aesthetic theory, we must go beyond Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*, which focuses pragmatically on the means for evoking *rasa*. It is the later commentators who explicate this aesthetic dimension of *rasa*, each reflecting on the nature of aesthetic experience from their own particular historical and philosophical perspectives, creating a dynamic history of Indian aesthetics.

The most influential among them is the philosopher, Abhinavagupta (tenth to eleventh centuries), from Kashmir. His *Abhinavabhāratī* sought to define the nature of the *rasa* experience. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* clearly expected an audience to be educated into the sensibilities needed to appreciate the subtleties of an actor’s performance, of course, but Abhinavagupta refined this, defining the ideal spectator and audience member as a *sahṛdaya* – one whose heart/mind is “attuned” to appreciate the performance.

The artistic creation is the direct or unconventionalized expression of a feeling of passion “generalized,” that is, freed from distinctions in time or space and therefore from individual relationships and practical interests, through an inner force of the artistic or creative intuition

within the artist. This state of consciousness (*rasa*) embodied in the poem is transferred to the actor, the dancer, the reciter and to the spectator. Born in the heart of the poet, it flowers as it were in the actor and bears fruit in the spectator.

If the artist or poet has the inner force of the creative intuition, the spectator is the man of cultivated emotion, in whom lies dormant the different states of being, and when he sees them manifested, revealed on the stage through movement, sound and decor, he is lifted to that ultimate state of bliss, known as *ānanda*.

(Vatsyayan 1968:155)

Kutiyattam and its distinctive style of performing Sanskrit dramas like *The Hermit/Harlot*

Just as Sanskrit theatre was reaching its zenith in most of India and becoming the subject of commentators such as Abhinavagupta, a distinctive style of staging Sanskrit dramas known as *kutiyattam* (“combined acting”) emerged in Kerala. *Kutiyattam* was initially developed with the patronage and direct involvement of King Kulasekhara Varman, around 900 C.E. The king himself authored two dramas still staged today in this style: *Subhadrādhyananjaya* and *Tapatīsamvarana*. Assisted by a well-known high-caste brahmin scholar, Tolan, King Kulasekhara is credited with the introduction of a number of innovations in the way that Sanskrit dramas had previously been staged. These innovations are the controversial hall-marks of this distinctive style of performance: (1) the use of the local language, Malayalam, by the main comic character (*Vidusaka*) to explain key passages of the Sanskrit and Prakrit dramas; (2) the introduction of each character of a play with a brief narration of his past; (3) allowance for deviation from a script in performance to provide elaboration on the meaning and/or the state of mind/being of a character; and (4) the development of stage manuals for staging dramas in this emergent style and acting manuals on how actors should elaborate passages in a play. One practical reason for the introduction of Malayalam into

performances was that Sanskrit was ceasing to be an everyday spoken language. After the tenth century, it was used only by certain educated communities. 🎭

Perhaps the most crucial feature of the development of *kutiyattam* during this period was its exclusive performance within particular high-caste temples of Kerala as a “visual sacrifice” to the deities of these temples. Theatres of the kind prescribed by Bharata for Sanskrit drama were built within compounds of a few wealthy, high-caste temples in Kerala (Figures 3.12, 3.13). Other changes ensued, still to be seen today. In *kutiyattam*, Sanskrit dramas are not performed in full. Rather, sections of the drama become dramas in and of themselves, with lengthy preliminaries and elaborations of the story featuring one of the main characters on each night. On the final nights (one to three), there is the “combined acting,” *kūṭiyāṭṭam*, the term from which the style takes its name, which brings all the actors to the stage to perform the act or scene being staged. Still today, enacting a single scene of a drama in the *kutiyattam* style can take from five nights to as many as 41.

One of the oldest plays in the *kutiyattam* repertory is the one-act farce, *The Hermit/Harlot* (Figures 3.14, 3.15). One traditional stage-manual for *The Hermit/Harlot* gives instructions on how to stage the play over 35 nights, including the nights of “combined acting.” For seven of these nights, the *Vidusaka* explains and comments in the local language on the philosophical issues raised by the play (Raja 1964:17). Only certain sections are enacted on specific nights. Indeed, when a portion of the scene between the *Bhagavan* and Shandilya is enacted in this tradition, the evening becomes less about the farcical humor than about a serious allegory on the “interaction between God and the human soul” (Lockwood and Bhat 1995 [Part II]: 9). The scene with the courtesan and her attendant in the garden before the exchange of souls becomes an opportunity for the two women performers (*nanḡyārs*) to elaborate the erotic pleasures associated with the poetic images of the garden, emphasized through dance and facial expression.

For the fifteenth-century anonymous author of *The Goad on Actors*, with whose account we began this case

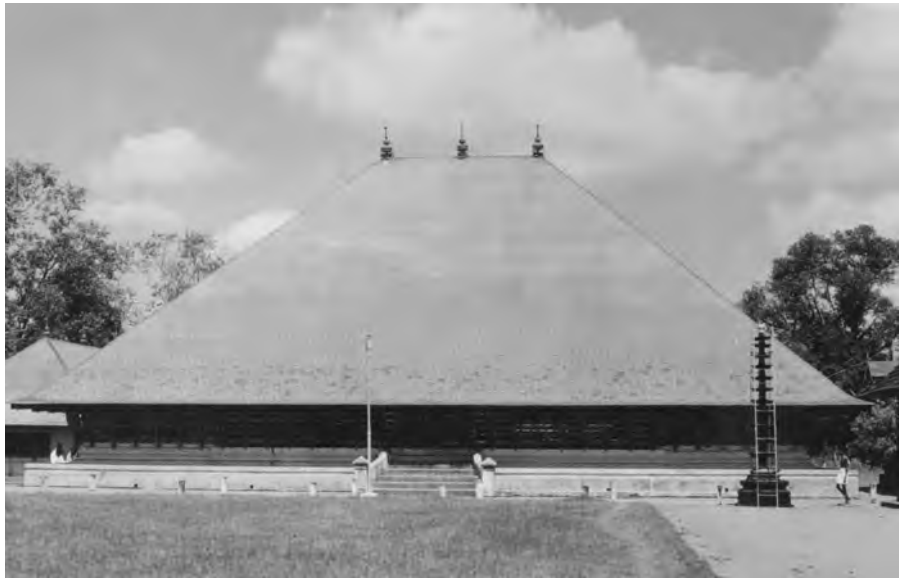


Figure 3.12

A temple theatre, known as a *kuttampalam*, built for *kutiyattam* in the Lord Vadakkunnathan (Siva) temple in Trissur, central Kerala. The temple compound containing this one is set apart from the outside world by high walls and massive gates. The main shrine housing Vadakkunnathan is to the right.

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study, it was the very different experience and meaning of *kutiyattam*'s way of staging King Mahendravarman's farce that he thought necessary to attack as "blasphemous" and "illogical." As an audience member, he decried the fact that the actors of the *kutiyattam* tradition were depriving him of an experience of *The Hermit/Harlot* as the farce he expected. Looking back at least 1,200 years to Bharata, he demanded a return to a staging of the drama in its entirety, uninterrupted by the actors' lengthy elaborations. His displeasure notwithstanding, the *kutiyattam* tradition of staging Sanskrit dramas, with all its "faults" and "defilements," persisted down to the present. For centuries, *kutiyattam* has been appreciated within its high-caste interpretive community of educated connoisseurs for its unique delights, including

the *Vidusaka*'s lengthy seven nights of humorous, philosophical elaborations. Today, the audience base for *kutiyattam* is considerably smaller than it once was.

Reception theory, with its emphasis on the agency of the audience/reader in the process of making meaning from the experience of a work, opens opportunities for understanding Sanskrit theatre. This theatre's practitioners were not logocentric but concentrated on the means by which performance itself should evoke the proper aesthetic pleasures. The distinctive style of staging Sanskrit drama in the *kutiyattam* tradition still was guided by the *rasa-bhāva* aesthetic – ubiquitous in India even where the *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself is unknown. But *kutiyattam* was developed within Kerala's culturally distinctive, regional interpretive community and reflected a major

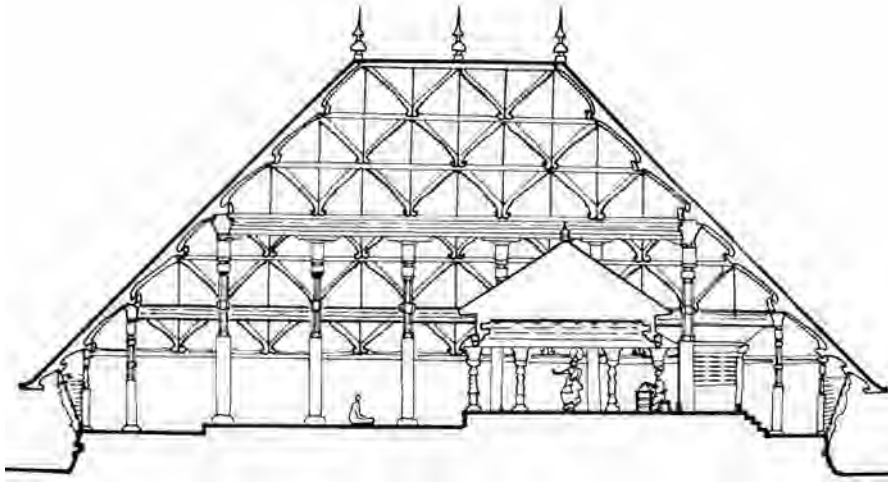


Figure 3.13

Cross-section of the interior of the theatre in a temple in Trissur. Inside the high-ceilinged *kuttampalam*, the audience sits on the polished floor, facing the roofed stage. A drummer sits upstage, behind the actor. The dressing room is through two entry/exit doors behind the drummer.

Source: Line drawing No. 14 located on p.79, from *Kuttampalam and Kutiyattam* by Goverdhan Panchal. New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1984. The author indicates that “most of the drawings in this book are based on my own drawings and sketches” and then rendered by Shri Ajit Parikh and Shri Ajit Joshi of the School of Architecture, Ahmedabad.

language change – the decline of Sanskrit itself. Audience and theatre artists were cultural partners in this development. The connoisseur’s trenchant negative criticism of the *kutiyattam* actors in Kerala with which we began this case study is evidence of an aesthetic shift; the record of his negative response helps the historian to further understand the modified aesthetic of *kutiyattam*. This development was not unique. As we saw in Chapter 3, in the commemorative devotional dramas dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, *rasa* theory and practice were reinvented to accommodate an aesthetic experience of deep devotion known as *bhakti*, which became a new *rasa*. This is especially evident in several genres of North Indian devotional drama including *Rāmlīlā* which, as discussed earlier, celebrates the life of Ram, and the genre known as *raslīlā* which celebrates

the life of Lord Krishna. As the case study of *kathakali* that follows reveals, it is also evident in some plays in the *kathakali* dance-drama repertory based on the life of Krishna.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.



Figures 3.14 and 3.15

The *Bhagavan* or Hermit (Figure 3.14), and his wayward student, Shandilya (Figure 3.15), played, respectively by Raman Cakyar and Kalamandalam Shivan, in a *kutiyattam* production of *The Hermit/Harlot* in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, in 1977. From a reconstructed staging based on traditional acting and staging manuals, under the supervision of Ram Cakyar of the Kerala Kalamandalam. The costume of Shandilya (Figure 3.15) is the traditional one worn in *kutiyattam* by the stock comic character, *Vidusaka*, who plays Shandilya here.

Photo © Phillip B. Zarrilli.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Kutiyattam temple/theatre tradition

The following videos are available at: www.keralatourism.org/video-clips. See the following videos on the *kutiyattam* temple-theatre tradition; enter the site and look for the complete list of clips.

- (1) *Kutiyattam*
- (2) *Koothiyattam* (a variant spelling of *kutiyattam*)
- (3) *Chakyarkoothu* (solo performance of the *vidusaka* or clown-like comic figure), and
- (4) *Nangyarkoothu* (solo performance of the Nangyars or women who perform the female roles).

Kutiyattam

Kailasodharanam (Ravana: The lifting of Mount Kailasa). On YouTube, search *kutiyattam* and then scroll for this title. This is a famous *kutiyattam* scene in which the actor playing the ten-headed demon-king, Ravana mimetically enacts his tremendous power by “lifting” Mount Kailasa.

Kutiyattam performance and training

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CASE STUDY: *Kathakali* dance-drama: Divine “play” and human suffering on stage

By Phillip B. Zarrilli

This case study illustrates and discusses issues of ethnographic research into performance. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork on *kathakali* dance-drama. The fieldwork was conducted in Kerala, India where the author lived for approximately seven years between 1976 and 1983. In order to understand *kathakali* training and performance from the actor-dancer’s perspective, the author underwent intensive training eight hours a day at the Kerala State Arts School, traveled with touring companies, and attended numerous performances. The author conducted interviews with actors, students, administrators, and audience members.

Kathakali – an overview

Kathakali dance-drama is a distinctive genre of South Asian performance closely related in many ways to the earlier

form of staging Sanskrit dramas in Kerala, *kutiyattam*. The term *kathakali* combines “story” (*katha*) and “dance” or “play” (*kalī*). The vast majority of the plays performed in this style of Indian dance-drama are adaptations of episodes from the Indian epics (*Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*) or stories from the *purāṇas*—encyclopedic collections of traditional stories and knowledge. 📺 Like other regional genres that developed in India during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *kathakali* developed in response to the growth of religious devotionism to Vishnu, one of the three primary Hindu deities. Some of the *purāṇas* contain collections of stories about Lord Krishna, one of the main incarnations of Vishnu. The play on which this case study focuses, *The Progeny of Krishna* (*Santanagopalam*) by Mandavapalli Ittiraricha Menon (c.1747–1794), is based on one of the stories about Krishna. 📺 The active repertory includes approximately 60 plays of the 500 authored over the years.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Ethnography and history

Ethnography is one of the primary research methods developed by anthropologists during the nineteenth century and later used by folklorists, sociologists, and, most recently, by those studying performance. Ethnography involves fieldwork usually carried out by living in the community that is the site of research, conducting numerous interviews with people involved in the subject of research, and active engagement in learning what one is studying.

Early studies of non-Western performance were often ahistorical, reflecting and projecting onto non-Western cultures and peoples a romantic view, including assumptions that they were “unchangeable,” or “eternal.” Ethnographers have sought to correct that but also have recently embraced history, and historians have begun to embrace ethnography. Both are concerned with providing complex and detailed descriptions of socio-cultural processes and events, and with giving voice to the people involved in these processes and events. Performance ethnographers must develop non-leading, open-ended questions in order to properly conduct their field research. The ethnographer might ask performers or their teachers questions such as the following: “How does the teacher attempt to correct the student so that her/his technique comes to be as correct as possible? How is the experience of acting/performing described? What is the optimal state of awareness of the performer when she or he is giving a ‘good’ performance?”

Traditionally, performances took place either at the courts of Kerala's rulers, in the grounds of wealthy land-holding families, or as part of Hindu temple festivals. In the context of Hindu temple festivals, a simple playing space was cleared outside the temple compound in a public space with open access to the general public. The main "season" lasted from January through April/May and might have been attended by several thousand people. Today, performances are also held throughout the year, inside theatres in towns and cities, and under the sponsorship of cultural organizations, with as few as 50, mostly male, connoisseurs attending.

On a bare stage using only a few stools and properties, three groups of performers collectively create *kathakali* performances: the traditionally all-male companies of actor-dancers who enact each character in a story and the percussionists and the vocalists who accompany them. The actor-dancers use a highly physicalized style of performance based on traditional martial arts to play a variety of roles including kings, heroines, demons, demonesses, gods, animals, and priests. 📺 A few characters, such as the Midwife in *The Progeny of Krishna*, are drawn from everyday life. The local audience – traditionally including both learned connoisseurs as well as a general audience from a broad spectrum of the public – can easily identify each character type, having learned to read the basic make-up and costume codes. The actor-dancers create their roles using a repertory of dance steps, choreography, a complete gesture language for literally "speaking" their character's lines, and expressive use of the face and eyes to communicate the internal states (*bhava*) of the characters.

The percussion orchestra consists of three different types of drums, each with its own distinctive sound and role in the ensemble. The singers vocalize the entire text, including third-person narration as well as first-person dialog. They also keep the basic rhythms with hand-held brass cymbals.

Performances traditionally begin at dusk, and it requires an entire night to perform a thirty-page drama. Texts are composed in the local language of Malayalam, but they make extensive use of Sanskrit. While unique,

kathakali developed its conventions and aesthetics of performance from many sources, especially *kutiyattam*.

Since the 1960s, *kathakali* has become known through many international cultural exchanges. While there is a long history of experimentation with content and technique in *kathakali*, recent performances have prompted new arguments about change. Controversial experiments have included adaptations on the subject of Adolf Hitler at the end of World War II and leftist *kathakali* dramas such as *People's Victory* (1987). A *kathakali King Lear* was performed throughout Europe and at international theatre festivals such as Edinburgh, Scotland in 1989 and at Shakespeare's Globe (London) in 1999.

The pleasures of *The Progeny of Krishna*

In 1993, the author was working as a performance ethnographer with V.R. Prabodhachandran Nayar, a life-long appreciator of *kathakali* and Professor of Linguistics at the University of Kerala. The first collaborative project was a translation of *The Progeny of Krishna*. The author had selected *The Progeny of Krishna* as the first play for this translation project for all the "wrong" reasons, that is to say for literary reasons. Prabodhachandran Nayar explained as both a linguist and appreciator of good Sanskrit and Malayalam poetry that *The Progeny of Krishna* simply "isn't great poetry. There's too much repetition, and the vocabulary is meagre. It's just not rich!" What connoisseurs of *kathakali* appreciate most are passages with rich poetic imagery for performers to interpret. In this respect, as a text on the page, *The Progeny of Krishna* cannot compare to the four plays authored by the Raja of Kottayam (c.1645–1716): *The Killing of Baka*, *The Killing of Kirmira* 📺, *The Flower of Good Fortune*, and *The Killing of Kalakeya*. These are considered formative in the history of *kathakali*, as is Unnayi Variyar's (c.1675–1716) much heralded *King Nala's Victory*. These plays are included in the required syllabi of Malayalam literature courses, but *The Progeny of Krishna* is considered such "bad" poetry that Prabodhachandran Nayar had never read the text.

Prabodhachandran Nayar, however, knew the text-in-performance by heart, and might be heard humming the well-loved, if simple language set to appropriate musical modes (*ragas*). Moreover, he cherished a life-long set of memories of *The Progeny of Krishna* in performance (Figure 3.16). He had seen performances in family house compounds and local temples, sponsored by childless couples hoping in this way to secure future progeny and he had seen performances earlier in the century of the renowned actor-dancer, Krishnan Nayar, whose genius (along with Kunju Nayar) left its stamp on the way today's actors perform the main role of the Brahmin.

At performances of *The Progeny of Krishna* at village temples that the author observed in 1993, many levels of appreciation and pleasure were clearly experienced by

audiences. Among those with the most nuanced level of appreciation was the 78-year-old Ganesha Iyer, who explained to the author:

From six years of age I was taken to see *kathakali* performances by my father and older brothers. I've read all the plays, can appreciate performances, and point out all the defects! But real appreciation requires critical study and drawing on knowledge of actors and other experts.

Known as “*kathakali* mad,” connoisseurs like Ganesha Iyer used to travel far and wide during the festival season to attend as many performances as possible by their

Figure 3.16

The Progeny of Krishna, Scene 2. With the body of his eighth son lying before him, the Brahmin (M.P. Sankaran Namboodiri) pours out his tale of woe at court. Arjuna in green (*pacca*) make-up observes in the background.

Photo © Phillip B. Zarrilli.



Educating actor-dancers



Figure 3.17

One of *kathakali*'s psychophysical training exercises, intended to render the actor's body/mind supple and flexible.

Photo © Phillip B. Zarrilli.

The all-day formal training of a *kathakali* actor/dancer traditionally began at the age of seven, but today begins somewhere between ten and 16. The entire performance vocabulary is broken down into small units for individual mastery. Starting in the early morning hours, students undergo a rigorous training regimen designed to render their bodies flexible, balanced, and controlled. Originating in the indigenous martial art, *kalariipayattu* (kah-lah-rip-pay-YA-too), the regimen requires a series of gymnastic full-body exercises (Figure 3.17), including kicks, jumps, and massage for the entire body given through their teacher's feet and hands. They also do exercises for the eyes, eyebrows, facial muscles, wrists,

and hands. All these components are reassembled as students learn the nine codified facial expressions, 24 root hand gestures through which to speak the text, a variety of dance steps set in rhythmic cycles, the coordination of movement of the eyes with the hands, set pieces of choreography, and then roles in the repertory. 📺 By the end of the minimum of six years of formal training, students will have been introduced to all the basic roles in the repertory and should be able to learn new roles as required for performance. Mastery only comes after lengthy stage experience, with most "star" actors gaining recognition, if at all, only after at least 20 years of experience on stage and in life.

favorite actor-dancers. The ideal connoisseur is knowledgeable in Sanskrit, culturally sophisticated in the nuances of each poetic text, able to read *kathakali*'s gesture language through which the actor's "speak" their lines, and able to appreciate and appraise each performer's style and approach to performing particular roles. Today a connoisseur is known as a *rasika*, "taster of *rasa*," or *sahridaya*, one whose heart/mind (*hrdaya*) is able to respond intuitively to a performance.

The most accessible aspect of *kathakali* performances is its popular epic/mythic stories. *Kathakali* performances traditionally served as a pleasurable form of education, not just for connoisseurs but for people from all walks of life, inasmuch as "Myths are not written by gods and demons, nor for them; but they are by, for, and about men. Gods and demons serve as metaphors for human situations" (O'Flaherty 1976:8). Therefore, performances may also be appreciated by those who have little or no education in *kathakali*'s nuances. It does not require a specialist's knowledge to be interested in *The Progeny of Krishna*'s drama of a couple's love and loss of their children in order to have empathy for the main character of the Brahmin or to enjoy the beautiful musical modes to which the text is sung. Audiences laugh raucously at the Brahmin's all-too-human foibles, they experience a sense of devotion for Krishna, and they feel a sense of affirmation knowing that human suffering is subsumed within the workings of Lord Vishnu's cosmic "play." If from a literary and poetic point of view *The Progeny of Krishna* was the "wrong" play to translate, from the perspective of the author as a performance ethnographer, *The Progeny of Krishna* was a good play to translate because it allowed the author-observer to explore the wide popular appeal this play has in performance.

Introduction to *The Progeny of Krishna* and its playwright

Kathakali owes its birth to the powerful, wealthy ruling lineages of Kerala who were interested in the performing arts and had sufficient resources to patronize a company, all of whose members were traditionally from castes

serving the ruler. Following the ancient tradition of royal authorship (such as King Mahendravarmā's *The Hermit/Harlot*), *kathakali*'s first dramas were written by the ruler of Kottayam in northern Kerala. Other authors were court poets, like Mandavapalli Ittiraricha Menon, who served the court of Kartikaturun Maharaja, ruler of the large southern kingdom of Travancore. Born to a poor family, Ittiraricha Menon received a traditional education in Sanskrit literature. He came to the ruler's attention in 1763. At court in the city of Thiruvananthapuram, now Kerala's capital, he composed his two *kathakali* plays, *The Progeny of Krishna* and *King Rugmamgada's Law*. He was so successful that the ruler awarded him the highest honor possible – a gift of a gold bracelet.

Both plays were probably first performed either within the palace compound or as one of many performances given annually as part of a festival at the nearby main Hindu temple, Sri Padmanabhaswamy Temple. The main deity in this temple is Lord Vishnu in his reclining form, known as Padmanabha. Vishnu is considered the "preserver." Vishnu, "the preserver," is one of the trinity of Hindu deities, along with Brahma, "the creator" and Siva, "the destroyer." Lord Krishna is one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu. As reflected in *The Progeny of Krishna*, there was a very close relationship between rulers and the main local temple. Kings were held responsible for upholding the cosmic order of the universe by protecting and preserving the social order. This responsibility is reinforced in the ritual calendar of the temple when the reigning monarch carries the sword representing the deity's power in annual processions to the nearby Arabian Sea where Lord Vishnu's image is bathed.

Given the close ties between temple and state, it is not surprising that both of Ittiraricha Menon's plays focus on devotion to Lord Vishnu. In *King Rugmamgada's Law*, this takes the form of a test of the king's devotion, while in *The Progeny of Krishna* the devotion of a simple brahmin is tested. Brahmins were learned in Sanskrit, serving as priests, scholars, and grammarians. They are considered "priests" and therefore "highest" among the categories into which people are born. Plays based on

the life of Krishna are adapted from stories in *The Bhagavata-Purāṇa*, the source of the story dramatized in *The Progeny of Krishna*, dating between the fifth and tenth century. The story was originally told to illustrate how Vishnu is the greatest deity in the Hindu pantheon, especially in his incarnation as Krishna.

Both of Ittiraricha Menon's plays stage the notion of "divine play," or *lila*. A fundamental concept in a Hindu understanding of the world, "divine play" means that when god wants to act in the world by taking one of many forms (incarnations), such as Rama or Krishna, he does not do so out of any need or lack, but "by a free and joyous creativity that is integral to his own nature. He acts in a state of rapt absorption comparable to that of an artist possessed by his creative vision or that of a child caught up in the delight of a game played for its own sake" (Hein cited in Sax 1995:13). The child-like nature of "divine play" is reflected in the character of the Brahmin in *The Progeny of Krishna*.

The Progeny of Krishna – the play

Kathakali actor, Margi Vijayan, told the author that he thought *The Progeny of Krishna* was accessible and popular not only because its language was relatively simple, but also because it was "a very simple play." Connoisseur G.S. Varyar echoed this, saying the play "has an everyday (*lōkadharma*) aspect." *The Progeny of Krishna* enacts the very human dilemma faced by a simple Brahmin householder and his wife. They have suffered the loss of all nine sons born to them. The original play is composed in twelve scenes, each of which is briefly summarized below: 

Scene 1: The greatest martial hero in the Mahabharata epic, Arjuna, returns after the Pandavas' victory over their evil cousins, the Kauravas, in the battle of Kurukshetra, to visit Krishna's court. Krishna blesses Arjuna, and then convinces him to stay awhile and share his company.

Scene 2: A Brahmin householder unexpectedly bursts into the Council Hall carrying the body

of a dead child. He pours out his woeful tale of loss (Figure 3.16):

This grief is unbearable for me.
I am not one who has committed any deed
prohibited to Brahmins.
Why this result! Oh son, Siva! Siva!

Alas, what you see here is my dear child
lying with his eyes having turned upward.
Thus eight boys are lost and gone
due to the fault of our arrogant king!

Lord Krishna, the object of the Brahmin's anger, not only turns a deaf ear, but literally walks away, exiting the stage. Arjuna is moved by the Brahmin's tale, and rushes forward to offer his help. He promises that he will protect his next child. The Brahmin is skeptical of Arjuna's brash promise:

When Vishnu, the master of the worlds and
protector of the good, heard of my sorrow, He
did not move (even an inch).

But, quite surprisingly, without thinking even a
little why this was so,

You, Fool, have ventured into this!

To convince the Brahmin, Arjuna vows that he will throw himself into a pit of fire if he does not protect the baby.

Scene 3: At home, the Brahmin's Wife (which is how she is known) hears his news, but at first remains philosophical as she asks, "Is it possible for even those who are accomplished to turn away fate?" Putting his trust in Krishna, he convinces his wife that their fate is about to change with Arjuna's help.

Scene 4: The time has come for the Brahmin's Wife to give birth. The joyous and nervous father calls the Midwife from the village to care for her (Figure 3.18).



Figure 3.18

In *The Progeny of Krishna*, Scene 4, the Brahmin's Wife (Margi Vijaykumar), in pain as the time for her delivery draws near, is helped by the village midwife (Margi Suresh).

Photo © Phillip B. Zarrilli.

Scene 5: The Brahmin rushes to tell Arjuna, who builds a delivery house of arrows to protect them. The Midwife and Brahmin's Wife enter. Arjuna guards the entrance as the Brahmin paces nervously outside. When the Wife delivers a ninth son, it immediately vanishes! At first the Brahmin faints. When he revives, he turns his fury on Arjuna, taunting him:

Fool! What happened to your highly accomplished skill?

Oh best among dunces, what is the use of this tent of arrows with all its "pomp and circumstance?"

Finally, he commands him to leave, "Go! Go! Go!"

**Scene 6:* Arjuna travels to the abode of the god of death, Yama, and angrily demands the return of the Brahmin's son. Yama says he has not taken any of the sons, and sends him in search of Krishna.

**Scene 7:* Arjuna next goes to the god of thunder and rain, Indra's heavenly world, to demand the return of the Brahmin's sons. He too tells him to seek out Krishna.

Scene 8: Arjuna searches all the worlds, but does not find the missing sons. Acting on his vow, he is about to jump into the fire pit when Krishna saves him, humbling Arjuna's pride.

**Scene 9:* Krishna and Arjuna set out for Vaikuntha, the heavenly abode, but along the way

they encounter the darkness of Mount Lokalka. Krishna releases his great weapon to dispel the darkness so they may continue their journey.

**Scene 10*: Krishna and Arjuna arrive in Vaikuntha where they encounter the wonders of the heavenly abode.

**Scene 11*: Mahavishnu greets Krishna and Arjuna, expresses his delight with their presence, and reveals the following:

Only to make you come here itself, did I bring that

best among Brahmin's children here with delight.

Vishnu entrusts all nine sons to them to return to the Brahmin and his wife.

Scene 12: Arjuna and Krishna arrive at the Brahmin's house where he and his wife are still in mourning. After recounting his journey through the heavens, Arjuna requests the parents to receive "with delight" all their sons being returned "by the compassion of the Lord [Vishnu]!" Overjoyed, the couple receive each of the nine children (Figure 3.19), and give their blessings to Krishna and Arjuna.

When a drama like *The Progeny of Krishna* has been performed for over 200 years, the performance ethnologist may ask a number of questions about changing texts, changing audience tastes and expectations, and changing performance conditions.



Figure 3.19

With his seventh son on his shoulders, the Brahmin dances with joy at his return. At his left is his wife (Sajan) and behind her several other children. Arjuna is on the right.

Photo © Phillip B. Zarrilli.

Text and performance, past and present

Over the past 40 to 50 years, most *kathakali* texts, including *The Progeny of Krishna*, have been edited and shortened from what was once an all-night performance to a now more typical three-and-a-half to four-hour performance. There are several practical reasons for this change.

- For town audiences at performances sponsored by cultural clubs made up of connoisseurs, performances are often shortened to allow people to return home by the last available modes of public transportation.
- Full productions are expensive to mount, and with the waning of court patronage, costs must be reduced. *The Progeny of Krishna* is much more expensive to mount because it requires five additional actors playing divine roles, each with elaborate make-up and costumes. The edited version only requires four actors, plus village children.
- Throughout the twentieth century, there was an increasing emphasis on featuring star performers in roles popular with connoisseurs. Rather than performing a single play in its entirety, all-night programs often feature three shortened plays with three different star performers. The edited version keeps the focus much more on the star actor playing the role of the Brahmin – a character who does not appear in any of the scenes cut from the full-length version.

As exemplified in *The Progeny of Krishna*, what is edited from a performance both reflects and shapes audience taste and expectations in a changing sociocultural landscape. Of the original twelve scenes, the five cut (marked * on pp. 149 and 150) are Arjuna's search for the children (Scenes 6 and 7), and his journey with Krishna to Vishnu's heavenly abode (Scenes 9–11). These five scenes emphasize the overarching point of view of the *original* story: that Vishnu is "the greatest" of all the gods and that his own inscrutable, capricious divine play, *lila*, is manifest not only in his incarnation in Lord Krishna, but in his own "play." (He brings the Brahmin's children to Vaikuntha in order to necessitate

a visit by Krishna and Arjuna.) As described by Krishna in Scene 10, these scenes reveal the wonder and glory of Vishnu's abode:

Please look with delight at Vishnu's home.
 . . . all eyes have begun to swim and play
 in the immense waves of this
 ocean of ambrosia!

In the center of this ocean of milk is a
 wonderful world called Vaikuntha . . .

[It is] the prosperous Goddess Lakshmi's
 playhouse where there is no grief,
 and where all people are immersed in pleasures!

With these scenes cut, the dramatic narrative does not focus nearly as much on the cosmic dimensions of Vishnu's "divine play," but more specifically on the Brahmin's "everyday" human dilemma: Arjuna's prideful attempt to resolve that dilemma, and the joy and devotion that comes with Krishna's gracious return of the children. Because the five scenes cut are all briefly summarized by Arjuna at the beginning of Scene 12 when he reports to the Brahmin, the narrative continuity of the story is not broken. Indeed, in its shortened version, the pace of *The Progeny of Krishna* is decidedly up-tempo in keeping with the Brahmin's sense of urgency about his very human situation. As we shall see below, in the hands of the great twentieth-century actor, Kunju Nayar, the style of playing the lead role of the Brahmin came to emphasize his endearing humor, popularizing a shortened production's focus on the Brahmin's human dilemma. The focus on star performers like Kunju Nayar developing the human side of this role reflects a major historical shift from an earlier emphasis on the larger cosmological drama of Vishnu's "divine play."

Everyday concerns: male progeny and the suffering of the pious and innocent

Childlessness and, in particular, lack of male progeny, bursts upon the stage with the Brahmin's dramatic

entrance in Scene 2. This is perhaps the worst dilemma that can befall traditional Hindu males. As *kathakali* actor, Vasu Pisharoti, explained, “the greatest loss one can suffer is to lose a child.” Children “are the only form of *physical* permanence. They are the links of the eternal chain of rebirths . . . in contrast with (and often at the sacrifice of) the setting free or Release (*moksa*) of the eternal soul” (O’Flaherty 1988:73).

The point of view assumed in *The Progeny of Krishna* is that inherent in a set of Sanskrit texts, *Dharma Sastras*, which provide an idealized model of how society should be organized and one’s duties within that order. According to this religious and social ideal, the [male] brahmin passes through at least the first two of the four “stages of life” open to him – student, householder, forest-dwelling hermit, and renunciant. In the play, the Brahmin is attempting to fulfill the two most essential duties of householder through which society is preserved – offering sacrifices and raising sons. Although release from the cycle of rebirths is the ultimate goal, “for most people, householder life was the limit of their present existence: they married, raised a family, carried out their social duties, performed their prescribed rituals, and ended life as householders, hoping that they had prepared the way for a better future birth” (Hopkins 1971:81). Of these, the householder role was considered most important because, of the four stages,

it alone leads to the production of offspring and the support of society. . . . Every Brahmin was said to be born with a triple indebtedness: to the sages, to the gods, and to his ancestors. He became free of these only when he had satisfied the sages with celibacy, the gods with sacrifices, and his ancestors with a son.

(Hopkins 1971:82, 77)

The tragedy that befalls the Brahmin and his Wife is exacerbated by the apparent injustice of their situation since they are faultless. The Brahmin is described as “pious,” “noble,” “good,” and “best among Brahmins.” *The Progeny of Krishna* dramatically raises the question

that confronts all families: Why do the pious and innocent suffer?

In a study of how Malayalis interpret such a situation, villagers shared thoughts that echo the Brahmin’s Wife’s view that their suffering is divinely ordained, that is, it is their fate (*vidhi*):

Sometimes really good people suffer. . . . What is to happen will happen. One cannot prevent it. It is called [fate] *vidhi*. . . . *Vidhi* means the happenings in life which are beyond one’s control, e.g., the sudden death of a young person. (Ayroohuzhiel 1983:123, 126–127)

For pious, upright individuals like the Brahmin and his Wife, they suffer not from some sin committed in the past, but from a present fate over which they have no control. Innocent people also suffer. It cannot be that they have done something wrong. It may be “what is written on their foreheads” (1983:129). The everyday concerns with childlessness and suffering in *The Progeny of Krishna* are part of the play’s popular appeal to *kathakali*’s broad-based audiences.

Everyday characters

Another reason for the popular appeal of the play is its everyday characters. Connoisseur G.S. Varyar explained that the Brahmin in *The Progeny of Krishna* is “more everyday” than most major *kathakali* characters. In part this is due to the Brahmin’s costume and make-up, which is relatively close to how Brahmins traditionally dressed in Kerala with a grey beard, simple wrapped cloth, sacred thread, and beads. It is also because of the way the role of the Brahmin is enacted today.

One way senior actors develop roles is to create a mini-scene not in the original dramatic text that allows the actor to elaborate some aspect of the drama – the mood of a scene, a character’s state of mind, or a story that provides further information on the situation. Toward the conclusion of Scene 2, actor Kunju Nayar developed a small scene that elaborated the Brahmin’s mistrust of Arjuna’s vow that he will throw himself into

the fire. This interpolation helped crystalize Kunju Nayar's style of acting the Brahmin, and made the character popular.

Kathakali actor Vasu Pisharoti explained that in the Kunju Nayar tradition of playing the role, the Brahmin is "typical" of his social type because "he's very, very innocent. Because of his innocence, he lashes out,

terribly angry, against the ruler and loses control." His innocence comes from qualities traditionally understood to be determined at birth, which leave him uncorrupted. When he enters the scene, he is filled with the anguish of sorrow over the loss of his eighth son. But his sorrow (the dominant emotional state) is tinged with anger over the death of yet another son. He moves back and forth

***Kathakali* make-up and costume categories**

Costuming and make-up are part of the process which "transforms" the actors into idealized, archetypal character types, each of which is individualized by the dramatic context and the choices actors make playing each role. Costumes and make-up for these archetypes have evolved from several sources: *kutiyattam*, ritual performances, local artistic conventions, and conventional daily dress.



There are seven basic archetypal costumes and make-ups, of which the first three below appear in the short version of *The Progeny of Krishna*.

(1) "Green" (*pacca*) archetype (Figure 3.16): These are the divine figures like Krishna and Vishnu in *The Progeny of Krishna*, and epic heroes such as Arjuna. They are upright, moral, and ideally full of a calm inner poise – "royal sages," modeled on the hero of Sanskrit drama whose task is to uphold sacred law. A white frame sets off the green base of the face makeup, reflecting this type's basic inner refinement. The stylized mark of Vishnu is painted on the forehead with a yellow base and markings of red and black. The soft curving black of the eyebrows and black underlining of the lower lids extends to the side of the face, framing the eyes. The lips are brilliant coral red. The outer jacket is red and the lower skirt is white with orange and black stripes. Most characters in this class wear the highly jeweled medium-size crown like Arjuna. Krishna wears a special vase-shaped crown with a short tuft of

peacock feathers on top, a blue upper garment, and skirt of bright mustard-yellow.

(2) "Radiant" (*minukku*): includes both idealized female heroines such as the Brahmin's Wife, and spiritually-perfected males including Brahmins, holy men, and sages. The base make-up is a radiant yellow-orange. Costumes are close to traditional everyday dress. For female roles, men don a long-sleeved upper garment, a white lower cloth, and suggest a traditional female hairstyle by wrapping a colorful cloth around a false topknot worn slightly to the left of the head. Holy men wear the typical saffron yellow and a special crown, while Brahmins like the main role in *The Progeny of Krishna*, wear a simple lower cloth as well as an upper cloth tied over the head.

(3) "Special" (*tēppu*): a catch-all class of approximately 18 characters, including the comic Midwife in *The Progeny of Krishna*, as well as special bird-style make-ups and costumes such as Hamsa (a goose).

Other categories include:

- (4) the orange-red "ripe" (*pazhuppu*) type for four divine characters: Brahma, Shiva
- (5) "knife" (*katti*) make-up for arrogant and evil demon-kings like the ten-headed Ravana
- (6) "beard" (*tati*) characters including the divine/higher "white beard" for the valorous chief of the monkeys, Hanuman, the "red beards" for the evil, vicious, and vile demons, and "black beards" for evil schemers, and
- (7) "black" (*kari*) for demonesses.

between expressing pathos and anger. But immediately after becoming angry, he regrets it. Another actor, Nelliode Vasudevan Namboodiripad, explained that “Since the Brahmin is so innocent, he shows everything in the extreme. If he is happy, he will be extremely happy. . . . So at last, when he sees all his children together, he is very happy, and he can’t control his happiness! It’s like a person winning the lottery!”

The Kunju Nayar tradition of playing the role also involves an important element of endearing humor. When Pisharoti’s Brahmin reacts to the thunderous sound of Arjuna’s first arrow shot, he shouts, “My ears are broken!” Improvising, he adds, “I’m only familiar with the sounds of worship – the ringing of the bell.” The Brahmin’s innocent piety creates humor. As G.S. Varyar explains, “the enjoyment of a really good performance . . . is seeing the wide gamut of emotions through which [the Brahmin] passes. [It] is what makes the play unusual . . . [and] popular.”

Although the Brahmin is a familiar character, by no means is he a caricature. M.P. Sankaran Namboodiri explains how the actor must keep within the bounds of “what is appropriate” (*aucityambōdham*) to the type – a fundamental concept guiding the acting of all major roles. In contrast is the minor role of the Midwife, which is intentionally played as a caricature; she is one of the most “everyday” (*lōkadharmī*) roles in the repertory. Like other caricatures, *kathakali*’s are created by carefully copying easily identifiable stereotypical behaviors of particular groups of people within the society at large. The Midwife is played as a buck-toothed, hunchbacked old village woman. Her portrayal never fails to elicit a good-humored response from the audience.

Responding to *The Progeny of Krishna*

Kathakali actor Vasu Pisharoti recollected how, at the age of thirteen or fourteen, “tears fell unconsciously from [my] eyes” while watching Kunju Nayar play the Brahmin in a performance of *The Progeny of Krishna*. Although he knew the story and had seen it performed before, on this particular night the performance

“touched and pierced my heart/mind. It is a special feeling. . . . I cried and so did many other people in the audience.” Such an overtly empathetic response is unusual, and is occasioned either by the Brahmin’s moments of pathos, and/or by the occasion of overwhelming joy that concludes a good performance – a moment when joy, wonder, grace, and devotion are melded as parents and children are united and the Brahmin’s suffering is ended.

In productions of *The Progeny of Krishna* today, the roles of the Brahmin’s eight oldest children are not played by young *kathakali* actors, but rather by children from the community where the performance is being held. Ideally, the organizers of the performance gather eight volunteer children, male or female, from families attending the performance, ideally of different heights and ranging from 4-year-olds to 15-year-olds. They are then arranged on the stage from oldest/tallest to youngest/smallest. This ideal casting reflects the fact that Vishnu had taken all of the children to his heavenly abode where they had been living fully and joyfully with their heavenly father (Vishnu) and mothers (Lakshmi and Bhuumi Devi) until they were taken by Arjuna and Krishna to rejoin their parents of birth.

Naturally, the spectator/actor relationship is altered with village children rather than young *kathakali* actors playing these roles. The audience is usually abuzz with conversation and commentary throughout the opening of the final scene as Krishna serves as an on stage stage-manager for the children, arranging them from tallest to shortest, prompting them about how to hold their hands to pay proper respects to their parents, and when to go forward to Arjuna to be given to their parents. Much of this is improvised by the actors playing Arjuna and the Brahmin. Once the children have been brought forward, given the predominant mood of the Brahmin’s abundant joy, the improvisations are often uproariously funny.

The author-ethnographer was unable to determine precisely when it became common for village children to play these roles instead of young *kathakali* actors, but this convention brings the larger religious context of the

play into the performance text. Krishna's grace is not an abstract theological/cosmological construct, but becomes part of the village's progeny here and now. In *The Progeny of Krishna*, the "everyday" has the potential to take on the sense of being *this* particular day for these particular people. This phenomenon reflects an increasing emphasis in popular Hinduism today on the immediacy of devotion to Krishna, rather than on the larger cosmology of "divine play."

Among connoisseurs, the same performative moments that brought tears to Pisharoti's then young eyes are often experienced and interpreted as a subtler internal resonance or "vibration" "within the mind" – signs of actualizing an aesthetic experience of "tasting" known as *rasa*. As Ganesha Iyer explained,

When the actor enacts certain states (*rasas*), they are able to create a sympathetic motion in my heart. When he enacts a sorrowful aspect, I do not experience sorrow, but appreciate his expression of sorrow. . . . I experience sympathetic vibration. But in some people, they may experience this as a *real* emotion. . . . When a very sorrowful scene is enacted, some may weep. . . . This difference may be due to having a more intellectual appreciation, and not emotional.

The aesthetic experience Ganesha Iyer describes is part of an Indian cultural understanding of what happens when one's sensibilities are developed through education, whether as a spectator or practitioner learning yoga or a martial art. According to this paradigm, one's sensibilities begin at the grossest, physical, most external level, and through a gradual process of education and disciplined training one moves toward a subtler, more refined internal mode of appreciation and action.

How has the West read and interpreted non-Western performance?

Discussions of *kathakali* have often described it as a "classical" art, and privileged the educated point of view

of the connoisseur and his "theater of the mind." This point of view suggests that *kathakali* is an art of the elite to the exclusion of the everyday and the mundane. Although *kathakali* was traditionally, and still is, of greatest interest to those castes/classes involved as performers and patrons, whose view of the world is best reflected on stage, it has never been a dance-drama appealing only to an elite. When *kathakali* is discussed exclusively as a "theatre of the mind," the discourse disparages the simpler pleasures and broad popular appeal of a play like *The Progeny of Krishna*, which, at least when Kunju Nayar performed the Brahmin, was able to bring tears to the eyes of some among his audiences. *Kathakali* performances traditionally were open to a general public – a marketplace for commerce and social interaction.

When *kathakali* is classified, as some in the West have, as "classical," or "traditional," these labels imply that *kathakali* is relatively fixed and unchanging, rather than a dynamic reflection of socio-cultural and political/economic processes. Such labels also say something disturbing about the West. In 1976, Edward Said identified this kind of ahistorical process of projecting onto cultures of the Middle East and Asia what the West desires them to be as "orientalizing" the "Other." In the nineteenth century, German philosopher, Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), represented Europe as open to change and development, but Asia as more or less static and unchangeable. The view of India in particular as unchangeable and absolutely different allowed the British to justify their colonization of India: they could provide the rules of reason and bureaucracy that Indians (ostensibly) could not provide for themselves. This legacy of India as the "absolute Other" is discernable still in the West's continuing romance with India as the "mystical" or "spiritual Other" [see the Chapter 12 case study, "Global Shakespeare", for a further discussion of "Orientalism" and postcolonial criticism]. The degree to which such mystification has affected traditional Indian performance, especially performances designed for Western tourists, is witnessed in P.K. Devan's tourist *kathakali* performances in the port city

of Kochi-Ernakulam in central Kerala. Devan touts *kathakali* as a 2,000 year-old “ritual art” [see Chapter 12 on “Tourism”]. This representation of *kathakali* reflects a Western desire to encounter India as that “other” magical place of antique “ritual” spirituality, rather than to see *kathakali*, as we have here, as a genre that continued to change, responsive to dynamics in culture, including that of the late twentieth century. To give one more example of this, contemporary experiments involving *kathakali* have included Iyyemgode Sreedharan’s 1987 play, *People’s Victory*, where Karl Marx meets imperialism on the *kathakali* stage, a play that reflects the fact that Kerala State, when formed in 1957, had the first democratically elected communist government in the world (Zarrilli 2000: Chapter 10).

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Introduction to Kathakali Dance-Drama: 20-minute color video-tape introducing *kathakali* in context. London: Routledge, 2000.

The Progeny of Krishna: 210-minute documentary of complete performance in Kerala, India. For rental (only) from: Centre for Performance Research, 8H Science Park, Aberystwyth, Wales, SY23 3AH, United Kingdom, or Centre for South Asia, Film Distribution Center, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Ingraham Hall, Madison, W.I. 53706

The Killing of Kirmira: 210-minute documentary of complete performance in Kerala, India. London: Routledge, 2000.

Kathakali performances, training: www.keralatourism.org/ video-clips. Search for the following videos on this website: *Kathakali*, *Kathakali training*, *Kathakali make-up*, *Kathi Vesham*. See *kalarippayattu* for clips on the martial art training from which *kathakali* training and massage developed.

For types of traditional ritual performances which influenced the development of *kathakali*, see *The Dance of the Gods (teyyam)*, *Perumkaliyattam (teyyam)*, *Kaalitheeyatu* (ritual invoking the goddess Kali), *Kalamezhuthu Pattu*.

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Rugmangada's Lav, *The Flower of Good Fortune*, and *The Killing of Kirmira* by V.R. Prabodhachandran Nayar, M.P. Sankaran Namboodiri, and Phillip B. Zarrilli.)

CASE STUDY: The silent bell: The Japanese *nō* play, *Dōjōji*

What is *nō*?

By Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei

Does attending an outdoor performance of a fifteenth-century *nō* play at a Buddhist temple sound like a hot date? In contemporary Japan, growing numbers of trendy young urbanites flock to summertime performances of *nō* plays such as *Dōjōji*, performed as *takigi nō*, or *nō* by firelight. What might be the fascination of a genre that many Japanese consider outdated, slow, and incomprehensible?

One answer may be the allure of the main character in the *nō* plays – the *shite*, the one who does. Many *nō* plays, including *Dōjōji*, feature main characters who are agonized females or their ghosts, often formerly great beauties, women who have been betrayed, who are possessed by demonic forces, or who are crazed. Their angry spirits make battle against the prayers that the Buddhist priests (male characters) say to try to calm them. Powerful dance, hypnotic music, and stunning costumes and masks combine with the atmospheric firelight to create an ideal occasion for a stylish date. But beyond this, might there be deeper, cultural reasons in Japan's past and present? To explore this, we need to know something of the cultural context in which *nō* developed. Considering the interest in plays like *Dōjōji* with their special kind of female characters and their mythic femaleness, we also should inquire into the place of such portraits of women that the all-male *nō* theatre developed. In doing so this case study will employ contemporary feminist and gender theories, adapted to the subject.

Nō plays are performed on a raised wooden stage, over which is a roof held up by four pillars, even when the stage is indoors (see Figures 3.7, 3.8, and 3.20). The main acting area is about 15 square feet. Beneath the floorboards, ceramic jars enhance the sound of the actors' stamping feet. *Nō* stages have a painted pine tree on the back wall, representative of the "epiphany pine" where a god-possessed priest once danced. There are no special settings or lighting, and only minimal stage properties. A bridgeway (*hashigakari*) connects the stage with the curtained "mirror room" where the actors prepare (Figure 3.8); the *hashigakari* is seen as a passage from this world (the realm of the audience) to the world of spirits (embodied by the actor who crosses this bridge). The audience, usually about 400 people, sits on two sides of the stage. Steps lead from the stage into the auditorium (Figures 3.8, 3.21), a vestige of the Tokugawa era (1603–1868) when actors would descend them to receive valuable gifts from the shogun and his entourage.

Professional *nō* actors today are almost all male, training from childhood with older relatives. To prepare to perform properly, the actor stares at his masked (or sometimes unmasked) reflection in the "mirror room." He will embody the character, but will not go into trance. The main character, the *shite*, and the secondary character, the *waki* (meaning the listener or sideman), may have companions called *tsure*. Usually the *waki* arrives first and establishes the situation; then the *shite* enters. The *shite* dances while retelling and reliving past woes; the *waki* is often a traveling Buddhist

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Feminist and gender theory, modified for medieval Japan

"Feminism begins with a keen awareness of exclusion from male cultural, social, sexual, political, and intellectual discourse. It is a critique of prevailing social conditions that formulate women's position as outside of dominant male discourse" (Dolan 1988:3). Feminist theory first appeared in Europe and America around the end of the nineteenth century and has since entered the thinking of many cultures. Nevertheless, some women in developing countries have rejected Western feminism as not relevant to their situations. As Chandra Mohanty explains: "Western feminist discourse, by assuming women as a coherent, already constituted group which is placed in kinship, legal, and other structures, defines third world women as subjects *outside* social relations, instead of looking at the way women are constituted *through* these very structures" (1991b:72). Mohanty also notes that "third world women have always engaged with feminism, even if the label has been rejected in a number of instances" (1991a:7). By this she means that such women have actively attempted to improve their material situations. Thus, while acknowledging that cultural differences must be considered, and that solutions or explanations posed for one culture or time may not be appropriate in another context, Mohanty suggests that in male-defined societies, all women struggle to negotiate a place for themselves.

The social and economic roles of women and men as depicted in theatre can indicate the stresses and ruptures that define an actual time and place. Until recently, Japanese theatre studies focused almost exclusively on theatre written and performed by males, and on the male spectator's perspective. The role of women as creators and spectators was seldom considered. Extensive feminist theatre research is now being done to more fully understand women's roles in Japanese theatre history.

In Europe and America, feminist theory was first systematically applied to theatre in the early 1980s, building on concepts developed during the women's liberation movement of the previous decade. Early feminist theatre historians worked to recover or retrieve neglected works by female playwrights and to document the activities of female actors, managers, directors, critics, and designers. One goal of this case study is to emphasize the often-overlooked early female performers whose innovations made the all-male *nō* possible.

Multiple feminisms and the idea of gender

Feminist theory is not a unified whole, but includes various approaches such as materialist, liberal, radical, lesbian, black, and Lacanian (psychoanalytic). Paralleling Mohanty's concern regarding women in "non-Western" or "third-world" countries, Judith Butler argues that "the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept that category" (1990:4). We must look at the many ways that gender and sexuality (male and female, heterosexual and homosexual, normative and alternative) are performed and perceived in various societies.

Butler insists that the body's external gestures and not some "inner essence" define gender (as opposed to biological sex) (1990:4). She notes that the body publicly performs repeated, planned, stylized actions that are understood by the society in which they occur. Gender is therefore not stable; only physical gestures make gender readable to the outside observer. Even when done unconsciously or by habit, these gestures result in a performance that is as stylized and as choreographed as a ballet.

Materialist feminism

"Cultural materialism" seeks to understand how literature is both a product of, and a participant in, a wide range of oppressive social formations and practices, from a society's language to its constructions of class, race, ethnicity, gender, or nationhood. (For further explanation of materialist criticism, see the case study on Ibsen's *A Doll House* in Chapter 9.) Materialist feminists deny the existence of a natural female (or male) essence. They argue that gender is constructed by the repetition of accepted social practices, an argument that seeks to counter traditional Western concepts of "natural" gender identities.

Sue-Ellen Case (1988) asks how the audience in a society that denies women economic and social opportunities "reads" the staged image or sign of "woman," when that sign is created by a male playwright and performed by a male actor. Materialist feminists suggest that the female performing body in societies in which women are allowed to perform might actively create an alternative (even subversive) version to that created in male-written or male-directed plays. She might do this by her choice of costume, gesture, intonation, rhythm, movement, expression, or her personal lifestyle. In so doing she might necessarily challenge conventional ideas about women characters in classical plays, including ancient Greek tragedy or the plays of Shakespeare.

Gender and the spectator

The Platonic-Aristotelian idea of mimesis seems to assume that theatre's purpose is to mirror reality, and reality as males see it. The spectator is assumed to be male and traditional male values frame the play. But suppose that a female (or male) spectator were to resist identification with the male hero and values. Materialist feminist Elin Diamond advocates that women on the stage might use Bertolt Brecht's distancing or "alienating" acting techniques to disrupt the narrative conventions of realism – which Case terms "the prison-house of art" (Case 1988: 124). Diamond believes that feminist performance must focus on Brechtian "gestus." The influential twentieth-century German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) sought to break from realism in his plays and in his innovative methods for performance and production. Influenced by Karl Marx, Brecht sought to make his audiences critically aware of the social and economic conditions of characters so that audiences would challenge such conditions (Brecht's work is further discussed in Chapter 10). The term "gestus" refers to the expressive means an actor can employ – such as a way of standing or moving or a pattern of behavior – that indicates to the audience the social position or condition of the character the actor is playing. (Various devices can be used to this end including unexpected costuming choices, cross-gender casting, or puppetry.) Applying Brecht to feminist performance, Diamond suggests that in contrast to realistic theatre, in which the actor "laminates body to character," actors (especially women) perform in ways in which the body "stands visibly and palpably separate from the 'role' of the actor as well as the role of the character" (Diamond 1988: 89). The goal of gestic acting would be to make the female (or male) body an active agent who chooses the way she or he is looked at, rather than being a passive object.

This case study uses materialist feminism and gender theory, modified for Japanese medieval culture, to better understand the female origins of *nō*. It considers the social position of women in medieval Japan, various "distancing" techniques of *nō* performance, and the "mythic dimensions of femaleness" as perceived by many Japanese.



Figure 3.20

In a performance of the *nō* play, *Dōjōji* at the Kanze Theatre, Tokyo, 1962, the ghost of the maiden, dressed as a beautiful *shirabyōshi* dancer, approaches the bell at *Dōjō* Temple. Here, the actor moves from the *hashigakari* (bridgeway) toward the main stage, symbolizing her passage from the spirit world to this world. (See also Figure 3.21.)

Photo © Gary Jay Williams.



Figure 3.21

In the *nō* play *Dōjōji*, the ghost maiden dances around the bell which then descends over her and then is raised to reveal, as seen here, the differently costumed and masked actor (who has done a quick change inside the bell) as a horned, demon serpent which is the true form of the ghost maiden. The abbot and the priests standing at left are attempting an exorcism.

Photo © Gary Jay Williams.

priest asked to pray for the release of the *shite*'s suffering soul. While the *shite* dances, the chorus chants his words.

Eight to 15 chorus members kneel on the stage at the audience's right (opposite the *hashigakari*). Unlike the Greek chorus, they do not dance and have no identity particular to a given play. Musicians (flute and drums) sit upstage, in front of the painted tree. They vocalize rhythmical sounds (*kakegoe*) as part of the musical score. Stage assistants (*kōken*) handle props, straighten costumes, or prompt actors. They are unobtrusive but clearly visible to the audience.

When masks are used, they are worn only by the *shite* (and sometimes the *shite*'s companion). Smaller than the

adult male face, they allow the audience to see simultaneously the role portrayed by the mask and the actor's living flesh. Costumes are elegant, costly, and conventional. The scripts are in an archaic language, using a "brocade style" that weaves together well-known stories, poetry, and Buddhist references.

Alternation of serious and comic plays

In the past, a full day's performance consisted of five *nō* plays, with short, comic plays (*kyōgen*) in between them. Today, most programs have one or two *nō* plays and one *kyōgen*. *Kyōgen* plays (the literal meaning of *kyōgen* is "crazy words") emphasize comic inversions

of social roles and stereotypical behavior. Unlike *nō*, *kyōgen* uses everyday speech, few masks, no chorus, and reserves song and dance for comic effect. Powerless characters, such as women, thieves, servants, or sons-in-law outwit masters, husbands, priests, or gods. They play practical jokes and are carried away by song, dance, and uncontrollable urges (for wine, food, prestige, mischief, or even cruelty). For example, in *Tied to a Pole* (*Bōshibari*), the master ties up his two servants to prevent them from drinking his wine. In a complex, physically comic sequence, they cleverly help each other get drunk anyway. *Kyōgen* actors also perform minor roles during the interlude between two-part *nō* plays.

Actor-playwright-theorist Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443), who refined the art that became *nō*, maintained that actors should gauge the style of performance to please the audience, changing it as needed. However, during the Edo (or Tokugawa) period (1603–1863), *nō* became a state ritual rather than entertainment, and no variations were permitted. Because *nō* was slowed down to satisfy ritual requirements, it is now performed about three times slower than it was during Zeami's day.

What happens in *Dōjōji*?

As noted in our Preface, Western scholars did not always consider *nō* to be “drama,” because it focuses on sustained lyrical moments rather than on logical plot development. French poet-playwright Paul Claudel (1868–1955) once said, “In drama something happens; in *nō* someone appears.” What did he mean?

Dōjōji is one of the most popular and theatrically flamboyant *nō* plays. The author is unknown; it was formerly attributed to Kanze Kojirō Nobumitsu, 1435–1516. It begins when the *waki*, the male Buddhist Abbot of *Dōjōji* (*Dōjō Temple*), announces that for many years, no bell has hung in the temple. Today, a new bell will be raised and dedicated. He leaves, forbidding the priests to admit women. The *shite* – an elegant woman – appears, maintaining that she, as a *shirabyōshi* dancer, should be allowed to perform at the dedication (Figure 3.20). The foolish priest agrees to let her enter.

She dons a special hat (*eboshi*) normally worn by male courtiers. Her dance gradually becomes chaotic and animalistic, entrancing the priests. The music, used only in *Dōjōji*, is the exotic, hypnotic *rambyōshi*, a secular version of the music of a Shinto demon-quelling ritual. Her feet move in triangular patterns, mimicking the fish-scale triangles on the actor's inner robe. Finally, the dancer knocks the hat from her head, stamps her feet, and looks at the bell. She swings her fan back and forth like the ringing hammer of a bell, as the Chorus sings: “This loathsome bell, now I remember it! / Placing her hand on the dragon-head boss, / she seems to fly upward into the bell” (Brazell 1998:199). She leaps up, and the giant bell falls crashing to the ground around her.

In the *ai-kyōgen* (interlude), the priests discover that the bell is red hot. When the Abbot returns, he angrily explains why women were forbidden. Long ago, a girl's father told her that a visiting priest would one day marry her. When she asked to be his bride, he fled in horror. She chased him, but he crossed the river by boat. In her fury, she transformed into a serpent, dove into the river, and swam across. On the other shore, she followed him to the temple called *Dōjōji*, where he had hidden beneath an unraised bell. Again becoming a snake, she entwined her body around the bell. The heat of her passion was so intense that the bell metal became fiery hot, burning alive the priest inside. The dancer in the play is this woman's furious ghost.

During this interlude, the *shite* remains inside the giant bell, where the actor changes mask and costume. When the bell rises, we see a female snake-demon, the dancer's true form (Figure 3.21). The Abbot and priests battle her, attempting an exorcism, but they cannot overpower her; they can only chase her off. As the play ends, the Chorus chants:

Again she springs to her feet,
the breath she vomits at the bell
has turned to raging flames.
Her body burns in her own fire.
She leaps into the river pool,
Into the waters of the river Hidaka,

And there she vanishes.
The priests, their prayers granted,
Return to the temple,
Return to the temple.

(Brazell 1998:206)

In order to interpret this play, we must consider its cultural and historical context. Zeami did much to develop *nō* theatre, but he did not create it from thin air.

Zeami and the female origins of nō

Japanese performance is said to originate in the shocking dance of Uzume, a female Shinto deity. According to the myth, because the sun-goddess, Amaterasu – the direct ancestor of the Emperor and thus of the Japanese people – was angry with her trickster brother, she hid herself in a cave. Deprived of the sun's light and fertility, the universe would have died. In desperation, the goddess Uzume leaped onto an overturned rain barrel, stamping her feet in dance and lifting her skirts to reveal her genitals. The other deities roared with laughter. The curious Amaterasu peeked out. But she did not witness Uzume's dance; instead, she saw her own reflection in a mirror. Entranced, she emerged from the cave. The laughter caused by Uzume's sexy dance had saved the universe from eternal death. In his secret treatises, Zeami wrote that this myth proved *nō*'s divine origin and relationship to the royal household. But is that all the myth tells us today?

Amaterasu is a female identified with the life-giving sun. Her emotional, irrational response to the bad behavior of an unruly male dangerously disrupts the balance of nature. She cloaks her body in darkness. In contrast Uzume intentionally displays her body in a kind of divine striptease. She uses explicit nakedness not to create a sexual spectacle for the pleasure of male viewers of the dance but to make the gods laugh and thereby to control events. Feminist theory suggests that she was performing not as a sexual object but rather as an active agent. Also these two female deities are reverse images that complement each other: light and dark, anger and laughter, life and death. Females have the power to give and to withdraw life.

In the sixth century, Korean emissaries introduced the patriarchal religion of Buddhism to Japan, challenging the dominance of female-oriented Shinto. Powerful leaders allied themselves with these opposing religions, vying for political control. Many sects combined aspects of both religions. Eventually, Shinto rituals became associated with the female realm and with life-affirming acts (fertility, marriage, sex, and birth), while Buddhist rites were tied primarily to the male realm, death, and the afterlife.

Nō theatre reflects this gendered religious syncretism, which remains today. The texts are primarily Buddhist, emphasizing *karma* (the results of sin that determine reincarnation status) and salvation in the afterlife. In contrast, most performance elements derive from Shinto (or Shinto-Buddhist) rituals, including demon-quelling dances, stamping feet, ritual purifications, trance-possession by gods, and the invasion of the present by spirits and ghosts. The *nō* stage is based on Shinto shrine architecture.

Nō incorporated elements of female dances. Shinto shrine maidens (*miko*) performed sacred *kagura* dances as well as *nembutsu-odori*, Buddhist-Shinto ritual dances meant to pacify angry ghosts. Female prostitute-entertainers performed Buddhist funeral rituals for the imperial family and entertained aristocratic male clients on river boats. Their outcast status diminished as their religious importance grew. Zeami's family may have belonged to their clan (Kwon 1998).

Kusemai and *shirabyōshi* were popular, secular entertainments mainly performed by women dressed in male clothing. Critics feared that their unconventional, disturbing musical rhythms and dance styles were contributing to "an age of turmoil" and were a sign of "a nation in ruins" (O'Neill 1958: 43–44). Like Uzume, these female ritualists and performers disrupted notions of social and religious stability.

Since Zeami's time, only males have performed *nō*; nevertheless, Zeami praised and valued his female predecessors. He wrote that his father Kan'ami had trained with Otozuru, a female *kusemai* dancer. The *shite*'s main dance is still termed *kusemai*, and many plays,

including *Dōjōji*, feature female *shirabyōshi* or *kusemai* dancers as characters.

The aesthetics of *nō*

Zeami's treatises were written in his maturity. Intended as training manuals for his family of actors and playwrights, they also include profound meditations on aesthetics. This case study considers two of Zeami's many aesthetic concepts – *monomane* and *yūgen*.

Monomane, often inaccurately translated as “mimesis,” is the imitation of character, not action. Unlike Western mimesis, which is representational and idealistic, *monomane* is non-representational and physical. By imitating “the three roles” (male, female, or old person), the actor reveals the fictional character's invisible body. For Zeami, a mask allows the actor to become another character; his body becomes a vessel inhabited by another's “essence,” which resides in the mask (the Buddhist concept of “essence” is clearly at odds with materialist philosophy). According to Steven T. Brown, “Underneath the actor's costume and mask is the body of the actor transformed into the virtual body of the other” (2001:26).

Nō uses many elements of non-realistic, “gestic” performance as identified by Elin Diamond. These include stylized movement and gesture, music, conventionalized vocal patterns and wordless sounds, choral and narrative speech, a single character performed by several actors (as when the chorus takes up the *shite*'s speech), dialog that cites other literary works, masks that do not fully hide the actor's face, and costumes that do not emphasize the actor's gender, class or physical body. These might be described as “gestic” performance elements. They are further supported by aesthetic concepts such as *yūgen*, one of many ideas infused with the mystical, non-dualistic philosophy of Zen Buddhism, the sect that was especially popular among the aristocrats and samurai who were Zeami's patrons.

Yūgen is a deep, quiet, mysterious beauty tinged with sadness. Zeami expands its meaning to refer to both text and performance, emphasizing the fleeting, melancholy nature of human existence. The greatest *yūgen* appears

in plays about aged, dispossessed, or formerly beautiful women who are reduced to poverty, madness, or regret. Steven T. Brown's analysis of *yūgen* is indebted to materialist feminism and other contemporary interpretive approaches. He has revised the definition of *yūgen* to include the idea of “symbolic capital” (Pierre Bourdieu's term), which stresses that actors could enhance their political position by representing characters in a way that appealed to powerful patrons. By displaying aristocratic female bodies in exquisite emotional agony, Zeami and his troupe could please all members of the shogun's court (Brown 2001:30–33). By combining *yūgen* with *monomane* in plays about often Shinto-identified females in need of male Buddhist healing or exorcism, Zeami consolidated the position of formerly outcast actors in a changing court and paved the way for *nō*'s transition from popular entertainment to elite art (Sorgenfrei 1998).

A materialist perspective on the shogun's court

Although written after Zeami's death, *Dōjōji* represents the maturity of the form that Zeami solidified. Zeami lived during a time of peace, enforced by samurai warriors after centuries of civil war. The elegant culture of the older imperial court clashed with the rather uncouth style of the warrior-rulers, the samurai. These new rulers had fostered legal changes to centralize military power and weaken noble branch families. These changes encouraged a porous social structure that increased the individual's opportunity for changing class, rather than reinforcing the strict class divisions typical of most feudal societies. Such a pattern does not fully accord with materialist interpretations of history; however, since the new laws forced the material position of aristocratic females downward, a materialist feminist interpretation proves valuable in understanding the representation of such characters in *nō*.

Among the new laws were those that shifted inheritance rights away from female aristocrats and toward first-born sons. Suddenly, a divorced or abandoned woman found herself dispossessed both financially and

emotionally. Her fury at an unfaithful spouse would be intensified by the loss of property she would previously have retained. Many people believed that the angry spirits of such dispossessed females and those of the dispossessed male rivals of the ruling Ashikaga clan, were responsible for a century of natural disasters that devastated Kyoto. Beginning around the time that the Ashikaga clan took power in 1336, there were at least 14 earthquakes and numerous plagues, typhoons, droughts, famines, fires, and floods (Brown 2001:49). Various Buddhist and Shinto rituals and festivals were established to calm these enraged spirits. As noted earlier, most *nō* plays, including *Dōjōji*, center on the anger or madness of dispossessed spirits (dead or alive). The great majority of *shite* are agonized females. Although Zeami's main patrons were male samurai, they preferred plays about women. Only 16 of 240 currently performed *nō* plays focus on warriors.

Aristocrats also feared dispossession. Court poet Nijō Yoshimoto tried to retain power by transforming the military court into a bastion of cultural refinement. In 1374, he encouraged the 17-year-old shogun (military ruler) Ashikaga Yoshimitsu – famous for his wild excesses and vulgar taste – to attend a performance of popular *sarugaku* (monkey music) acted by the talented, 11-year-old Zeami. Nijō hoped to wean his master from *dengaku* (field music), the more shocking type of performance he usually patronized. The plan succeeded too well. Overwhelmed by Zeami's beauty and skill, Yoshimitsu invited the entire troupe of rough and tumble, wandering, outcast performers, headed by Zeami's father Kan'ami, to live in his court. Since sexual relations between male samurai warriors and their young male pages or protégés were not uncommon, Zeami became the shogun's lover.

Powerful aristocrats and samurai now feared they would lose influence to these upstart favorites. To protect his own position, Nijō tutored Zeami in the aristocratic arts. Under his guidance, Zeami gradually altered the popular street entertainment, *sarugaku*, into the stately, poetic, all-male, Buddhist-oriented genre later known as *nō*.

Nijō's strategy involved differentiating *sarugaku* from its rival *dengaku*, the form that Yoshimitsu had originally preferred. By Zeami's time, masked *dengaku* (originally connected to Shinto fertility rites) was performed by both males and females. It had become associated with political turmoil and recurring bouts of mass hysteria called "*dengaku* madness." People of all classes would commit acts of larceny or lewdness, dance semi-naked in the streets for weeks on end, and dress in clothing forbidden to their class or gender. *Dengaku* actors were accused of being animal spirits disguised as humans (O'Neill 1958; Fujiwara-Skrobak 1996). An eyewitness to a 1349 *dengaku* performance described golden curtains, exotic animal skins, and actors dressed in embroidered, silver brocade. The huge audience caused the wooden stands to collapse. The eyewitness wrote:

The number of those who died among the great piles of fallen timber is past all knowing. In the confusion thieves began stealing swords. . . . Cries and shouts rose up from people who had had limbs broken or slashed; from others, stained with blood, who had been run through with swords or halberds . . . and from others still who had scalded themselves with the boiling water used for making tea. . . . The *dengaku* players, still wearing devil masks and brandishing red canes, gave chase to thieves escaping with stolen costumes. . . . Young servants unsheathed their weapons and went after men who had carried off their masters' ladies. . . . It was as if Hell's unending battles and the tortures of its demons were being carried out before one's eyes.

(O'Neill 1958:75–77)

Because *dengaku* had originated in native Shinto fertility dances, it was tied to supernatural female powers and unbridled female sexuality. In contrast, *sarugaku*'s origin is connected to Buddhist burial rites. *Sarugaku* (and eventually *nō*) would need to suggest victory over wild, emotional female forces by calm, "rational" Buddhism and stoic male warriors. Male fear of female sexuality

and the idea that the female body is the source of evil are evident in *Dōjōji*.

Gestic performance and *Dōjōji*

Both the content and performance style of most *nō* plays suggest doubleness rather than a seamless fusion of opposites. In terms of gender, the audience sees masked, obviously male actors playing primarily female characters, who perform dances derived mainly from female or Shinto genres. In terms of class formerly outcast actors are dressed in gorgeous robes that, in the past, were tossed onto the stage by grateful aristocratic patrons. Even *nō*'s commoner characters possess aristocratic traits.

The acting is “gestic” because gender and class are defined not by realistic imitation, but by conventionalized gesture, movement, and costume. The complex non-duality of these acting bodies mirrored the ideal new Japanese ruler, who combined a crass male warrior's martial fortitude with nostalgia for the faded delicacy, elegance, gentleness, and poetic skills of aristocrats – often female, dead, and dispossessed. In *Dōjōji*, the body of the male actor portraying a female dancer “enacts a complex double masquerade of both masculine and feminine” (Klein 1995:118). The male *nō* actor's body stands in for the absent female body of the *shirabyōshi* dancer, which stands in for the absent male monk as well as the invisible demonic snake. By leaping into the bell, the *shirabyōshi* dancer imitates what happened to the male. Instead of being burned to death, she is revealed in her true form. In fact, her physical body has vanished, since it was only an illusion, a disguise.

The audience sees a male actor masked as a female *shirabyōshi* dancer, who is really the snake-demon in disguise. But all of these represent another absent female, the woman of the past who is now a tormented ghost. Seeing the ghost of a woman whose lust-filled pursuit of the monk marked her as a demon-snake should inspire horror and disgust. The climax of the play becomes a cosmic battle between demonic, female forces and holy, male forces, but it is not conclusive – the demon will continue to lurk in the river, able to

resurface at any time. Female sexual power can be contained but not destroyed.

The fear of women displayed in *Dōjōji* reflects not only a misogynistic undercurrent in some types of Buddhist thought, but the historical fact that “the position of women at the elite levels of Japanese society was taking a distinct downward turn” (Klein 1995:117). The ambiguous ending suggests that chaos could erupt if the rulers failed to guard against all those (male as well as female) they had dispossessed.

***Dōjōji* today**

The continuing popularity of *Dōjōji* (and its numerous adaptations for modern theatre, film and even *anime*) suggests that the play holds a deep fascination for the public. Like the Muromachi period (1336–1573) in which it was created, late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Japan is a time of dissonance. Though outwardly serene, smooth-running, and seemingly homogeneous, Japanese society is filled with contradictions and turmoil. Men can no longer count on life-time employment; young, unmarried women live with parents while working at mind-numbing jobs; the elderly are no longer cared for by their adult children. Asian neighbors demand official Japanese apologies and reparations for atrocities committed in World War II. The victims (and their descendants) of the atomic bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki suffer physical and psychological disease. Industries have collapsed, inflation is out of control, pollution mars the environment, and even basic food such as sushi is considered dangerous to eat.

For some, the age is defined by incomprehensible acts of antisocial rage such as the sarin poison gas attacks by religious extremists. For others, it is defined by nature out of control, represented by the devastating Kobe earthquake of 1995. Still others point to governmental scandals, the apparent nervous breakdown of the Crown Princess, or the government's violation of Japan's “Peace Constitution” by sending troops to aid American military ventures, as proof that the cracks in Japanese society are irreparable. Material dispossession and spiritual betrayal are not confined to the past.

The silent bell of *Dōjōji* may speak to the spiritually and materially dispossessed: the huge, bronze temple bell no longer is able to intone warnings, announce religious services, celebrate victories, or mark the time of day. The silent bell harbors unseen forces of evil that might break forth at any moment. *Dōjōji*, with its silent bell, performed by the light of bonfires on a summer night, is theatrically stunning, but it also may suggest the difficult transformation Japan is undergoing today, from a troubling past to an uncertain future.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

The best single online source for *nō*, *kyōgen*, *kabuki* and *bunraku* – video clips (*nō* and *kyōgen*), photos (*kabuki*), historical prints, and other materials – is provided by the National Theatre of Japan at: www.ntj.jac.go.jp/english.

Video introductions to these traditional forms are also available at: <http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/noh/en/>.

All U.S. Japanese Consulates (and the Embassy) have cultural attaché offices which lend out for free a wide selection of videos and DVDs about Japan, including excellent videos on *nō*, *kabuki*, *bunraku*, and modern theatre. The selection at each consulate varies. Contact the one closest to your physical location several weeks before planning to show the videos; they will ship them to you or you may pick them up personally. There are consulates in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco as well as the Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Many videos, including the brief sampling below of titles we recommend are for sale from Insight Media: www.insight-media.com.

Bunraku: Classical Japanese Puppet Art (28 minutes) #9AF905.

Kyōgen classic: *Poison Sugar* (Busu) (28 minutes) #9AF733.

The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan (30 minutes) #9AF350.

Overview of *nō*, *kabuki* and *bunraku*: *Theatre in Japan: Yesterday and Today* (53 min) #9AF1899. Dated, but includes interviews with performers including Suzuki Tadashi on modern and traditional Japanese theatre.

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PART II

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Edited by **Bruce McConachie**

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PART II: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE IN PRINT CULTURES, 1500–1900

THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

Performances of <i>zaju</i> , <i>kunqu</i> , Ming Dynasty Classical drama in universities, Europe Perspective scenery Commedia dell'arte Professional theatres, companies, Europe <i>Kabuki</i> , <i>bunraku</i> Court spectacles: Italy, England, France, Spain Mechanized scenery English puritan revolt closes theatres 1642 Actors: Burbage, Alleyn, Montdory, Martinelli, the Andreinis Plays: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, Lope de Vega, Calderón, Hardy, Corneille	English Restoration 1660, theatre patents Neoclassical drama France, England English actresses play women's roles Comédie Française Multiple perspective scenery <i>Aragoto</i> style, <i>kabuki</i> Court spectacles Actors: Macklin Barry, Bracegirdle, Molière, Béjart DuParc, Baron, Plays: Molière, Racine, Dryden Wycherley, Behn, Congreve Chikamatsu	Sentimental drama, England, France Neoclassical drama, Russia, Germany English companies in colonies Licensing Act, London National theatres, Germany Actors: J.P. Kemble, Siddons, Garrick, Pritchard, Danjūro V Clairon, F. Schröder, Plays: Addison, Steele, Lillo, Lessing, Voltaire, Diderot, Goldsmith, Sheri- dan, Marivaux Alfieri, Goldoni Beaumarchais	Melodrama in Europe, U.S. Romantic drama Historical scenery, costume Orientalism, Western theatre Beijing Opera Touring stars Actors: Ekoff, Iffland, E. Kean, J.B. Booth, F. Kemble, Forrest, Lemaître, Rachel Plays: Kotzebue, Pixérécourt, Schiller, Goethe, Holcroft, Dunlap, Byron, Shelley, Jerrold, Büchner Gogol	Melodrama Scenic spectacle Minstrel shows Theatre Regulation Act 1843, London Touring stars "Well-made" play Realist settings, directors, writers Copyright laws Actors: Macready, Cushman, C. Kean E. Booth, Jefferson Coquelin, Bernhardt, Salvini, Ristori, Irving Terry, Duse, Wolter Plays: Boucicault, Mowatt, Boker, Tolstoy, Scribe, Sardou, Dumas <i>films</i> Rostand

1500 to 1649

1650 to 1720

1721 to 1789

1790 to 1850

1851 to 1900

WORLD EVENTS, MEDIA

Ming Dynasty 1368–1644 Renaissance, Europe Printed Bible 1456 European colonizing Protestant Reformation Elizabeth I 1558–1603 Spanish Armada, 1588 Holy Roman Empire 1559–1806 Thirty Years War 1618–48 James I 1603–25 Civil wars, Japan Tokugawa Shogunate 1603–1868 Charles I 1625–42 English Civil War 1642–49 Monteverde, Byrd, Peri	Louis XIV 1643–1715 Charles II 1660–1685 Baroque art Qing Dynasty 1644–1911 William III & Mary 1689–1702 John Locke Newspapers Rise of bourgeoisie London Stock Exchange Ottoman, Haps- burg war Lully, M. Locke, Scarlatti, Purcell, Couperin	Enlightenment European slave trade expansion War of Spanish Succession Industrial Revolution Jean-Jacques Rousseau George I, II, III 1714–1820 American Revolution 1776 Louis XVI 1774–89 French Revolution 1789 J.S. Bach, Handel Haydn, Vivaldi, Gay, Metastasio Mozart, Rameau	Romanticism European nationalism Napoleonic wars 1795–1815 War of 1812 Railways, steamboats Britain abolishes slavery Daguerreotype Revolutions of 1848, 1849 Indian Removal Act, U.S. Beethoven, Dibdin, Rossini, Berlioz Mendelssohn, Chopin, Brahms, Schumann, Wagner	Queen Victoria 1837–1901 British rule, India Ireland's famine U.S. expansion westward Crimean War Charles Darwin Civil War, U.S. U.S. abolishes slavery German empire Women's suffrage campaigns Edison's light bulb Gilded Age, U.S. Linotype machine Newspaper photos Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Puccini, Gilbert & Sullivan

Timelines 2. The timeline entries represent benchmarks relevant to themes in Part II, which take us up to the threshold of modernism. We encourage correlations between the World Events listings and the Theatre and Performance listings. Entries are for reference; some may not be explicitly discussed in Part II, given our thematic organization. For subject and name searches, see the index.

PART II

Theatre and performance in print cultures, 1500–1900

INTRODUCTION: CHINA AND WESTERN EUROPE

If asked in 1500 to choose the world's most advanced culture, an observer on the moon looking through a high-powered telescope would probably have chosen China. By the middle of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), the Chinese enjoyed the highest standard of living, the most advanced technology and medical care, the most reliable government, and arguably the most sophisticated culture in the world. In the previous century, Chinese explorers, using their invention of the compass, had established predominant influence over key ports in the Indian Ocean and landed on the east coast of Africa. New discoveries in rice cultivation had multiplied China's food-producing capacity. Landed interests and officials controlled the government, which ruled an enormous population through an imperial bureaucracy noted for its educational accomplishments. Stabilizing this authority was gunpowder, another Chinese invention, and the ideology of Confucianism, which honored learning, tolerance, decorum, and governance. Confucianism also denigrated the merchant class as unworthy of that of gentlemen, with the consequence that money made in trade and manufacturing was usually invested in education and culture rather than enhancing commercial profits. Many sons of merchants aspired to join the Confucian elite, where they could attain a high rank in the university system or imperial bureaucracy.

Chinese spectators enjoyed many kinds of theatre during the Ming Dynasty. These included *zaju*, a kind of variety performance dating from earlier times, and *kunqu*, a type of musical drama accompanied by dancing and singing that gained

popularity with Confucian elite audiences. Musician Wei Liangfu (c.1500–c.1573) synthesized several modes of southern Chinese music to initiate *kunqu*, which typically centered on mellifluous, plaintive singing to flute accompaniment. Performances of *kunqu* plays, usually about the complications of young love, also featured string and percussion instruments, slow but fluid dance movements, and lyrical, melancholy monologues. Early performances of *kunqu*, often staged at court or in elite houses, might last three days and nights. The Ming Dynasty also spawned many regional forms of music theatre, which later innovators would synthesize into *jingxi*, often referred to as Beijing or Chinese Opera (see Chapter 7).

The foundations of Chinese society and culture changed little in the four hundred years after 1500 in comparison to Western Europe. In the West, the Protestant Reformation and the religious wars that followed in its wake (1520–1648), ensured that no single ideology such as Confucianism would unify Western belief. Whereas the Ming Dynasty in China turned its back on the rest of the world – the emperor even forbade the construction of seagoing vessels – the smaller, weaker kingdoms of Spain, Portugal, England, and France sent out explorers and colonizers after 1492 to spread their religious views and enrich their kingdoms. Confucian belief and bureaucratic control regulated new discoveries in China, but the science of Galileo, Newton, and others challenged the authority of Church and state in the West during the seventeenth century and later. In the eighteenth century, the idea of a public emerged in Europe – a literate group of merchants, scientists, philosophers, artists, and others with their own political agenda, a sphere of influence unthinkable in imperial China. China had experienced conquest from abroad when the Mongols invaded, but never revolution from below. In contrast, some workers and peasants helped to lead the French Revolution (1789–1799), which challenged the kind of absolutist rule in Europe that Chinese emperors took for granted. After 1500, a new class arose in Western Europe that eventually supplanted landed aristocrats and royal sovereigns as national rulers. The bourgeoisie, merely a necessary evil in Confucian morality, began an industrial revolution in the late eighteenth century that transformed European society and led to the political power of their class in the twentieth.

By 1500, both China and Western Europe had the printing press. In China, where moveable wooden type had been in use since the third century, the Confucian elite used print primarily to standardize its bureaucratic procedures and to spread traditional learning, including extensive criticism of *kunqu* music. Print culture began in Europe in the mid-fifteenth century; Gutenberg printed his famous Bible in 1455. In sharp contrast to China, early printing was mostly unregulated in the West and soon it had entered into all of the debates that divided literate Europeans. Protestants printed Bibles for lay readers, explorers published new maps, and scientists relied on the press to communicate their findings. Print

helped sovereigns maintain their rule and, eventually, revolutionaries to overthrow them, and the early capitalists relied on the press for land titles, legal notices, and binding contracts. From 1500 to 1700 in Europe, most printers were kept busy with Bibles and religious tracts, scholarly books, and legal documents. After 1700, print culture went into high gear with the addition of newspapers and journals, novels and histories, and many more pamphlets, manuals, and plays. New inventions, coupled with more widespread literacy, led to an explosion of cheap texts in the nineteenth century. In China, socially and ideologically conservative institutions maintained a near monopoly on print culture. In Western Europe, the most dynamic, even the most radical institutions and movements turned to print to advance their goals. By 1900, the effects of printing pervaded all social and cultural practices in Western Europe, including the theatre.

This introduction focuses primarily on the many ways that print impressed itself on Western European theatre between 1500 and 1700. Subsequent chapters will continue the general story of print and the theatre between 1700 and 1900. Although centered mostly on the West, Part II will also explore the role played by printing in Japanese theatre. Many developments in Western theatre could not have occurred without its immersion in print culture. The growing dominance of print communication helped to legitimate dramatic theatre as an independent institution, shaped the development of perspective scenery within a proscenium frame, accorded greater authority to dramatic authors, enhanced the legibility of the gestures and characters presented by Western European actors, and eventually helped to convince many Europeans that they were members of a nation-state, not just a city or a province. For all of these developments, print was a necessary, but by no means a sufficient cause.

The rise of European professional theatres

Although print would prove vitally important to Western theatre, the struggling professional troupes of the mid-sixteenth century relied very little on printed plays. In Spain and England, traveling companies of actors benefited from the gradual decline of medieval forms of theatre by enacting traditional farces, moralities, banquet performances, and occasional new scripts – typically cobbled together by the actor-manager – for popular and aristocratic audiences. Much as troupes of minstrels had done in medieval times, the acting companies of the early 1500s attached themselves to a noble family, entertained in their households when they could, and traveled with the permission and under the protection of a nobleman's name for much of the season. Despite this apparent extension of feudal relationships in the theatre, however, Western European actor-managers and their companies both drew on noble patronage and supported themselves economically by charging admission.

In a parallel development, Renaissance humanist scholars in the major universities of Italy, England, Spain, and France had been rediscovering and printing ancient Greek and Roman texts related to the theatre. By 1520, editions of Aristotle's *Poetics*, the major plays of Plautus, Terence, Sophocles, and Seneca, and the illustrated discussions of theatre buildings and scenery by Vitruvius were available in print. Fired by an interest in these ancient texts, Renaissance scholars and their aristocratic patrons began writing their own plays in imitation of the classics and soon they were seeking to produce them. In Italy, Gian Giorgio Trissino (1478–1550) wrote and published the first classical-style tragedy, *Sofonisba* (1515). Italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527) borrowed the form of classical comedy to write *The Mandrake* (*La Mandragola*, c.1518). Like Machiavelli, university-trained Nicholas Udall (1505–1566) in England leaned heavily on Plautus to shape his *Ralph Roister Doister* some time in the 1530s. Earlier in the century, Juan del Encina (1469–1529) and Gil Vicente (c.1453–c.1537) were writing classically based entertainments for royal courts on the Iberian Peninsula. Because of the religious disturbances that wracked France during these years, classically inspired plays and performances developed somewhat later in Paris, with the first of them coming to the French court in the 1550s.

While most academics and aristocrats produced their plays on temporary stages for student or court audiences, one group of scholars built the first permanent theatre in Italy since antiquity, the Teatro Olimpico in Vincenza. Its primary architect, Andrea Palladio (1518–1580), based much of his design on the architectural drawings of the Roman writer, Vitruvius. From Vitruvius, Palladio borrowed the look of the *scenae frons* from the Roman theatre (see Chapter 3) for the scenic façade of the Teatro Olimpico. After Palladio's death, architect Vincenzo Scamozzi (1552–1616) completed the building's design. Behind each of the five entrances on the façade and two more on either end of the stage, Scamozzi placed perspective scenery. In effect, Palladio and Scamozzi had merged an ancient, Vitruvian design with the Renaissance innovation of perspective painting.

The Teatro Olimpico opened in 1585 with a production of *Oedipus Rex* to an audience of academics and nobility. Such productions, however, were mostly occasional, amateur undertakings intended for pedagogical, honorific, celebratory, and scholarly purposes. Renaissance academic theatre might employ professional actors, especially in Italy, but it never challenged the professionals' popularity with the public. Nonetheless, the literary resources of the academic theatre offered substantial opportunities to the early professional troupes. Two major theatrical traditions – *commedia dell'arte* and dramatic, text-based theatre – flowed from the intersection of amateur and professional theatre in the mid-sixteenth century.

Commedia dell'arte

Although its origins are uncertain, professional troupes in northern Italy apparently began performing *commedia dell'arte* in the 1540s. In a typical *commedia* scenario, lustful or miserly old fathers block the romantic hopes of a young couple, who turn to their servants for help. Through successful trickery and often-lucky discoveries (such as lost family relationships), the foolish old men are foiled and the lovers happily united. Nearly all of the characters and plot devices of *commedia* derive directly from the plays of Plautus and Terence, which the Italian troupes probably learned while reading and performing *commedia erudita* (academic comedy) for aristocratic patrons. Even though they were indebted to academic comedy, the acting troupes styled themselves dell'arte – that is, professional – to distinguish their work from the amateur efforts of academic theatre.

Most *commedia dell'arte* improvisation was carefully planned. Somewhat like stand-up comedians, the actors relied on memorized lines from *commedia erudita* and pre-arranged comic business, and then plugged these speeches and gags into pre-set scenarios. This ready store of comic material freed *commedia dell'arte* performers to charm and entertain the public with their considerable skills, charisma, and virtuosity. By the mid-1560s, *commedia* troupes included female actors, who had been excluded from many types of medieval performance. This addition, along with other factors, increased the popularity of the form, and *commedia dell'arte* spread rapidly across Europe. Professional companies were performing in Venice and Milan in the 1550s, and by the 1570s troupes were appearing in southern France, Spain, and even London. During the next century, it was a mark of status for royal and ducal courts to patronize and house a *commedia* troupe; *commedia dell'arte* traveled as far as Stockholm and Moscow.

By 1600, the typical company employed eight to 12 performers, each with his or her own specialized character (Figure II.1). The actors playing the old men (*vecchi*) wore grotesque half-masks and used specific dialects: Pantalone always spoke Venetian and the Doctor railed in Latin or Bolognese, for instance. The lovers (*innamorati*) appeared without masks and often quoted poems and romantic dialog from *commedia erudita*. The servants (*servi*) were the most diverse, with names such as Arlecchino and Brighella for the males and Franceschina and Colombina for the women. With their sequences of comic business called *lazzi*, the servants carried much of the comedy of the show. In one famous *lazzi*, Arlecchino, always hungry, catches a fly and eats it with relish. Most *servi* wore masks, though some of the younger female servants may have occasionally appeared without the conventional half-mask.

Institutionalizing drama in Europe

The commercial production of new plays was the other option offered by the intersection of professional and academic theatre in the mid-1550s. Until then,



Figure II.1

Late sixteenth-century engraving showing three stock characters from the *commedia dell'arte* – from left, Arlecchino, Zanni the cuckold, and Pantalone – serenading an unseen lady in her house on the right. © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Source: Le Reçueil Fossard – Paris: Librairie théâtrale, 1981 (lote 4–V–43809). Conserved in the National Museum, Stockholm.

nearly all dramatic theatre in the West had been performed for a specific occasion, such as a religious celebration, civic festival, or a royal wedding. If the play was mediocre or failed to please on one of those occasions, no one's livelihood was at stake. Commercial dramatic theatre, however, upped the ante. Now actor-managers needed a constant flow of good, new plays or rival companies would soon surpass them with the public. *Commedia* troupes, by continuing to recycle the same dramatic material into new scenarios and performances, retained more control of their productions. In contrast, actor-managers in England and Spain looked to playwrights, whom they now had to nurture and reward, for their plots and dialog.

Renaissance actor-managers could take this gamble because several of them were already profiting from new plays that merged classical learning with the demands of popular entertainment. In Spain, actor-manager Lope de Rueda (c.1510–c.1565) gained considerable income and renown in the 1550s among popular audiences and aristocratic patrons for his classically inspired farces and comedies. In England, no one figure brought together these two traditions with similar success, but the frequent mix of academics, professional actors, and aristocrats in London for performances at schools and at noble houses created an interest in classical and Italian plays in the 1560s and 1570s. By 1590, most of the prominent Elizabethan playwrights writing for professional companies had received an education that included classical training. These included Thomas Kyd (1558–1594), whose *The Spanish Tragedy* (c.1587) drew on the dramatic devices of Seneca to set the pattern for later revenge tragedies, and Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), who mastered episodic plotting in such popular tragedies as *Tamburlaine*, Parts I and II (1587–1588), and *Doctor Faustus* (1588) (Figure II.2). Although few contemporary plays were

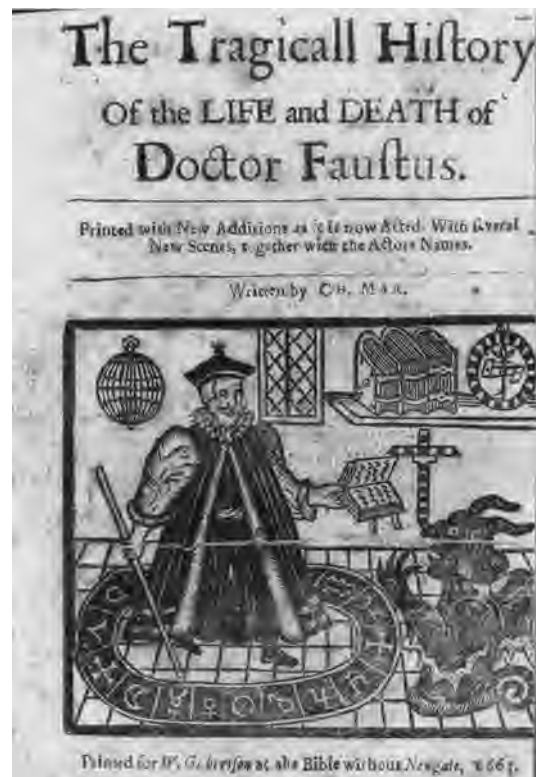


Figure II.2

Faustus (played by Edward Alleyn) conjures a devil on this title page for a seventeenth-century edition of *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, by Christopher Marlowe. Rumors that “one devil too many” had responded to Alleyn’s black magic probably drew audiences to this popular play at the Fortune Theatre.

© Victoria and Albert Museum of Theatre History.

in print by 1600, humanist scholarship was convincing the literate public that dramatic theatre connected their own tastes with the superior culture of the ancients.

Two companies dominated London theatre in the last ten years of Queen Elizabeth's reign (1558–1603) and during the reign of James I (1603–1625). Theatrical entrepreneur Philip Henslowe (c.1555–1616) backed the Admiral's Men, initially headed by the actor Edward Alleyn (1566–1626), and the Burbage family ran the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The sharing system, by which leading actors, playwrights, and financiers shared in the profits, organized both troupes. In recognition of the importance of these companies, James I put the Admiral's Men under the patronage of his son (re-naming them Prince Henry's Men) and elevated the Chamberlain's Men to royal patronage (which changed them to the King's Men). Both companies, together with several minor ones, competed for plays and mounted them in outdoor and indoor playhouses as well as in "great rooms" at schools and courts. Rivaling the two companies in popularity during the first decade of the 1600s was the Children of the Queen's Revels (earlier known as the Blackfriars Boys), which produced a full range of dramatic genres performed entirely by boys. While the Admiral's Men produced Marlowe's popular tragedies, the Chamberlain's Men counted playwright William Shakespeare (1564–1616) among its shareholders and controlled the rights to most of the successful plays co-authored by Francis Beaumont (c.1584–1616) and John Fletcher (1579–1625). Co-authorship was a common practice in the 1590–1625 period; Fletcher probably collaborated with Shakespeare on the last three plays attributed to the Bard of Avon.

According to historian Jeremy Lopez in his *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response in Early Modern Drama*, most Elizabethan and Jacobean spectators, like television audiences today, cared little about who wrote the play as long as it met their expectations (Lopez 2003:3–29). Spectators wanted dramas stuffed with sexual allusions and characters disguised as someone else. They expected frequent direct address, as in asides and soliloquies, and applauded plot developments involving incest and physical mutilations – in comedies as well as tragedies. Not disturbed by comic scenes within tragedies or mortally serious moments in comedies, spectators enjoyed plays that jumped abruptly among scenes of lyricism, suspense, heroics, and grotesquerie. A good play, from their point of view, should also include several metatheatrical moments, in which the actors acknowledged the make-believe of their actions. Lopez argues that, to meet audience expectations, most comedies ended in marriage and/or reunion and tragedies ended with a stage-full of dead bodies and order restored.

The increasing prestige of well-written drama altered acting. By the 1580s, performers who might have improvised their way through an evening's

entertainment a generation ago were now expected to play “by the book.” So important had memorization become for acting that Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595–1596) even has the “rude mechanicals” of his subplot memorizing their lines completely before they mount their performance of “Pryamus and Thisbe” in the play-within-the-play. The expectation of the auditors and actors that a script would be played as written led, in turn, to higher standards of playwriting. Better for actor-managers and their companies to memorize and perform several plays of high quality than to have to purchase and learn many mediocre scripts that would enjoy only limited popularity.

After 1600, as more contemporary plays reached publication, the acting companies and their playwrights reaped more direct benefits from the emerging print culture. By 1618, the shareholders of the Children of the Queen’s Revels had published all of the extant plays performed by the boys’ company, for example. Like the Queen’s Revels, most companies paid top dramatists up front for their work and divided the profits from publication among their shareholders. The average payment per play until about 1603 was roughly six pounds (sterling), a figure that had increased to ten or 12 pounds by 1613. By the 1640s, it was increasingly common for companies and professional playwrights to arrange for the publication of their dramas. In addition, more dramatists were striking deals with their companies to maintain control of their publication rights. Ben Jonson (1572–1637), who won applause for satirizing the follies of the time through a strong dose of classical precepts and wit, was the first English playwright to edit and publish a collection of his own plays, in 1616.

Golden Age theatre in Spain, public and court, 1590–1650

Print culture in Spain helped to sustain a vital theatre that developed near the end of the long transition from feudalism to absolutism on the Iberian Peninsula. As several historians have noted, the joining of Castile, Aragon, and Granada to form late medieval Spain in 1492, plus the rapid success of the Spanish crown in extending its rule to the Netherlands, Austria, southern Italy, and much of Latin America in the 1500s, actually delayed the centralization of power in the Spanish monarchy. Although the royal court in Madrid sponsored theatrical performances after 1620, Spanish royalty mostly ignored the professional troupes during the formative years of Golden Age theatre. This left Spanish playwrights comparatively free to borrow from traditional regional and popular sources as well as from classical and Italian dramas for the form and content of their plays. The result was a lively theatre that, though generally aristocratic in its values, also had the freedom to criticize excessive incursions of feudal power into popular traditions. This relative freedom gradually dissipated after 1620, however, as the Spanish crown centralized and extended

absolutist authority. By 1650, the Golden Age of Spanish theatre had ended.

In the 1590s, public theatres were flourishing in Madrid, Valencia, Seville, Valladolid, Lisbon, and several other cities on the Iberian Peninsula. Unlike the situation in London, Spanish acting troupes did not control their playhouses, but rented them from private capitalists or charitable institutions controlled by the Catholic Church. For most companies, this meant extensive touring and an ongoing search for residencies at aristocratic houses. The public theatres, or *corrales*, varied in size but usually included an open courtyard (*patio*) with a platform stage at one end and backstage space behind it, plus separate, raised seating on either side of the yard (*gradas*) and an elevated gallery (*cazuela*) opposite the stage (Figure II.3). Male standees occupied the *patio*, wealthier patrons (men and women) sat in the *gradas*, and the *cazuela* was reserved for women. Most staging conventions, as in Elizabethan London, were simple and traditional. The continuous stage

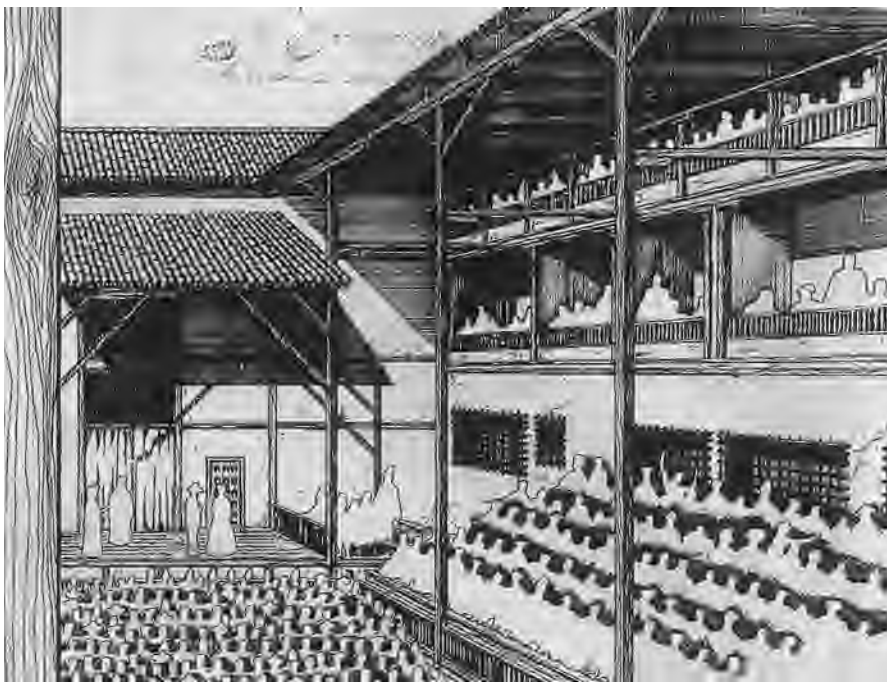


Figure II.3

Artist's impression of the interior of the seventeenth-century Spanish playhouse, *El Corral del Principe* (c.1697). Drawing by Carlos Dorremoechea in John Allen, *The Reconstruction of a Spanish Golden Age Playhouse* (1983).

© University Press of Florida.

action, with no front curtain and no breaks to change scenery, involved other characteristic elements of the popular stage, such as direct address to the audience, plots involving intrigue and disguise, stock characters, and fast-moving dialog with proverbs, wordplay, and asides.

Just as the public theatres accommodated popular and aristocratic spectators, many of the plays, too, merged the tastes and values of both groups of auditors. The history play and romantic drama, the latter known in Spain as the *comedia de capa y espada* (cloak-and-sword drama), successfully fused these traditions. Gaspar de Aguilar's (1561–1623) comedy, *The Merchant in Love* (c.1590s), for instance, gives his rich bourgeois protagonist the problem of deciding whether to marry for love or money. Set in Valencia at the height of that Mediterranean city's early commercial success, the play rejects the aristocracy's preoccupation with rank and examines the problematics of making money. The merchant of course chooses love, but comes to understand that it is acceptable for the aristocracy to harbor capitalist ambitions. Like many other romantic comedies, *The Merchant in Love* put limits on nascent capitalism in Spain at the same time that it helped the once-feudal aristocracy to adjust to changing economic conditions.

The most prolific and renowned playwright of the Golden Age, Lope Félix de Vega Carpio (1562–1635), wrote many *capa y espada* dramas among his more than 800 plays. Although a favorite of the aristocracy, Lope came from an artisan family, worked to gain more education throughout his life, and eventually became a priest. Lope set his history play, *The Life and Death of King Bamba* (1597–1598), in the early Middle Ages and focused it on the brief rule of a peasant king in Spain. Altering much of the historical record for dramatic effect, Lope posed peasant wisdom, valor, and humility, backed by Catholic faith, against the foolish and villainous objections of a fractious nobility. Eventually God and Bamba prevail, but an aristocratic rebellion against his rule in the north of Spain leads to Bamba's death and the collusion of the nobility with invading Moors. Similar to Lope's *The Sheep Well* (c.1614), which also utilizes a peasant perspective to criticize arrogant aristocratic power, *King Bamba* calls on the Spanish nobility to draw on history and popular tradition to change their morality. The play is not anti-aristocratic, however; like *The Merchant in Love*, it validates the importance of the nobility while urging its reform. Significantly, the production of *King Bamba* followed soon after Lope's prolonged service at the court of the powerful Duke of Alba in the early 1590s.

During the reign of Philip IV (1621–1665), the Spanish monarchy asserted more control of its kingdom and colonies and also called more frequently on the theatre to bolster its absolutist claims to power. Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–1681) succeeded Lope de Vega as Spain's most successful playwright, but Calderón's energies were split between the public theatres and the court. Writing primarily

between 1622 and 1640, Calderón continued and improved upon the previous genres. He also wrote several *autos sacramentales*, allegorical dramas that embodied Catholic ideology and often glorified the Spanish throne as the Defender of the Faith. Even his most secular play, *Life Is a Dream* (c.1636), presents the absolute power and agency of kingship as the necessary answer for a royal prince who does not know if his life at court has been a dream. After 1640, Calderón mostly abandoned writing for the public theatres so that he could create *autos* and devise entertainments with lavish spectacles to glorify Philip IV and his court.

As in England, Spanish theatrical troupes purchased scripts directly from dramatists and profited from their sale to publishers. Because script piracy among troupes was a bigger problem in Spain than in England, however, companies were often reluctant to print their best plays for fear that other troupes would slap on a new title, make a few small changes, and perform the piece themselves. Consequently, nearly half of Lope de Vega's plays were not published during his lifetime and some that did make it into print were corrupt scripts, doctored and claimed by another playwright. In defense against piracy, Calderón held on to his plays for most of his professional life, refusing to allow them to be published until the 1670s. Nonetheless, both of these professional playwrights and many others from the Spanish Golden Age profited handsomely from the increasing demand for printed plays.

Neoclassicism and print in Europe

By the 1650s, Spanish literary culture was embracing the aesthetics of neoclassicism, a mode of theatre that would soon be perfected in France. If early print culture in Western Europe raised the prestige of dramatic theatre, it also, under neoclassicism, limited the kinds of dramas that came to be acceptable to most of the literate public. By 1620, many more Europeans than before were reading printed plays and generally regarded this practice as superior to watching a live performance. In the view of most scholars – a view supported by the anti-theatrical prejudices of Plato and other ancient philosophers – the stage was, in effect, the place of bodies and mortality, while the page could attain immortality in the realm of the spirit. Even dramatists writing for the popular stage sometimes supported this view. Many of Calderón's plays celebrate a neo-Platonic spirit over the imagined shortcomings of the bodily senses.

This view about public performance underlay the concerns of several sixteenth-century Italian scholars who were eager to support a restrained dramatic theatre, but fearful of its social consequences. Julius Caesar Scaliger (1484–1558) and Lodovico Castelvetro (1505–1571) used Aristotle's *Poetics* as a jumping-off point for their ideas, but set out to update and improve upon Aristotle's recommendations

for good drama. Scaliger and Castelvetro synthesized the ideas of previous Italian theorists who had emphasized the need for dramatic probability, which they termed “verisimilitude.” To support verisimilitude, the Italians recommended that playwrights follow three unities – place, time, and action – in constructing their dramas. In brief, a play should occur in a single setting, its fictitious time should last for no more than a single day, and its plot should encompass only one major action. Scaliger and Castelvetro reasoned that unity of place was necessary because spectators knew that the stage in front of them could not really be transformed into several actual locations. Regarding unity of time, Scaliger called for plays whose action lasted no longer than 24 hours, but Castelvetro urged that 12 hours would better serve verisimilitude. The “ignorant multitude” attending a play, said Castelvetro, would not believe “that several days and nights had passed when their senses tell them that only a few hours have passed” (Carlson 1993:48–49).

This point of view about audience reception, of course, radically underestimated the imaginative capabilities of spectators and flew in the face of most people’s actual experience in the public theatres of England and Spain. But the prejudices of early print culture, plus current beliefs about social hierarchy, supported Scaliger and Castelvetro. Educated scholars and aristocrats whose imaginations had been stretched and tested by books might be able to understand plays that violated verisimilitude, according to the sixteenth-century humanists, but the “ignorant multitude,” with only their “senses” to guide them, would be lost.

French critics and theorists in the seventeenth century echoed and extended these Italian humanist prejudices to produce a body of neoclassical rules that many educated Europeans came to accept as necessary safeguards for drama on the stage. Most French and Spanish scholars in the early 1600s agreed with the Italian theorists, but several popular playwrights had already voiced objections. Lope de Vega, for example, recognized the validity of the norms of verisimilitude advocated by the Italians and admitted that his plays violated them, but he forthrightly stated his intention of continuing to please his audiences rather than bowing to the theorists. Alexandre Hardy (c.1570–1632), the most popular French playwright of the 1620s, also sought the vindication of public applause over humanist praise. The dispute between the popular stage and the academic theorists came to a head in France with the production of *Le Cid*, by Pierre Corneille (1606–1684), in 1637. Believing his play was generally in accord with the norms of verisimilitude, Corneille and his friends nevertheless responded to criticism of *Le Cid*’s popular success with a defense that ignored its debt to the unities and other neoclassical rules. When the controversy threatened to get out of hand, Cardinal Richelieu (1586–1642) called on the French Academy to settle the dispute.

***Le Cid* and French absolutism**

Richelieu, who effectively ruled France in the 1620s and 1630s behind the throne of Louis XIII, used the controversy over *Le Cid* to position the monarchy as the public arbiter of French culture. Although the French Academy had originated as a private organization of scholars, Richelieu pressured its members to adopt state support and to take as its primary goal the codification and regulation of French language and culture. Like the publication of dictionaries and grammars that attempted to standardize Western European languages in the 1600s, the French Academy was itself a product of print culture. By referring the debate over *Le Cid* to the arbitration of the Academy, Richelieu ensured that the future of French theatre would help to serve the interests of the French state.

Six months later, Richelieu's appointee, Jean Chapelain (1595–1674), delivered the verdict of the Academy. Chapelain took issue with some of the criticism leveled against Corneille, but condemned his play for breaching verisimilitude and for its lack of ethics. Even though *Le Cid* observes the unity of time, Chapelain complained that Corneille had packed too many incidents into 24 hours to sustain the play's probability. The Academy found particularly offensive the incident in Corneille's plot that involves a young woman consenting to wed the killer of her father. This the Academy viewed as transgressing the neoclassical precept of decorum. Decorum, which preserved class lines by specifying behavior appropriate for each class (only lower-class characters could act foolishly, for example), dictated that young women of the nobility must not commit immoral acts without punishment. In his decision, Chapelain had vindicated the unities, upheld decorum, and tied the purpose of dramatic theatre more firmly than had the Italian critics to the ideal of "poetic justice" – evil characters should be punished and good ones rewarded. In subsequent years, the Abbé d'Aubignac (1604–1676), a protégé of Richelieu, would codify these neoclassical rules and celebrate dramas that followed them for normalizing a socially conservative morality and glorifying the hierarchy that supported French absolutism.

By linking dramatic construction to the power of the monarchy, neoclassicism facilitated many strategic alliances among playwrights and sovereigns in Western Europe. Louis XIV officially began his reign at the age of five in 1643 and assumed control of France in 1661. Building on the achievements of Richelieu, Louis XIV made French power and his version of absolute monarchy the envy of Europe until his death in 1715. French culture – and with it the precepts of neoclassical verisimilitude, decorum, and poetic justice – spread throughout the continent and became the European norm. The most celebrated playwright during the reign of Louis XIV, Jean Racine (1639–1699), wrote tragedies that became models of neoclassicism. In England, following the English Civil War and the Commonwealth period (1642–1660), the restoration of the monarchy that put Charles II

(1630–1685) on the throne in 1660 helped to legitimate and popularize neoclassical ideals. John Dryden (1631–1700) was the foremost of many English playwrights who dramatized neoclassical values on the Restoration stage. Neoclassicism remained at the center of French playwriting in the eighteenth century in the work of Voltaire (1694–1778) and others. It also informed the kinds of plays written in Germany and Spain and dictated the goals of “good” drama in Sweden, Poland, and Russia. For many literate Europeans until the French Revolution in 1789, the goals of neoclassical theatre seemed the most enlightened in the world. Print culture had helped to make them so.

Scenic perspective in print and on stage

Print-influenced neoclassicism altered theatre architecture and scenic conventions as well as playwriting. In the early seventeenth century, scenic practices on the stages of public playhouses remained indebted to the platea and mansion arrangements of the medieval theatre. Parisian theatre troupes, for example, continued to use small mansions visible throughout the performance on an unframed stage into the 1630s. And in England and Spain, the platea-like open platforms, backed with doors and perhaps an upper level, provided a fluid, unlocalized playing area that could be whatever the lines of the actors said it was. These scenic practices gradually gave way to presenting a series of single settings that localized the dramatic action – settings that were organized according to the laws of perspective and framed by a proscenium arch. This convention for staging appeared first in Italian courts and gradually altered public performances throughout Europe.

There are many reasons for the rise and eventual triumph of proscenium staging and perspective scenery between the late fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth. By 1500, Italian painters had perfected the geometry and graphics of single-point perspective, and this mode of illustrating depth on a canvas or on walls began to influence Italian scenographers. When Sebastiano Serlio (1475–1554) depicted a series of tragic, comic, and satyric settings in perspective in his *Architettura* (1545), this type of scenic practice had been in use for performances at Italian courts for some years. To realize Serlio’s conventional designs in production required a painter and carpenter to construct and hang a painted backdrop at the rear of the playing space and flank the drop with three sets of angle wings, each with two painted sides that receded symmetrically from the front of the stage (Figure II.4). Because the upstage floor was sharply raked (sloped toward the backdrop), the actors had to perform far downstage on the level flooring. If they performed within the upstage scenery, their bodies would appear out of proportion to the converging lines of perspective and spoil the illusion. The vantage point of the ruler, seated in the center of the auditorium, organized the scene visually. That



Figure II.4

The theatre in print: the setting for a comic scene by Sebastiano Serlio, from his *De Architectura*, 1569 edition.

Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

is, the designer figured out where in the auditorium the ruler's eyes would gaze on the scene and drew his perspective lines for painting the scenery from that single point toward the vanishing point. This meant that only one person in the temporary auditorium had a "perfect" view of the stage; from every other vantage point, the painted perspective looked skewed. For those seated at the side of the auditorium the perspective was completely awry. The implicit visual demand on the other spectators in the auditorium, of course, was to imagine how the scene looked from the prince or duke's point of view. 🖼️

This visual power play suited the political dynamics of ruling families such as the Medici and the Farnese in northern Italy. It also served the ideology of royal absolutism at the royal courts of France, England, and Spain.

Related to the prerogatives of absolutism was the popularity of building Roman triumphal arches at royal residences. The first proscenium arches, frames on the

sides and top of a stage, looked like the triumphal arches of ancient Rome; most were as high as they were wide, and they usually featured some glorifying motif at the top center of the arch. Because court spectacles generally involved temporary scenery in a room used for other purposes, permanent prosceniums were a late addition to the perspective stage. Nonetheless, by 1587, the ruler of Florence had installed a permanent proscenium in Uffizi Palace, designed by Bernardo Buontalenti (1536–1608). As more elaborate stage mechanisms came into use to move scenery or to manage the ascents and descents of gods who came to earth to bless the ruler's realm, the proscenium was useful to both frame the perspective scenes and to mask and support those mechanisms. Hiding the machinery by which heaven and earthly powers seemed to be linked served the ideological agenda of Renaissance rulers.

In addition to the influence of perspective painting, the rise of absolutist political power, and the attractions of Roman triumphal arches, theatre historians have also noted the suggestiveness of printed illustrations as a significant cause of the gradual spread of this new scenic practice. While an illustrated volume of Vitruvius's treatise on Roman architecture had been printed as early as 1486, many other books featuring scenic illustrations reached publication in the early days of print culture. More quickly than on the stage, the organization of space on the illustrated page shifted from the simultaneous representation of several images to one unified image that could take advantage of the discoveries of single-point perspective. Like printers, scenographers thought about space in graphic terms; they shaped the vision of the viewer through unity, symmetry, and the illusion of depth. By the 1550s, printers used Roman triumphal arches as a common motif to organize the title page in a book. And even when no printed symmetrical frame dominated the look of a page, the sides of its paper created a visual frame that established every page as a mini-proscenium. By the 1630s, literate Europeans had been looking for a hundred years at the pages of books and pamphlets that organized their vision according to the laws of perspective. How "natural," then, to expect that stage scenery should mirror this reality.

Cardinal Richelieu helped to ensure the triumph of Italianate scenery in France. In the late 1630s, Richelieu instructed an architect to build him a palace housing the first theatre in France with flat-wing scenery on a raked stage behind a permanent proscenium arch. When completed in 1641, the private theatre at Richelieu's palace featured a stage 59 feet wide by 46 feet deep and an auditorium of nearly the same dimensions (Figure II.5). Richelieu died in 1642, and his palace came under the control of the crown as the Palais Royal. In 1645 Richelieu's successor, Cardinal Mazarin, brought Giacomo Torelli (1608–1678), known as the Great Sorcerer for his spectacular scenic innovations, to Paris in order to design for the Palais Royal. Working at a theatre in Venice in the early 1640s, Torelli had

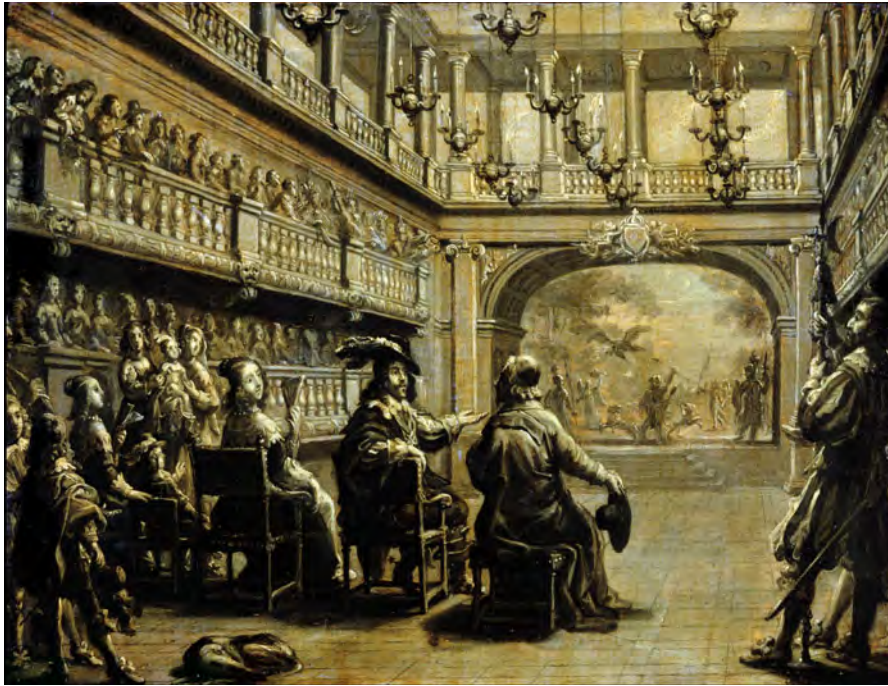


Figure II.5

Cardinal Richelieu's theatre in his palace (later the Palais Royal). Louis XIII converses with Richelieu (back to the viewer) during a performance, while Anne of Austria looks on. Molière's company later played in this theatre.

© Bridgeman Art Library.

already put together the first “chariot-and-pole” system for changing scenery before he left for Paris. He got the idea for his new technology from the complex rigging in use by Venetian sailors on their ships. In brief, this system involves flat wings mounted on the downstage side of long poles, which pass through slots in the flooring to small two-wheeled wagons, or “chariots,” that run on tracks under the stage. Through a series of ropes, pulleys, winches, and counterweights, all of the chariots under the stage – perhaps as many as ten on both sides for each pair of five wings – could be made to move simultaneously. As one flat moved into view, the flat behind or in front of it receded offstage. The counterweighted flats and drops were linked, as well, to painted borders hanging from the flies. Chariot-and-pole rigging could also include special effects in perspectival miniature and the descents of deities on cloud machines from the heavens. By turning a few master winches, stagehands could effect a complete scenic

transformation from one setting to another in a matter of seconds. Chariot-and-pole machinery dating from the eighteenth century is still in use in Sweden's Drottningholm Theatre today (Figure II.6) and such transformations remain astonishing.

Torelli brought plans for the chariot-and-pole system with him to Paris and remodeled the Petit Bourbon and Palais Royal theatres in 1645 and 1646 to accommodate the new mode of scene shifting (Figure II.7). Although he did not immediately win over the French court to the new system, Torelli's innovation gradually caught on, and by 1680 its triumph in Paris was complete. By the early

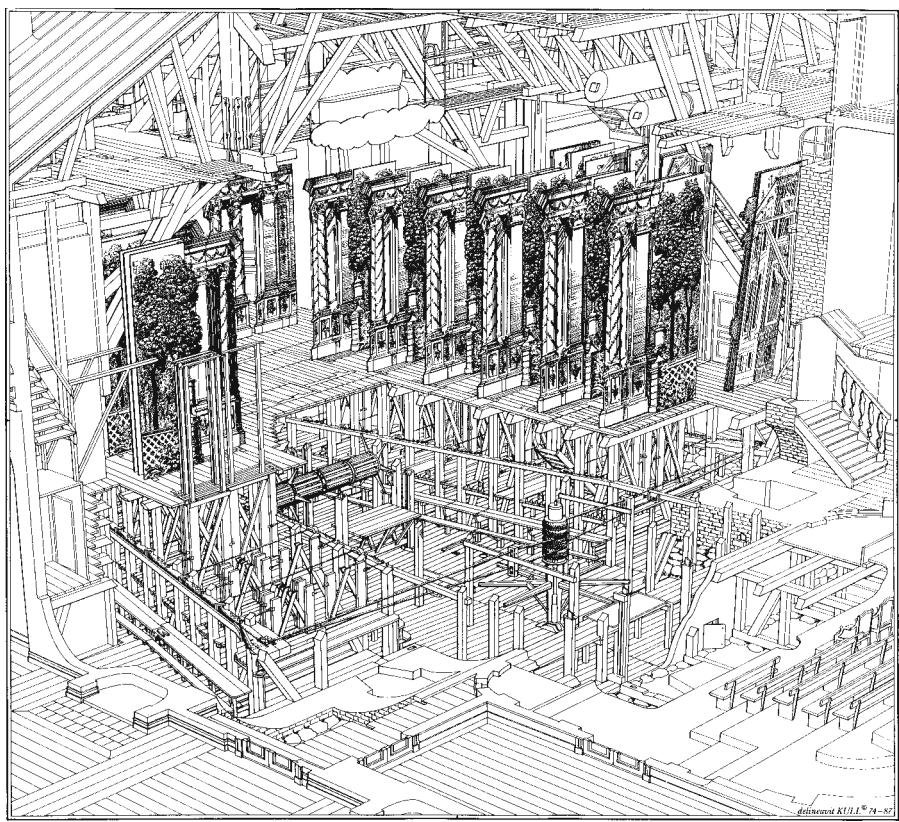


Figure II.6

The chariot-and-pole machinery for changing flats at the Drottningholm Court Theatre in Sweden. Cut-away drawing by Gustaf Kull. From Per Edstrom, "Stage Machinery," in Ove Hidemark et al., *Drottningholm Court Theatre* (1993).

© Gustav Kull, Jr.



Figure II.7

Giacomo Torelli's setting for Act II of Pierre Corneille's *Andromède* at the Petit Bourbon Theatre, 1650, in which Torelli's chariot-and-pole scene-shifting machinery was used. Engraving by François Chauveau.

© Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

1700s, court and public theatres throughout Europe were struggling to catch up with the French mode. In England and in countries that followed English theatrical practice, a less expensive system of flat wings sliding in grooves on the stage floor and on supporting tracks above predominated for staging. English public theatres used perspective scenery too, but in relatively modest settings compared to continental practices. The wing-in-groove and chariot-and-pole systems remained the standard among premiere theatres until the late nineteenth century. Proscenium stages with perspective scenery had triumphed in European public theatres.

Baroque entertainments at court

As we have seen, the magical transformations made possible by Italianate scenery were linked, from the start, to the rise of absolute monarchy in Europe. Although the wing-in-groove and chariot-and-pole systems eventually moved from court to public theatres, these systems were initially paid for by rulers and perfected by

engineers, designers, and painters working at European courts. In fact, playwrights and designers in the public theatres of the seventeenth century initially resisted these innovations, both because of the added expense and because the emerging Neoclassical ideal, which mandated only a single setting for their plays, did not require such machinery. By the 1680s, most cultured opinion sought to enforce Neoclassical precepts at the public playhouses but exempted the absolute monarchs and their court entertainments from neoclassical standards. For these sumptuous extravaganzas, especially within the Catholic courts of Europe, the baroque aesthetic of playfulness, allegory, metamorphosis, and sensuality conflicted with and mostly replaced the neoclassical ideal of verisimilitude.

Baroque aesthetics returned court life to the centrality of visual and oral culture that had predominated in Europe before the rise of print. Although this Introduction has focused on the effects of print culture on European theatre from 1500 to 1700, it is important to emphasize that earlier forms of communication continued to instruct and delight spectators at many kinds of performances during these years. Peasants and townspeople throughout Europe enjoyed most of the same kinds of festivities they had joined in and applauded in medieval times, for example. Typically, when a new medium of communication is introduced and gains cultural power, the old media, though generally less influential, continue to shape many cultural practices, often gaining new niches of authority. This was the case with baroque spectacles at court, especially performances of seventeenth-century opera. Certainly the technologies of the new Italianate scenery and the libretti and music for new operas benefited from print culture; both circulated much more widely in print than would have been possible in a culture that rested on copying manuscripts. But the visual tropes and transformations that linked the power of a king or queen to the magnificence of a Christian god depended on a mode of visual allegory that derived from the manuscript cultures of ancient empires and can be easily traced from Roman times to the courts of medieval Christianity. Music, important to all cultures based in orality but diminished in the theatre with the rise of print, reasserted its centrality in court performances of opera. The values of playfulness and sensuality that the strictures of neoclassical thinking had shunted to the wings moved center stage in the spectacular performances of baroque opera.

Indeed, these delights had been a part of court-sponsored festive entertainments in Europe since the late medieval period. We have already explored such a festival in Jaen, Spain in 1461, when the local count staged mock battles between Christians and Moors and other dances, games, and performances throughout Jaen to celebrate his wedding (see the case study on p. 96, following Chapter 2). In addition to weddings and similar dynastic events, late medieval rulers and towns celebrated visits of foreign dignitaries, the signing of peace treaties, feast days of particular saints, and the king's entry into the city with similar festivals. Such events

would continue to provide rationales for court entertainments for the next four hundred years.

As the previous section on the history of perspective scenery and proscenium auditoriums suggests, Renaissance innovations in Italy were especially influential in moving European court entertainments from late medieval practices into the baroque era. Florentine artist and engineer Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), for instance, designed a glittering revolving stage that featured moving planets, fabulous beasts, and Roman gods and goddesses to welcome a new duchess to the court of Milan as a part of a wedding ceremony in 1490. Called the *Festa del Paradiso*, the spectacle used visual symbols, poetry, and song to suggest that the rulers of Milan descended from a classical version of paradise.

As in Jaen and Milan, most pre-baroque festivals opened the court to the populace of the city. The counts, dukes, and others who sponsored these events usually took an active part in several of the performances, demonstrating the stability and justice of their rule by the symbolic roles they played, as well as by their clothing, horsemanship, and retinue. In the largest of these festivals, the celebrations spread throughout the town, temporarily transforming its squares, churches, and palaces into festive spaces. Although usually centered on the ruler-sponsor, Renaissance festivals were public in the sense that they were accessible to most of the populace and their performances embodied mythic symbols and social relations that all understood to be necessary for the welfare of the whole.

From outdoor festivals to indoor pomp

After 1500, however, these festivals began to move indoors, into ducal and royal palaces that were off limits to the populace. Serlio and other designers, along with court musicians from Italy and elsewhere, usually constructed their stages and musical entertainments in large palace ballrooms or banquet halls. As European kings and queens began to think of themselves as absolute monarchs, they turned increasingly to designers and musicians who could deliver the wonders of Italianate scenery and create performances enhanced by musical accompaniment in order to validate their rule. Because absolute monarchs had to impress a fractious aristocracy with their claim of divine right, the audience for court festivities gradually shifted from the populace as a whole to the nobility living at court. By the 1610s, court entertainers and musicians in Paris were using modified versions of Serlio's designs to mount lavish ballet spectacles – amateur performances featuring the king and court as powerful mythological and allegorical figures. From 1605 until 1640, Inigo Jones (1573–1652) designed Serlian scenery for the court masques of English kings, first for James I, then Charles I – entertainments similar to the expensive ballet spectacles in France. In these court masques, Jones typically positioned the king as the pivot around which the costumed courtiers

would dance. Jones convinced Charles I to convert two rooms at his court palace for masquing, an extravagance that angered the Puritans and helped to lead to the overthrow of the king and the English Civil War in 1642. Court entertainments in the Catholic countries of Europe, however, faced no such popular impediments, and baroque musical spectacles flourished in Madrid, Paris, and Vienna during the middle decades of the seventeenth century.

While royal families had continued to perform in many of the masques and ballet spectacles in London and Paris, they gradually withdrew from active participation in the festivities and into positions where they could appear as beneficent overlords to watch the performances of others. To ensure that the glorification of kingship continued to maintain its central focus, however, many baroque court spectacles placed a symbolic representative of the monarch on stage. When Philip IV of Spain enjoyed *The Greatest Enchantment is Love* in 1635, he watched a symbol of himself as the protagonist of the entertainment. The musical extravaganza, penned by Golden Age playwright Calderón and produced by an Italian engineer, featured the temptation of Ulysses by the enchantress Circe, with characters and dramatic situations based on Homer's *Odyssey*. The lavish spectacle, intended to celebrate a saint and honor the opening of the king's new pleasure palace, placed shipwrecks, triumphal chariots, and volcanic destruction on an island in the middle of a small lake within a garden of the new palace. From their seats on gondolas, the court could watch the king enjoy the show or attend to the songs and actions of his representative (Ulysses, in this case) in the entertainment.

Some monarchs continued to perform in court spectacles, even after opera had generally replaced ballets and masques as the preferred mode of baroque entertainment. The young Louis XIV of France, a devotee of dancing, left his royal seat in the *Salle des Machines* theatre to join the dancers on stage during the interludes of the opera, *Hercules in Love*, in 1662. Power broker in France, Cardinal Mazarin, had helped to orchestrate the defeat of some aristocrats who mounted uprisings against royal absolutism between 1648 and 1653. To celebrate this triumph of the king, recent victories over the Spaniards in war, and the impending marriage of Louis XIV to Maria Theresa of Austria, Mazarin spent several years organizing the production of *Hercules in Love*. The Cardinal pulled together an Italian team of machinists, designers, writers, and composers, who, under his direction, even built a new theatre for the production (Figure II.8). *Hercules in Love* celebrated the suffering of a lustful hero (a stand-in for Louis), who must sacrifice the love of his mistress for the good of the state. According to historian Kristiann Aercke, the court had no difficulty reading Mazarin's allegory as a congratulatory commentary on the well-known political and amatory machinations of the Cardinal and the king (Aercke 1994:165–220). By featuring the changeable qualities of nature through the spectacle of moving scenery – raging storms at sea,

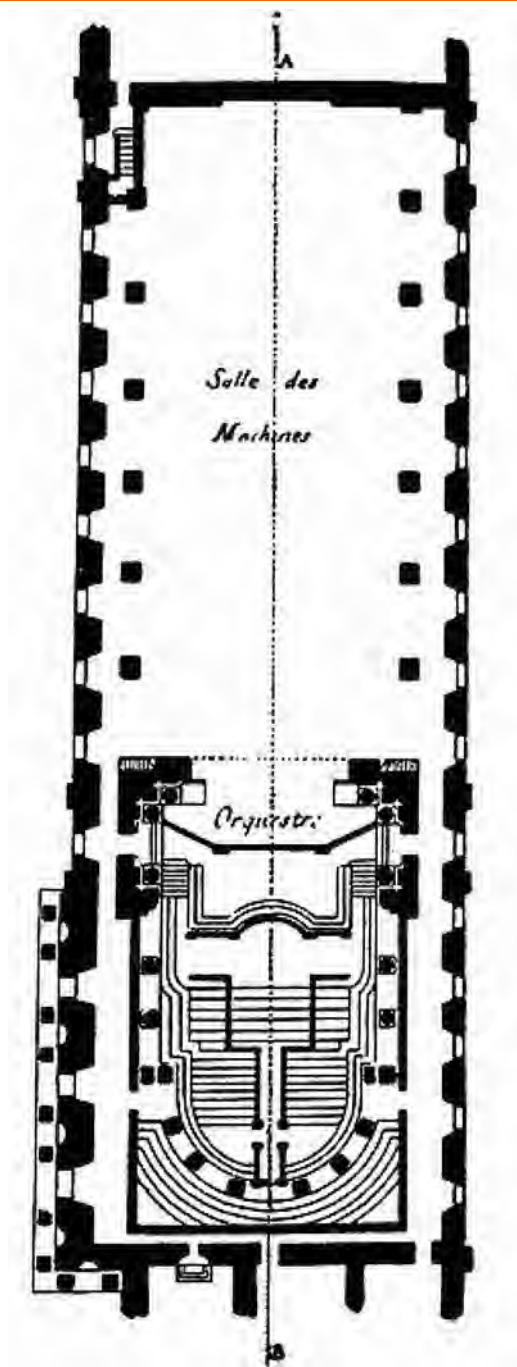


Figure II.8

Plan of the *Salle des Machines*, designed by Gaspare Vigarani (1586–1663) for Louis XIV and first used in 1662 for the opera, *Hercules in Love*, an allegorical tribute to the king. The stage, 140 feet deep, accommodated chariot-and-pole machines for changing Vigarani's scenery (six sets of flats riding on substage trolleys) and flying machines. The entire royal family and attendants were flown in on one machine that was 60 feet deep and 45 feet wide. The settings, organized around a single, central vanishing point, offered monumental images of a rationally ordered world, seen to fullest advantage by the king seated in his throne front and center.

From L.P. de la Guepière, *Théâtre et Machine* (1888).

the fires of passion, and frequent interventions from classical gods descending in cloud machines – the production highlighted the changeable characteristics of the sovereign. Although several viewed the production of this six-hour opus as an artistic failure, Aercke argues that *Hercules in Love* helped to vivify Louis XIV's growing reputation as the Sun King, the embodiment of heavenly power and natural majesty.

For Aercke, the production of *The Golden Apple* at the Habsburg court in Vienna in 1668 constituted the *ne plus ultra* of baroque opera in the seventeenth century (1994:221). Nearly all baroque operas were embedded in a series of festive events, often stretching over several weeks or months. Due to technical and political delays, the performance of *The Golden Apple* was preceded by 18 months of fireworks, feasts, dances, and an elaborate equestrian ballet (Figure II.9). Intended to celebrate a dynastic marriage, the opera actually reached the stage two years after the royal wedding. And the performance itself was spread over 32 hours. Nonetheless, the ending was apparently worth the wait. The opera, based on the

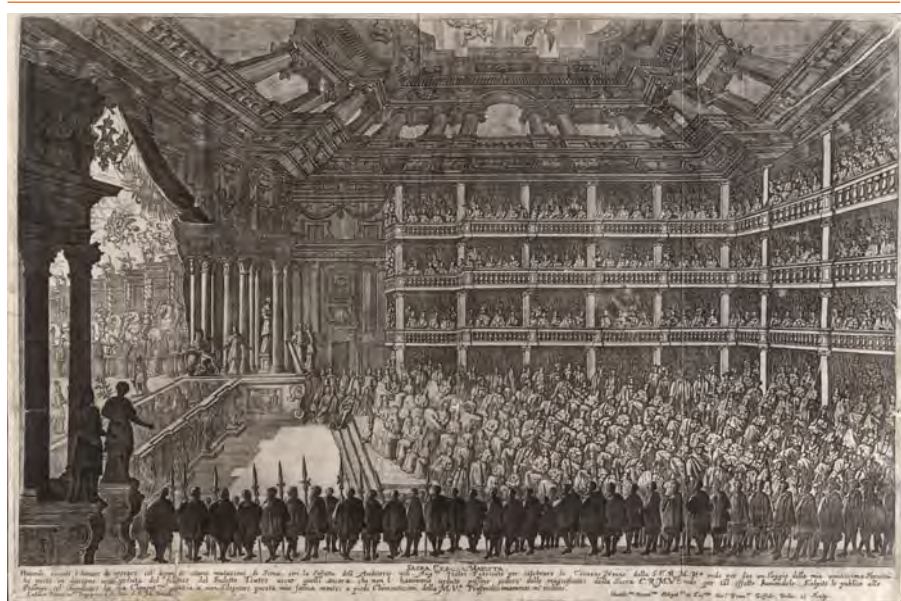


Figure II.9

A cut-away illustration of the Viennese court and emperor Leopold I (seated on the dais) enjoying a scene from *Il Pomo d'oro* (*The Golden Apple*) in 1668. Ludovico Burnacini (1636–1707) designed the scenery and the theatre. The theatre was torn down as a fire hazard when the Turks lay siege to Vienna in 1683. Engraving by Franz Geffels, 1668.

Courtesy Bildarchiv, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

classical story of the “Judgment of Paris,” concluded with a *coup de théâtre* that delighted and impressed the emperor’s court. Instead of awarding the golden apple – Paris’s tribute to divine beauty – to Juno, Pallas, or Venus, Jupiter’s eagle deposited it into the hands of the new queen of the Austrian empire.

The enormous expense of baroque opera, even for absolutist monarchies, hastened its decline at the end of the seventeenth century. The success of neoclassicism, underwritten by the increasing power of print culture, also undermined the baroque theatre’s emphasis on allegory and metamorphosis through scenery and music. As grand opera changed to accommodate these cultural shifts, it also found an enduring home in the public theatres of the era. Commercial theatres in Venice were the first to offer regular productions of opera to the public and other Italian theatres soon made opera a popular part of theatre-going. Although not as successful with the general populace as in Italy, operatic productions spread throughout the public theatres of Europe after 1700.

Coming attractions

The marriage of theatrical styles to dominant trends in European political culture points to an important area of theatre history that constitutes the focus of our next chapter. Governmental power has often been used to support or limit theatrical activity. Sometimes it has served both purposes at once. Chapter 4, “Theatre and the state, 1600–1900,” traces the relations between state power and major theatrical enterprises in France, Japan, and England. As we will see, these relations have varied widely, mostly due to official attitudes toward the theatre and differing historical and cultural contexts. Our case studies for this chapter examine subversive strains in Molière’s comedies for Louis XIV, *kabuki* theatre’s relations with aristocratic culture in Japan, and sexuality in Shakespeare’s comedy *Twelfth Night*.

After 1700, print helped to shift European culture from neoclassicism toward sentimentality. Although the term “sentiment” now has negative connotations, the eighteenth-century public understood it in a positive light; for them, it was a way of acting on stage and in society that united intellect, emotion, and morality. In Chapter 5, “Theatres for knowledge through feeling, 1700–1900,” we will discuss this surprising theatre in Western Europe and its alteration after the revolutionary and Napoleonic era (1789–1815), when “sentiment” came to mean cheap melodramatic tears. The case studies for the chapter begin with a cultural analysis of the printed pictures showing how they helped promote English star David Garrick, and how they are related to two key issues of the eighteenth century: sentimentality and national identity. We conclude with a case study of nineteenth-century melodrama.

In Chapter 6, “Theatre, nation, and empire, 1750–1900,” we examine the many ways in which the theatre shaped nationalism and its extensions in imperialism

from the end of the eighteenth century and into the twentieth. As will be clear, print culture helped to underwrite the legitimacy of the nation-state and to spread the ideologies of nationalism and imperialism. A case study of the plays and essays of Friedrich Schiller will focus on the poet's images of and hopes for Germany before the creation of the German nation-state in 1871. Finally, we look at the nationalistic riots that greeted initial performances of *The Playboy of the Western World* by John Millington Synge in Dublin in 1907, when Ireland was still a part of the British empire.

KEY REFERENCES



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Baroque scene design and machinery: *The Development of Italian Scenic Spectacle* (updated 2007): <http://www1.appstate.edu/orgs/spectacle/>. Dr. Frank Mohler provides reliable explanations and basic demonstrations, with virtual moving models (using *Quicktime*) of scene changing machinery. Click “Scene Changes” for *Florimene*.

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Theatre and the state, 1600–1900

By Bruce McConachie

Throughout the world, relationships between governments and theatres have never been conflict-free. This is primarily because both engage in political and ethical performances, broadly understood, and their overlapping authority in these spheres often creates conflicts among theatre artists and those whom the state supports and favors. In addition to providing many important services, all governments also claim political and ethical authority and attempt to influence the views and actions of their subjects or citizens through such performances as coronations and press conferences. Although most theatres throughout history have tried to be uncontroversial, nearly all of them have presented human relationships on stage that powerful others have interpreted as questioning or even undermining their authority. When this occurs, the powerful look to the state to uphold conventional morality and/or to protect their images and interests.

Not surprisingly, then, no major theatre in history has ever escaped some measure of state regulation. In the unequal contest between the government and the stage, the state has traditionally established the laws and guidelines within which theatre artists have been allowed to operate. But governmental policies have varied widely

among different societies and over time. The primary determining factor in state regulation has been the attitude of those in power toward the theatrical arts. Where the government understood the benefits that theatre could offer to those in power – praise of their morality and authority – the state usually tried to co-opt and control theatre artists through subsidies and regulations. Many theatres in Asia and Europe before 1800 gladly accepted some initial state control in return for economic assistance. Other governments, however, viewed theatrical art as immoral, unpatriotic, or both, and attempted to contain or even destroy it. During the American Revolution (1776–1783), for example, the Continental Congress outlawed theatrical performances for both of those reasons.

This chapter examines three contrasting examples of state–theatre relations in different societies. Beginning with Cardinal Richelieu, the rulers of France generally understood that theatre could help to centralize the French absolutist state. Gradually the crown's policy toward the most important theatres in the nation changed to accommodate this point of view. In contrast, the warlords who ruled Japan from 1600 into the 1860s strove to contain the popular *kabuki* theatre as

though it were a plague of immorality threatening to contaminate their elite culture. The diversity of state–theatre relations in England between 1600 and 1900 reflects a mix of both attitudes. When those opposing theatrical entertainment as immoral gained power in the English Civil War, they banned the theatre altogether. After the Restoration in 1660, however, other Englishmen advanced state subsidies and regulations intended to wed theatrical performances to the political purposes of the state. Both English factions used the theatre as a political football between 1688 and 1800. In the nineteenth century, France and England gradually abolished monopolistic control of the theatre, but continued state censorship. The case studies following this chapter help to demonstrate the effects of state–theatre relations on specific theatrical events. Performances of *Tartuffe* in France, *Chushingura* and other *kabuki* plays in Japan, and *Twelfth Night* in England reflected some of the dynamics of dominant political and ethical relations in those countries. While state–theatre relations differed in other countries and at other times, these three examples explore a wide range of historical problems in this fractious relationship.

Theatre and the state in France, 1630–1675

As we saw in the Part II Introduction, Cardinal Richelieu established the power of the French monarchy in cultural matters with the French Academy's settlement of the *Le Cid* dispute in 1638. We also noted the triumph of Italianate scenery in the court and, eventually, in the public theatres of Paris. These followed earlier actions of the Cardinal intended to tie theatrical life in Paris to the cultural authority and purse strings of the crown.

When the court began to patronize the acting troupe performing at the Théâtre du Marais in the 1630s, Richelieu arranged for a subsidy for that company. Soon the crown was subsidizing the other major troupe in Paris at the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Before his death in 1642, Richelieu even attempted to raise the social status of actors in France. Traditional prejudices blamed actors

for immorality (due to frequent travel, their sleeping arrangements were sometimes unconventional) and insincerity (because they could play many roles convincingly, some people supposed that they often lied). A 1641 decree from the crown, pushed by Richelieu, removed some legal restrictions from acting companies and forthrightly stated the king's desire that acting as a "profession" be accorded respectability. If the crown was to gain some prestige for its support of acting companies, it was necessary to grant actors higher social status.

As other troupes in Paris vied for royal support after 1643, the new king Louis XIV and his ministers took advantage of the monarchy's position in French culture, bequeathed them by Richelieu, to continue to tie theatre to the power of the crown. A *commedia dell'arte* company from Italy under the management of Tiberio Fiorillo (1608–1694), which enjoyed the support of several influential courtiers, gained a subsidy in the middle 1640s that was renewed from 1653 onwards. When Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin, 1622–1673) and his company returned to Paris in 1658, the king's younger brother (who had seen the company in the provinces) arranged for their debut at court. They failed with an initial tragedy but succeeded with a farcical afterpiece that won them permission from Louis XIV to share a theatre with the Italian *commedia* troupe. It was against this background of royal beneficence that Molière wrote *Tartuffe*, a play attacking the hypocrisy of holy men in high places. As we will see in a case study, Louis, concerned about offending Catholic fundamentalists, suppressed the play after the comedy's premiere at court in 1664. Remarkably, for the next five years, Molière worked on revisions and petitions to the king to lift the ban. Molière's ability to evoke laughter in his final version, even while subverting absolutist orthodoxy, is the subject of the first case study in this chapter.

In addition to French acting companies and Italian *commedia* troupes, Louis XIV extended his support to public performances of French opera. Increasing interest in Torelli's chariot-and-pole wizardry and the success of

Italian baroque opera at court led Louis to award a monopoly for the production of French opera to one company in 1669. The monopoly soon passed to the Italian-born court composer, Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687), who founded the Royal Academy of Music, later renamed the Paris Opéra. In accord with the king's wishes, Lully worked to establish the grandeur of French opera, as opposed to Italian, and soon found success with Paris audiences as well as the court. By the early 1670s, the crown was giving financial assistance to five operatic and theatrical troupes in Paris.

From patronage to control in France, 1675–1789

After 1675, Louis XIV and his ministers used state subsidies to extend their centralized control of theatrical life in Paris. Their first significant move was the formation of the Comédie Française in 1680. When Molière died in 1673, rivalry among the Paris acting troupes led to a period of flux, with several actors leaving one company to join another. In 1679, the crown forced an end to the conflicts by ordering the two major Parisian acting troupes to combine into one – the Comédie Française. As he had already done with musical drama and the opera, Louis granted a monopoly over spoken drama in French to the new company. (An exception was soon made, however, when Fiorillo's *commedia dell'arte* troupe won the right to continue to use French in their performances.) Louis XIV's 1679 decree continued the traditional organization of French acting companies, by which the actors shared in the profits of the troupe, but he fixed the number of shares so that no new members could be admitted to the Comédie Française until an old one retired or died. The edict also regulated how actors might be elected as sharing members and the authority the members possessed in selecting plays for production. Finally, the king took control of the internal affairs of the troupe; his decree established his First Gentleman of the Chamber as the arbiter of disputes within the company. Although members of the new Comédie Française enjoyed state support and might benefit from generous

pensions on retirement, they had become bureaucrats of the monarchy.

Although Louis XIV had enjoyed attending the theatre as a young ruler, he grew censorious toward the stage as he aged. His suspicions were increasingly reflected in the attitudes of his ministers toward the theatre. When courtiers learned that Fiorillo's *commedia* company might be planning to perform a play that satirized the king's second wife, Louis expelled the troupe from France in 1697. Before 1700, the throne rarely engaged in direct censorship; the need for theatres to seek royal subsidies, the watchful eye of the French Academy, and self-censorship had made direct regulation of the political content of scripts mostly unnecessary. Nonetheless, Louis XIV imposed censorship in 1701 and reinforced it with another edict in 1706; these mandated that all scripts be read and approved by a censor in the police department before a public performance in Paris would be allowed. Actor-managers were implicitly allowed to produce prohibited plays in the provinces, however, where local rules and poor enforcement offered few problems. But Louis had made Paris and his nearby court at Versailles the center of France; no troupe forced to perform in the provinces could return to Paris after such disgrace.

Royal patronage had helped to create a thriving theatre in Paris from 1630 to the early 1670s, but Louis's absolutism after 1675 was narrowing the scope of acceptable theatre. It also left the companies that survived his mandates insular in their tastes and jealous of their monopolistic privileges. The Opéra profited from its monopoly, for instance, by selling the right to use singers, dancers, and musicians in productions to a minor company performing at local fairs. In the face of other fairground troupes performing dramatic scenes, the Comédie Française, however, stuck to its privileges. It sued the offending actor-managers, which led them to evade the Comédie's monopoly on spoken dramatic dialog by introducing such ruses as actors performing monologues. The Comédie Française took revenge in 1706. A court ruling reinforced the Comédie's monopoly, and shortly afterwards the police tore down

several booth theatres at the fairground. These conflicts among companies, of course, were a direct result of the structures that Louis XIV had put in place to extend his absolutist control of French theatre (Figure 4.1). In the early 1670s, five companies had competed for Parisian audiences and the favor of the court. By 1700 only two remained – the Comédie Française, and the Opéra.

The structures enforcing state control of the stage changed little until the French Revolution (1789–1799). Following the death of Louis XIV, the Italians returned in 1716 and were given a theatre, a subsidy, and the right

to perform *commedia dell'arte*, reinforcing the monarchy's policy of granting a monopoly over certain genres of theatre to specific companies. This policy continued to create conflict with the fairground troupes, which generally managed to bounce back from legal restrictions with ever more ingenious means of attracting audiences. Their ongoing popularity, despite their marginal legal status, underlined the lack of variety in the state theatres. Censorship continued as well. The censors, empowered by the increasing availability of printed dramas, prohibited any play that they judged might undermine the authority



Figure 4.1

Scene from a Parisian fair theatre play, *The Quarrel of the Theatres*, which satirized two state-supported theatres for stealing from the fair theatres: the Comédie Française, represented by the player on the right, and the Comédie Italienne, represented by the player on the left, which performed the *commedia dell'arte* repertoire and a mix of other works.

From Alain René Le Sage and Jacques Autreau d'Orneval, *Le Théâtre de la Foire l'Opéra Comique* (1723). © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

of the state, which included the Catholic Church and the French aristocracy. Voltaire's *Mahomet* was banned when it seemed to grant some wisdom to Islam and suggested that Catholicism might not have exclusive access to religious truth. Pierre-Augustin Caron Beaumarchais (1732–1799) fought the censors for two years before they allowed the Comédie Française to produce his *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1784. In 1791, in the wake of the French Revolution, the new National Assembly abolished state censorship and all theatrical monopolies.

Samurai warriors versus *kabuki* actors, 1600–1670

Civil wars wracked Japanese society from 1467 until 1590, when one group of samurai (professional soldiers) emerged victorious. In 1603, the Japanese Emperor conferred the title of shogun (supreme military ruler) on Tokugawa Ieyasu, thus establishing the Tokugawa shogunate, which kept peace in Japan until 1868. Desiring to end the power of Christian missionaries, the Tokugawa shoguns closed Japan to Western influences and turned to China for much of their official culture. The samurai adopted neo-Confucian values and Chinese rituals, such as the tea ceremony, and formalized their warrior tradition in practices of decorous simplicity and elegant restraint. At the same time, they attempted to isolate themselves from the merchants in the towns, whose culture they despised.

With the return of peace, the towns prospered and a vigorous new culture arose that was nearly the opposite of samurai elegance and control. Vulgar, irreverent, and often lewd, the culture of the merchants burst forth around 1600 in poetry, music, and dance. At the center of their new entertainments were the first *kabuki* performers, female prostitutes who danced and enacted satirical playlets and bawdy sideshows. At least as early as 1612, male prostitutes also formed *kabuki* troupes and competed with the women. By the 1620s, *kabuki* managers had established theatres linked to brothels in all of the major cities of Japan. In their sensuous dances and skits, *kabuki* performers often reversed gender roles and mocked samurai culture. 📺

The popular success of *kabuki* annoyed the samurai rulers, but also confirmed what they took to be their innate superiority to the rowdy culture of the cities. Although the regime could have stamped out *kabuki* when it first emerged, Ieyasu and his warriors chose to allow it to continue within limits, fearing that a total ban would lead to worse troubles. In a revealing document from Ieyasu's rule, one samurai official stated: "Courtesans, dancers, catamites, streetwalkers, and the like always come to the cities and prospering places of the country. Although the conduct of many is corrupted by them, if they are rigorously suppressed, serious crimes will occur daily" (Shively 2002:41). This point of view, which underlay the Tokugawa shogunate's policy toward *kabuki* theatre for 250 years, rested on class disdain for merchants and city culture. The combination of traders and workers in wealthy towns, the samurai believed, would always breed criminality. Better for such potential criminals to be distracted and enervated by theatrical entertainment, they reasoned, than for these people to turn to "serious crimes."

At the same time, the samurai rulers worried that *kabuki*, if completely unregulated, would corrupt the soldiers and young men of their own class. Complaints against the *kabuki* performers in the 1600–1670 period centered on drunken fights among soldiers and tales of young samurai losing their fortunes and ruining their reputations by chasing after a *kabuki* prostitute. In 1629, the government banned females from performing in *kabuki*. Despite the ban, similar laws were reissued in the 1630s and 1640s, indicating that it took several years for the shogunate to eliminate this popular form of *kabuki*. After 1652, young male prostitutes were also prohibited from performing *kabuki*, again in an effort to prevent class mingling. Henceforth only older males who shaved the forelocks of their hair were allowed to perform in the plays. Apparently this change rendered the male actors less sexually appealing to other men in the audience; young samurai could not be so easily enticed – or so the government believed – by men in drag without their forelocks. This led officials to levy more rules and inspections and the actors to use scalp

coverings and wigs in an ongoing contest of regulation and innovation between the Tokugawa shogunate and the *kabuki* managers.

Regulating *kabuki*, 1670–1868

Although this conflict between the samurai and the managers continued until the end of the regime in 1868, *kabuki* troupes gradually won enough grudging legitimacy from the regime to allow them to elaborate an art form out of this sexually enticing entertainment. After 1652, audiences in Kyoto, Osaka, and Edo began to find more enjoyment in the extended performances by the mature male actors, who now played all the roles on the *kabuki* stage (Figure 4.2). *Onnagata*, men who specialized in female roles, gained particular popularity

among the merchant spectators (see the case study on *kabuki* and *bunraku* at the end of this chapter, p. 219). As a few star actors in the major cities sought better material, *kabuki* playwrights emerged to provide it. The early playwrights generally worked in teams under the direction of an actor-manager, but a few, such as Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1724), gained recognition for their singular excellence. Japanese painters sold versions of *kabuki* performances featuring illustrations of the acting and that included plot summaries and snippets of dialog. These books increased the popularity of *kabuki* with the merchant class (Figure 4.3).

In addition to limiting the number of *kabuki* troupes allowed to perform, the shogunate developed three major strategies to minimize *kabuki*'s contamination of



Figure 4.2

A *kabuki* actor, from a *ukiyo-e* woodblock print by Utagawa Kunisada (1786–1865), a pupil of Toyokuni and famous for his prints of actors and courtesans (see also Figure 4.3).

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Figure 4.3

A performance of the popular *kabuki* play, *Shibaraku* (*Wait a Moment!*), in Tokyo's Nakamura Theatre in the mid-nineteenth century. On the rampway (*hanamichi*) leading to the stage at left, an actor in the robes of the Danjūrō line of actors portrays a commoner who enters to challenge the imminent execution on stage of innocent people by a powerful lord, uttering his famous fierce cry, *Shibaraku*. The woodcut triptych by Utagawa Kunisada shows the traditional auditorium (note the seating arrangements) and stage, but with an additional *hanamichi* at right.

Courtesy Gary Jay and Josephine S. Williams.

their culture. These policies, which after 1670 shifted regulation from the theatrical form of *kabuki* to its content and practice, continued in force until the end of the regime in 1868. First, specific laws separated theatre people from normal urban life. Actors could only live in certain districts, and their movement to other parts of town – to entertain at private parties, for example – was strictly regulated. Second, sumptuary regulations directing how different classes could dress mandated that *kabuki* actors could not wear clothes on stage that elevated their status. As in other feudal societies, dress marked class, and the shogunate did not allow *kabuki* actors to dress in costumes or carry props

that rivaled the elegant attire of the samurai. Third, censorship prohibited performances that appeared to undermine the political and social hegemony of the samurai. (The term “hegemony” here refers to the predominate influence of one class over another.) Spectators enjoyed historical plays about samurai victories in the 1500s, for example, but the actors could not present historical characters or incidents that might be understood as criticizing the present regime. Many playwrights, however, altered historical names and cities to get around this restriction and often succeeded in evading censorship. In general, officials cracked down on the *kabuki* troupes when the shogunate wanted a display

of righteous indignation and eased up when political pressure relaxed.

Occasional scandals and theatre closings, however, reminded the *kabuki* managers how precarious their situation might suddenly become. In 1714, the shogun discovered that one of the ladies of his castle in Edo was having an affair with the star actor, Ikushima Shingōrō (1671–1743). In addition to banishing the lovers and the others implicated in the crime from his capital, the shogun closed Ikushima's theatre, one of the most popular in Edo, confiscated its assets, and demolished the building. For the rest of the Tokugawa period, Edo had only three major theatres instead of the four that had flourished before the scandal.

As in the France of Louis XIV, the Tokugawa samurai controlled the theatre through regulations, censorship, and licensing restrictions. While the French carrot-and-stick policy provided subsidies and theatre buildings, and even attempted to raise the status of actors, the Japanese shogunate segregated the theatre from other urban activities and kept the official status of actors near that of thieves and prostitutes. The two political absolutisms differed in their aims. The French crown wanted a theatre that would legitimize its interests and values. The Japanese shogunate sought to protect itself and its values from theatrical corruption. Ironically, many of the results were similar. Most prominent among these similarities, perhaps, was both governments' impact on dramatic form and theatrical convention. Without the restrictions of monarchy and shogunate, neither neoclassical theatre nor *kabuki* would have developed as they did. Both genres, in fact, might not have existed at all.

Theatre and the state in England, 1600–1660

Within this 60-year period, English state policy toward the stage swung wildly from legal protection to attempted elimination to modified state control. By 1600, the English crown had accorded legitimacy to theatre companies in London. Despite opposition from the Common Council of the City of London, Elizabeth I

(1553–1603) granted royal patents to some troupes and provided legal protection to actors, who previously had been subject to arrest if they were unconnected to a royal or aristocratic household. New laws also exempted English actors from sumptuary regulations; unlike *kabuki* players, they could wear the garments of the aristocracy on stage. Intent on stamping out the last vestiges of the Catholic cycle plays to reinforce Anglican authority throughout England, Elizabeth probably saw the professional theatre as a substitute for these popular community productions. The crown's granting of prestige and protection to professional troupes led to a theatrical building boom in the late 1570s. By 1580, four outdoor theatres ringed the city of London; six more playhouses, indoor as well as outdoor, would be built by 1600.

But royal preferment came with a price. In the 1580s and 1590s, the crown had given the authority to license all plays and playhouses in the London area to the Master of the Revels, the office traditionally responsible for court entertainments. After 1603, with the ascension of James I to the throne, the Master of the Revels was also empowered to license the publication of plays, and, later, all acting companies. These laws, in addition to leading to occasional heavy fees and bribery, also entailed some censorship. Unlike French dramatists in the 1700s, however, English playwrights simply had to avoid inflammatory political and religious issues; they were not expected to reinforce the absolutist values of the regime. Within this mix of royal preferment, light regulation, and tight competition, William Shakespeare emerged as the premiere playwright of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Our third case study in this chapter focuses on the performance of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* around 1600.

This flourishing theatrical life came to an end in 1642, when the English Parliament closed all London theatres. Intended initially as a temporary safeguard against civil strife, the 1642 act was later broadened and extended by the Puritans. Led by Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), opponents of the monarchy incited a Civil War, beheaded King Charles I, and declared a Commonwealth that lasted until 1660. The Puritans banned professional theatre for three main reasons.

First, they associated the stage with the expensive and lavish masques that Charles I had enjoyed at court. To oppose the theatre was to oppose royal absolutism in the eyes of many Puritans. Second, they voiced religious objections, partly linked to the rise of print culture. Believing that the Word of God as printed in the Bible was revealed truth, the Puritans feared that mimicry and spectacle would corrupt people's reason, teach them to delight in illusion and debauchery, and turn them away from the biblical path to salvation. Further, the Bible specifically forbade transvestism, a regular part of the pre-1642 theatre. Boy actors played all of the female roles, and many plot and character devices of the stage involved varieties of gender bending. Third, and finally, the Puritans believed that the theatre incited immoral and illegal behavior. Ordinary people, already inherently depraved (according to the Puritans), would be tempted to robbery, sodomy, and even murder if they watched such behavior or even heard it discussed on the stage. Puritan anti-theatrical prejudice in England went far beyond the animosity that the Japanese samurai felt for *kabuki*. In fact, the Tokugawa shogunate had nothing against theatrical performance as such and continued to enjoy productions of *nō* plays during their rule.

Patents, censorship, and social order in England, 1660–1790

Although some productions occurred during the Commonwealth period, regular performances by professional companies did not return until 1660, with the Restoration of Charles II to the throne. While living in exile at the court of the French monarch, Charles had come to appreciate the control that Louis XIV was exercising over French theatre, opera, and ballet. Charles II did not want to pay the direct theatre subsidies that allowed the French throne to enjoy entertainments that reflected its absolutist goals, but he did believe that he needed the stage to legitimate his fragile hold on power. Before his return to the throne he awarded a royal patent for producing theatre to Thomas Killigrew (1612–1683), a minor playwright who had followed the king into exile. Charles II soon compromised Killigrew's

monopoly by awarding a second patent to William Davenant (1606–1668), also a playwright and theatrical entrepreneur, who would soon prove better able than Killigrew to fulfill the king's theatrical ambitions. By December of 1660, Killigrew and Davenant were the only men allowed to produce plays in London, an unprecedented theatrical monopoly in England (though not, of course, in France). Soon after his return to power, Charles II also decreed that English companies should now employ women as professional actors, a casting convention he had enjoyed on the French stage. Called the “merry monarch” for his sexual affairs, Charles extended his royal prerogatives to taking actresses of his choice as new bedmates.

For the next 20 years, the desires and values of Charles and his aristocrats dominated the English stage. When the king wanted a theatre in which he could entertain foreign dignitaries, he selected Davenant's ideas for a new playhouse in Dorset Garden and spent one thousand pounds of the royal treasury to have it completed. Much more lavish than the rival Drury Lane theatre, which housed Killigrew's company, Dorset Garden was also equipped with the necessary backstage facilities to stage European opera (Figure 4.4). For ten years after its opening in 1671, the king used Dorset Garden as an extension of his royal power, even though it remained primarily a commercial operation. The new female actors were an instant hit (and the boy-actor convention soon died out). Several women achieved artistic stature – including comedian Nell Gwynn (1650–1687), who became Charles's mistress, and tragedian Elizabeth Barry (1658–1713). Although a new law (passed as a sop to the Puritans) made it illegal to produce plays that offended “piety and good manners,” Davenant's productions paraded explicit sexual innuendoes.

Playwriting between 1660 and 1680 generally reflected royalist values. John Dryden's *Indian Queen* (1664) and his two-part *The Conquest of Granada* (1669–1670) followed neoclassical patterns and focused on royal heroes and heroines caught in conflicts between romantic love and duty to the state. *Venice Preserv'd* (1682)

legitimated royal absolutism in Thomas Otway's tragedy about a conspiracy to overthrow the government of Venice. Restoration comedies such as Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode* (1672) and William Wycherley's (1640–1715) *The Country Wife* (1675) featured witty language and titillating sexual intrigue among the beautiful and privileged. These and other dramatists wrote for a coterie audience that usually mirrored the king's taste for heroic grandeur and lusty sexuality. While a few playwrights – including Nahum Tate in his adaptations of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Richard II* – attempted to articulate anti-absolutist positions through allusive language, most bolstered royalist prejudices. By 1680, it seemed to many that the English theatre was going the way of its French absolutist cousin.

The political crisis of the 1680s, however, cut short the drift toward absolutism in England. Largely excluded from the theatre, anti-royalist factions in London took to the streets to perform massive Pope-burning pageants and other demonstrations that linked the crown to the absolute power of Rome. These and other political actions led in 1688 to increased power for Parliament and less overt support and control by the crown over the theatre. As in France, fairground theatres were attracting popular audiences in England and draining spectators from the aristocratic playhouses. The patent troupes, however, lacked the legal power of the Comédie Française; the English crown did not attempt to enforce their apparent monopolies on theatrical production. After 1688, the theatres at the Hounslow, Southwark, and Bartholomew



Figure 4.4

The stage of Dorset Garden Theatre, London, with the setting for Act 1, Scene 1 of *The Empress of Morocco* by Elkanah Settle, produced in 1673. Charles II's coat of arms is at the center of the proscenium arch, below the music room. Designed by Christopher Wren the theatre was architecturally lavish and featured London's best-equipped stage at the time.

Engraving by William Dole in the 1673 edition of the play.
© Gary Jay and Josephine S. Williams.

fairs continued to compete with the patent playhouses, sometimes mounting productions that challenged royal and aristocratic rule. When in 1695 the legal validity of the patents expired, the English throne, which no longer claimed absolute political authority, did not renew them.

By 1730, the English merchant class was replacing the aristocracy as the dominant group in both the government and at London playhouses. No more approving of the fairground theatres than the monarchy had been, the merchants also tried to shut them down, but without success. Theatrical licensing was allowed to slide as well, with the consequence that four unlicensed theatres were operating in London in 1730. By the middle of the decade, there was regular traffic between the fairs and the London theatres. London actors performed frequently at the fairs, and theatre managers borrowed rope dancers and jugglers for entre-acte entertainments and incorporated into their plays the political jibes that were common at the fairs. Most Londoners were enjoying the political openness of the playhouses, including their political satires.

Prime Minister Robert Walpole (1676–1745), however, was not among them. Following a theatrical attack on his political manipulations, Walpole rushed the Licensing Act of 1737 through Parliament. The act strengthened the censorship exercised by the Lord Chamberlain (to whom the Master of the Revels reported) by requiring companies to submit all scripts for approval before performing them. It also limited to two the theatres authorized to perform plays – Drury Lane and Covent Garden in London. Ever since John Gay (1685–1732) had attacked him in *The Beggar's Opera* nine years earlier, Walpole had been the butt of much theatrical satire, and the prime minister hated being laughed at. Requiring prior approval for all plays put an end to these attacks on him, and it also helped Walpole with the royal family, whose troubles had led to some theatrical ripostes as well.

Although the 1737 act drove overt satire off the stage, its strictures also forced some playwrights to couch their criticisms in more subtle and psychological forms. For the most part, though, the Licensing Act transformed London playhouses from arenas of debate and political

dissension into models of decorum and false consensus. Not coincidentally, the act also enriched the office of the Lord Chamberlain because the two licensed theatres had to pay handsomely for the “privilege” of holding a monopoly on the production of regular drama. Walpole had succeeded in pushing the bill through primarily because others in the governing classes also preferred censorship to derisive laughter.

Despite its short-term success, the 1737 act proved unwieldy over time. Designed to protect Walpole and the monarchy, the act made no provisions for theatre outside of London. Troupes and towns in the rest of the country simply ignored its strictures. Its numerous loopholes also allowed fairground managers and other theatre entrepreneurs to produce plays for lower-class patrons that encouraged a range of antisocial behavior. This led the governing classes to pass the Disorderly Houses Act of 1751, a new strategy in social control that put the onus for restraining the masses on those who owned and operated theatres. After 1751, all places for entertainment of any kind within a twenty-mile radius of London had to display a license that certified that the managers took responsibility for the good conduct of their patrons. The local constabulary might revoke the license if order were not maintained. Intended to cut down on the rioting that sometimes accompanied lower-class theatre, the 1751 act implicitly acknowledged that the Licensing Act of 1737 had not restricted all forms of theatre in the London area. It also moved theatrical regulation toward the Japanese model. Like the samurai, the English governing classes had come to recognize that lower-class “immorality,” from their point of view, was inevitable. The 1751 law admitted that it would be more effective to make managers responsible for the behavior of popular audiences than to try to dictate the form and content of their entertainments.

Theatre and the state in England and France, 1790–1900

When the French National Assembly ended all theatrical monopolies in 1791, it marked the end of one era and the beginning of another. The bourgeoisie who

triumphed in the first phase of the French Revolution believed in the classic liberal principle of free markets without governmental interference. They abolished most restraints of trade upheld by the old regime, including theatre monopolies. The 1791 act also recognized a difficult truth: monopolies had not worked to restrict the theatres to approved genres and to conservative social-political values. In France, several fairground troupes had grown so popular that they established permanent theatres and operated year-round. Prohibited from performing regular dramas and operas, they developed pantomimes with minimal dialog set to music and comic operas involving new, sometimes satirical lyrics set to popular tunes.

Similar genres had arisen in England to get around the Licensing Act of 1737. English pantomime, which had emerged from the *commedia dell'arte*, flourished on gags, spectacle, and subversive humor (see the case study on English pantomime at the end of Chapter 7, p. 347). Burletta, a satirical operatic sketch similar to French comic opera, spread quickly among several theatres after 1740. Following the French Revolution, gothic plays and melodramas gained popularity in London and several new theatres arose to fill the demand for them. By 1820, the two-theatre monopoly provision of the 1737 act was in tatters.

At the same time, the social prestige of theatre among the governing classes had never been higher in England. Since the mid-eighteenth century and the popularity of actor David Garrick, newspapers, memoirs, illustrations, and numerous other print media had kept a theatre-hungry public attuned to the latest stars, hits, and scandals. The English bourgeoisie recognized the theatre not only as a site of glamor and celebrity, but also as a business where star performers and dramatic authors could make a profitable living. Although many members of Parliament supported a bill to abolish the monopoly held by the two patent theatres in the 1830s, a similar bill did not pass until 1843. The Theatre Regulation Act of 1843, like the 1791 act of the French National Assembly, allowed any licensed company to produce theatre of any kind. It kept

censorship alive, however, by leaving unchanged the authority of the Lord Chamberlain, who could refuse to license public performances of plays that violated political and moral norms.

In France, the 1791 act had eliminated censorship as well as monopolies, but both were soon restored. Fearing subversion, the revolutionary government during the Reign of Terror re-instituted censorship. As Emperor, Napoleon returned France to many of the practices of absolutism, including monopolistic theatre, which he restored in 1807. Napoleon granted state support and genre monopolies to four theatres: the Comédie Française (for regular tragedy and comedy), the Opéra (for grand opera), the Odéon (for lesser drama) and the Opéra-Comique (for light opera and comic ballet). These restrictions remained in force until 1831, when a new bourgeois government loosened some of the regulations. As in England, however, the unsupported theatres continued to provide most theatrical innovation. The tide of nineteenth-century liberalism gradually turned against monopolistic control in the theatre in France, too. An 1864 French law removed all remaining mandates linking specific genres to certain theatres, although it did allow for continuing state support of the four Parisian theatres noted above.

France also continued state censorship through the end of the century. Recognizing that censoring plays had led to several flourishing *avant-garde* movements that opposed its values, however, the French bourgeoisie relented and ended censorship in 1905. In England, state censorship through the Lord Chamberlain's office continued until 1968. Long after the governing classes of France and England had abandoned attempts at direct control of the theatre, both had continued to restrain the range of political and ethical values that productions might embody and profess.

Key references



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Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Kabuki: See the many listings of performances online and on DVDs at the end of the case study on *kabuki* and *bunraku* following this chapter.

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CASE STUDY: Molière and carnival laughter

By Gary Jay Williams

Carnival laughter . . . builds its own world versus the official world, its own church versus the official church, its own state versus the official state.

(Mikhail M. Bakhtin)

This case study uses the concept of carnival folk humor proposed by Russian critic Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895–1975) to suggest a deep connection between the comic Molière and the Molière whose plays were sometimes very controversial, most especially his *Tartuffe* (1664–1669), which is of special interest here. It will

benefit the reader to read that play, one of Molière’s short plays, such as *The Precious Damsels* (1659) or *Love’s the Best Doctor* (1665), and one of his other five-act verse comedies, such as *The School for Wives* (1659), *The Miser* (1668), or *The Imaginary Invalid* (1673).

Molière’s full-length verse comedies are regarded as the cornerstone of French drama. (Molière [1622–1673] was the stage name of Jean-Baptiste Poquelin.) They have been staples in the repertoire of the Comédie Française, France’s national theatre, for over three centuries and are revived often in the classically oriented theatres of Great Britain, the United States, and Canada. Molière served Louis XIV as playwright, actor, and

courtier for fifteen years, from his court debut in 1658 to his death in 1673. During those years, his theatre company enjoyed many successes in the company's public theatres in the Salle de Petit Bourbon, attached to the Louvre palace, and, later, in the nearby Palais Royal (see Figure II.5). Molière also devised, on the king's command, complimentary court pageants. Molière, like his friend, the poet and fabulist La Fontaine, was a

good “swimmer in the seas of patronage” (Scott 2000:189), although Molière's relations with the Sun King seem to have cooled over the years.

But Molière was very unlike the court literati in important ways. He was an actor, after all, who, while excelling in the leading roles of his own comedies, suffered the social stigma attached to the profession. Some of his satires on the fashionable and foolish made him powerful



Figure 4.5

In this farce at a country carnival, a husband is being cuckolded by a monk. Detail from the painting, “Village Festival in Honor of St. Hubert and St. Anthony,” by Pieter Brueghel, the younger (1564?–1637).

© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University.

enemies. The Parisian literati characterized his plays as mere “bagatelles” – trifles, or, short pieces of light verse. Especially important for this study, his plays and his performances were strongly influenced by the popular comic theatre traditions of (1) French farce, which had roots in medieval comedy; (2) the *commedia dell’arte*, which had plots and character types similar to French farce; and (3) the kind of street medicine show that Molière knew well and put on stage in his *Love’s the Best Doctor* (1665), in which hawkers sold potions said to cure anything. Gerry McCarthy’s *The Theatres of Molière* provides a good introduction to these medicine shows. When Molière won the favor of Louis XIV, the king assigned his company to share a royal theatre with an Italian

company that specialized in *commedia dell’arte* pieces and the old French farces. Bakhtin finds what he calls the “carnavalesque” spirit in all of these traditions (Figure 4.5). This case study suggests that the carnivalesque spirit is at work in many of Molière’s plays, influenced as they were by such popular comic theatre traditions. Comic folk festival entertainments were temporarily subversive. Bakhtin explains, as we shall see, that they challenged prevailing truth and established order. Often, “they marked the suspension or inversion of hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” (Bakhtin 1984:11). In the case of *Tartuffe*, there are key instances of such challenges and inversion, and such a play so close to the seat of power was one an absolutist church had to suppress.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque

Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s concept of carnival folk humor was developed in his analysis of the evolution of the novel, but it is useful to theatre studies. Writing in the former Soviet Union between 1919 and the early 1970s and barely escaping Stalin’s infamous purges of the 1930s, Bakhtin was little known in the West until the publication in English of his *Rabelais and His World* (1968), his rich study of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* by François Rabelais (c. 1490–1553). Bakhtin’s work has been internationally recognized since as contributing to the century’s investigations into the production of meaning in language. In the 1920s Bakhtin was criticizing formalist, psychological, and early structuralist approaches to language and literature for closing off considerations of social energies within them. His idea of language as a naturally dynamic, even subversive force runs counter to more pessimistic Western theories of language as a construct of dominant ideologies, perpetually imprisoning our consciousness.

In his own Marxist account of language as based in material reality – in speech as a social event, he stressed that meaning occurs at that borderline where individual consciousness and the daily social world meet creatively, in a continuously reciprocal, dialogic process. In his subsequent works on the novel, Bakhtin saw this form as a vital, liberating genre because it includes popular languages from everyday reality, “unofficial” languages as opposed to “epic” literature’s singular language. He saw epic literature as the “official voice” of dominant value systems, characterized by the representation of, and reverence for an absolute past, eternalized and closed, and by finalized characters. The novel, by contrast, engages the present, and its multiple voices ensure that its structure is always open-ended, even ambivalent. Meaning is not over determined. In some ways, Bakhtin’s ideas also anticipate theories of reception (for reception theory, see the case study on *kutiyattam* at the end of Chapter 3, p. 133).

Bakhtin sees the “culture of folk carnival humor” (Bakhtin 1984:3–5) as an elemental force, nurtured by a 1,000-year tradition of folk humor, from satyr plays to medieval fools, liberating language and literature from the “official” ecclesiastical and feudal cultures and surging into the renaissance. For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque spirit found its expression in the clowns, fools, farces, and *commedia dell’arte* seen in the medieval and early modern

marketplaces. He located it in the comic hawking of medicine show barkers, the cries of Parisian street merchants, the roaring curses and obscenities of the market and workplace, and in written parodies. In these, he argued, language had a material base – concrete and sensuous – close to the earth, to daily labor, to bodily functions. The culture of folk humor found opportunities for expression in popular festivals such as those of Mardi Gras, city carnivals of feasting and drinking, or the medieval feast of fools, in which Catholic Church rituals were travestied – festivals at first authorized by the Church and then banned, but which continued outside of it. Such festivals often came with agricultural seasons – harvests or winemaking – and were linked with renewal, the future, and hopes of “a more just social and economic order, of a new truth” (1984:81).

Carnavalesque humor reveled in life’s fecundity, in sexuality and all the irrepressible life forces of the material body; its humor was full of images of copulating, defecating, dying, and birthing, always expressive of life’s regenerative processes. Images of excessive eating and drinking were common (the clowns of early German farces, Hanswurst and Pickelherring, are named after folk foods). Images of the body, from nose to phallus, and lower bodily functions were writ large and grotesquely in carnival folk humor; such representations were not about the individual body/ego but about the irrepressible and regenerative body of the people.

Given this celebration of regenerative forces, carnival folk humor in effect laid open the short-lived nature of power; it was full of symbols of “the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities” (1984:11). It was naturally hostile to “all that was immortalized and completed” (1984:10, 12). In contrast with official feasts that reinforced stability, hierarchy, and unchanging norms, values, and prohibitions, the festivals where carnival humor prevailed “celebrated temporary liberation from prevailing truth and established order; they marked the suspension or inversion of hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.” All were equal during carnival festivities. Carnival presented “a world inside out,” or a bottoms-up world, in its “parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings” (1984:11, 411). Carnival humor, with its obscenities and topsy-turvy world erupts as a counterpoint to the oppressive, rigid controls of the ruling class. Applying Bakhtin to Shakespeare, we may say that carnivalesque humor is manifest in such characters as Falstaff, Mistress Quickly, Sir Toby Belch, the Porter in *Macbeth*, and the Fool in *King Lear*. For Bakhtin, the works of Rabelais, Shakespeare, and Cervantes are all enriched by the resulting “dialogic interaction” in them between official and unofficial language and between popular and humanist consciousness. Parody – the comic imitation of another’s socially typical speech, behavior, thinking, or deepest principles – was an important strategy for Bakhtin. Carnival parody uncrowned the old order and simultaneously made a place for the new, which it also upended. It was not terminally negative like modern satire, in which the satirist places himself above the object of his mockery. Like other forms of carnivalesque humor, parody was an expression of “the wholeness of the world’s comic aspect; he who is laughing also belongs to it” (1984:12). Carnival laughter was festive laughter; it mocked in order to revive. All in all, carnival humor offered the possibility for social change, “a new outlook on the world, [a means] to realize the relative nature of all that exists and to enter a completely new order of things.” “Carnival is the people’s second life,” Bakhtin writes (1984: 34, 8).

Bakhtin’s idea of the carnivalesque opens to a wide spectrum of performative activities, from banqueting to pageantry to mock crownings in which the ordinary order of life is overturned (see Michael Bristol’s *Carnival and Theatre* [1985], which applies Bakhtin’s theory to early modern English theatre). Bakhtin did not think the popular-festive spirit was compatible with the footlights – polite proscenium theatre – high art, text-contained, domesticated. He makes only a passing allusion to Molière, seeing the age of Louis XIV in general as one of “abstract and rationalist utopianism.” He believed that the popular-festive comic traditions were no longer

appreciated or even understood amid the dominant mode of neoclassicism, which served to reinforce absolutism. However, this case study argues that there are strains of carnivalesque traditions in Molière which come alive as we view them in the light of Bakhtin's concept. His ideas also open to considerations of the performance of the comic actor, not merely as an ornamentation of a text, but as an embodiment of a whole force-field of social energies. This essay's application of Bakhtin's theory draws especially on *Rabelais and His World* (1984), and his essays published under the title, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (1981).

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 **Where do we see in a given play or performance a suspension or inversion of hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions, or comic crownings or uncrownings, a topsy-turvy world? Are there any implicit critiques of power in the humor?**
- 2 **Where do we find comic images of the body, of excessive eating or drinking, or of copulation, defecation, or other bodily functions?**
- 3 **Where do we find dialogic interaction between "official" and "unofficial" language?**
- 4 **What multiple meanings are available? Where are the ambivalences?**

Elements of carnival humor are arguably present throughout Molière's work, early, middle, and late. While Molière scholarship has benefited recently from theatre studies, it is still often occupied with traditional humanistic interests in such matters as the way his five-act verse comedies meet the literary high-genre requirements of "comedies of character" or "comedies of manners," or in demonstrating an upward-evolving literary sophistication in his work. Surely as important is the fact that Molière never abandoned the kind of disruptive comic elements that are in the spirit of the carnivalesque. As Gerry McCarthy has noted (even without reference to the carnivalesque), "We see a resurrection of the cruder structures of the farce at moments when a tidy chronology would show Molière's genius to be at the height of its powers" (McCarthy 2002:209).

Molière's early one-act farce, *The Precious Damsels* (*Les Précieuses ridicules*, 1659) has many attributes of the

carnavalesque. It is a broad parody of the affectations of the salons of fashionable court women (*précieuses*) who were setting the protocols for aristocratic manners, courtship, language, and literature. Two affected young women turn away two potential suitors for lacking faddish manners and language. The young men then contrive a hoax. They send their valets, Mascarille and Jodelet, to visit the young women in the guise of fashionable courtiers, and the foolish women take them to be genuine. This is not yet in the scale of the carnivalesque. But enter Molière, the actor. Molière played Mascarille, who comes in disguise as a marquis. A surviving account tells us that Molière's costume was a hyperbolic parody of a courtier's apparel. His powdered wig was so large that it swept the area around him every time he made a bow; on his head he wore a tiny hat. His lace collar was huge and so were his breeches, the pockets of which sprouted colored tassels. He wore six-inch heels on his beribboned shoes and was carried on

stage in a sedan chair by porters, whom he tried to avoid paying (Dock 1992:53; Molière 1971:I, 1008). The scale of exaggeration here is beyond satire; it has the overflow of the carnivalesque about it. It is a festive undoing, a parodic uncrowning of established order writ large on the body. Bakhtin's theory here allows us to value performance as something more than an accessory to a literary text. Molière's performance as Mascarille made him a larger-than-life comic icon who bursts the seams of both salon decorum and the neoclassical rules for plays that required rationalized representation (verisimilitude). While his marquis represents an original departure from the stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte*, he functions in the same iconic way: the bold extravagance of the figure testifies to a force of elemental comic energy that explodes the world of over-rationalized drama. Without this kind of elemental comic force, without the precedents of the *commedia dell'arte* and old French farces, it is hard to imagine this performance. Equally, without such precedents, it is doubtful that Harpagon in *The Miser* would break through the proscenium plane as he does in Act IV when he turns to the audience itself to accuse it of stealing his missing money.

In the original performance of *The Precious Damsels*, a comic icon descended from the carnivalesque world was also on stage with Molière. Jodelet (Julian Bedeau), Paris's most famous actor of old French farce and Italian comedy, played the other valet who impersonated an old viscount. Known as a good-natured clown, Jodelet always wore clown-white face make-up (probably a vestige of the flour-faced millers of old farce). Mascarille tells the young women, "Don't be surprised at the Viscount's looks. He just got out of bed from an illness that left him so pale" (Molière 1957:23). Jodelet had recently left a rival theatre company, and Molière jumped at the chance to hire him. Jodelet would have brought with him plays written for him by Paul Scarron, whose parodies Bakhtin cites often, and who influenced Molière. The two comedians go through some ribald jokes involving the lower anatomy under the guise of talking about old war wounds, and they then call in

musicians for a dance, typical *commedia dell'arte* business. Their masters enter to put an end to the deception and the play, beating and stripping their valets of their aristocratic clothes. No one gets to lord it long in carnival humor. Bakhtin speaks of thrashings and clothes-changing as part of the cycle of crownings and uncrownings in carnival humor in which the reign of the clown-made-king is ended by thrashing and stripping him of his robes (Bakhtin 1984:197).

Such analysis could be extended through most of Molière's comedies, but a sampling must suffice here. Two obvious instances of the parodying of "official" language occur in *The Would-be Gentleman* and *The Imaginary Invalid*. In the first, a servant dupes Monsieur Jourdain into believing that a long, burlesque ceremony, conducted in an amalgam of pseudo-Latin and pseudo-Turkish, is conferring on him the noble title of "mamamouchi." In *The Imaginary Invalid*, in which Molière satirizes the medical profession (as he does in at least five other plays), an elaborate ceremony ends the play that parodies medical practice and its degree-conferring. It travesties the profession's Latinate language and its conferring on a dunce of a new doctor the right to slash, purge, bleed, and kill his patients at will. The mocking of the "official" language suggests that it has no more truth-value than any other language.

Carnival humor's uncrownings of authority can take the form of cuckoldry. A wife's sexual deception of her husband is an uncrowning of domestic authority (and a parodic crowning with horns) (Bakhtin 1984:241). Cuckoldry is commonplace in medieval farces and the *commedia dell'arte*. Cuckoldry or near-cuckoldry is a feature of several of Molière's plays, notably *The School for Wives*, *Don Juan* (1665), and *Amphitryon* (1668). In the *School for Wives*, the foolish Arnolphe has had his prospective young wife raised in the country in convent captivity on the theory that she will be too ignorant to know how to be unfaithful to him, a proposition the play gaily unravels. Carnavalesque sexuality often erupts in this play. Arnolphe, justifying to a doubtful friend his expectation of success in his training of Agnes, says he was delighted when Agnes once came to him much

troubled to ask, “In absolute and perfect innocence, / If children are begotten through the ear!” (Molière 1957:37). Earlier in the same scene, when the zealous Arnolphe is fantasizing about his control of his prospective young wife, a *crème tarte* figures as a salacious sexual reference (Molière 2001:5; 1971:I, 548). These and several other such moments have the comically subversive merit of suggesting that very powerful sexual forces are surging just below the surface of Arnolphe’s selfish, rational social engineering. Predictably, such bawdiness disturbed decorous court audiences. But Molière went on to mock them further in his *Critique of the School for Wives* (1663), one of several episodes in a year-long controversy over the play.

In another variation on carnival humor’s upside-down world, the servants in Molière are often wiser than their masters and mistresses (much like those in Plautus’s comedies, from which Molière borrowed directly for his *Amphitryon* and *The Miser*). Dorine in *Tartuffe* and Toinette in *The Imaginary Invalid* challenge their masters’ delusions to a degree that borders on comic domestic anarchy. In *Don Juan*, Sganarelle challenges his master about his seductions: “Do you think because you are a gentleman and wear a fashionable wig, because you have feathers in your hat and gilt lace on your coat and flame-colored ribbons . . . that you can do as you like . . . ?” (Molière 1953:204). Street-smart underclass characters in Molière frequently are foils to the self-deluding bourgeoisie. In many of the plays, folk wisdom comes from the servants in the form of proverbs as Molière mines another vein of popular culture.

Let us look through the carnivalesque lens last at Molière’s *Tartuffe*, in which a clergyman preaches holiness but practices seduction, almost with impunity. It was his most controversial play and, ultimately, the most profitable in his lifetime. Molière first staged it as part of Louis’s lavish entertainments at Versailles in 1664, in a version now lost. The king enjoyed it but suppressed it in deference to the outrage of a sect of zealously devout Catholics. The play has many strains of popular folk humor inherited from farce and the *commedia dell’arte*, including Tartuffe’s near sexual overpowering of Orgon’s

wife on top of the table under which Orgon is hiding (Figure 4.6). But let us focus here on one profound example of carnival humor in the play.

In the comic spectacles of popular festivals, travesty – the mocking appropriation of the costumes and insignia of authority and identity – was typical. Travesty suggests a slippage between the ideal and reality, between symbol and truth, between the sign and what it signifies – an effect which, for Bakhtin, nourishes positive social change. Molière’s plays are full of imposters and poseurs, such as his affected courtiers, his bourgeois would-be gentleman, and all of his mock doctors. Disguised in the vestments and language of authority, such imposters create comic havoc. *Tartuffe*, as a sexual predator in the guise of a devout, creates more. Molière’s play, like the theatre art itself, raises the question of whether we can ever know where the performance of the self ends and a true self begins. Taken seriously, a question about the stability of our knowledge of truth is not one an absolutist church or state can long entertain. Molière’s play could be seen not only as irreverent but as a strike at the heart of the church’s authenticity. It is this, perhaps more than the sexuality that would account for the deep wrath of the powerful conservative cabal who insisted that the king, who had been Molière’s protector in controversies up to this time, suppress the play. One Catholic curate raged in print against *Tartuffe*, saying the author was “a demon . . . dressed like a man,” that Molière had held Christ’s church in contempt, and that he should be burned at the stake as a foretaste of what he would surely suffer in hell (Molière 1971:I, 1143–1144). When Molière tried to produce a revised version in 1667, the Bishop of Paris closed it down, threatening the excommunication of anyone who performed or read it.

A very persistent Molière finally got his play to the public stage in 1669 in the version that survives today. The ending probably represents his revising process and has been the subject of much debate. The ending’s last-minute intervention of the emissary from Louis XIV to save Orgon and his home from Tartuffe’s grasp was available to be read as the conventional, obsequious



Figure 4.6

Orgon catches Tartuffe (standing at left) in the act of trying to seduce his wife in Act 4 of Molière's *Tartuffe*. Engraving by François Chaveau from the 1669 edition of the play.

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compliment to the omniscience of Molière's sovereign and patron. But this last act *dénouement* might also have been available to be read by some as an ironic *Deus ex machina*, which is to say a carnivalesque parody of an all-knowing being. At the very least, two language zones, as Bakhtin would call them, were in play in the ending – the official and the unofficial – and two different reception possibilities. The result would have been the kind of dialectic in which Bakhtin found the gay ambivalence that subverts orthodoxy.

In their ribald humor and theatrical artifices drawn from street theatre traditions, Molière's plays, at least momentarily, critiqued decorum and absolutist control. Whether instinctively or consciously, Molière persisted

in deploying carnivalesque humor throughout his career, as if his integrity as an artist depended on it. Molière, the carnivalesque comic actor and writer never was elected to the classically rigorous, decorum-conscious French Academy, guardian of French language and literature, a fact that the Academy never has lived down.

Key references



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Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Molière's *Tartuffe*, video recording of the Royal Shakespeare Company production, directed by Bill Alexander, with Antony Sher as Tartuffe (1984).

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CASE STUDY: Kabuki and bunraku: Mimesis and the hybrid body

By Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei

“Why can’t a woman be more like a man?” sings Professor Henry Higgins in Lerner and Lowe’s *My Fair Lady*, echoing the musical’s source play, *Pygmalion* (1913), by George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950). When Higgins meets the Cockney flower-seller, Eliza, he does not see a “woman”; he sees only a dirty, squalling member of the working class. When he successfully teaches her how to sound and act like a member of his own class, he becomes aware of (and disturbed by) her gender. His comic, lamenting song demonstrates that social class and gender are constructed from behaviors such as diction, vocal

quality, grammar, clothing, hair style, bodily adornment, walking, and deportment. Higgins has, in effect, created a “hybrid body,” filled with “mimetic excess.”

The history and aesthetics of Japan’s *kabuki* theatre and its related puppet form, *bunraku*, are filled with “hybrid bodies” and “hybrid cultures.” The word *kabuki* derives from the verb *kabuku*: “to tilt or slant dangerously to one side.” Around the beginning of the seventeenth century, it referred to shocking, counter-cultural people, including actors, who roamed Edo (present-day Tokyo). Today, however, when *kabuki* is considered a “classical” art form, the word itself is now written differently, using Chinese characters meaning “song-dance-skill.”

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Mimesis, hybridity, and the body

Cultural products such as performance are never pure and unchanging. Contacts between different societies or different philosophies can “contaminate” older forms, often resulting in positive, new, and invigorating “hybrids.” In *kabuki*, especially as it developed during the Tokugawa era (1603–1868), we can see shifting cultural constructions of class and gender that demonstrate how “the concept of hybridity stresses the productive nature of cultural integration as positive contamination” (Gilbert and Lo 1997:7). Gilbert and Lo were discussing hybridity in cultural transformations in colonized societies; as we shall see, the Tokugawa shogunate’s creation of a closed, supposedly unchanging social order had effects similar to those that colonialist rule has.

In his *Mimesis and Alterity: a Particular History of the Senses*, Michael Taussig (1993) shows how colonizing Europeans who viewed native people as “childish” or “primitive” were mistaken. Taussig maintains that the Europeans (deeply imbued with Platonic ideals) failed to understand that when native peoples wore foreign costume items, mimicked European song and dance, or created religious effigies of the white man, they were attempting to incorporate the colonizing Other into their souls and their society. They were actually negating the threat while celebrating the wonder of Otherness by using “mimetic excess” (including parody) to work out a concept of their own identity. Taussig suggests this strategy may be more common than we think. “Mimetic excess provides access to understanding the unbearable truths of make-believe as foundation of an all-too-seriously serious reality. . . . [Mimetic excess is the power] to become any Other and engage the image with the reality thus imagined” (Taussig 1993:255). Such a concept complements the idea of hybridity as “productive contamination.” In other words, changes due to contact with alien societies or philosophies do not necessarily destroy “tradition.” Rather, “tradition” is itself an ever-changing “hybrid.” *Kabuki*, a “traditional” genre that is passed down from generation to generation, has never been static or frozen, but constantly responds to “positive contamination,” often by using mimetic excess.

In writing about mimesis (imitation), European and American theorists inevitably begin with a discussion of Plato and his distrust of imitation. Although Catholic missionaries (with their fondness for neo-Platonic idealism) were active in Japan beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, their influence waned with the establishment of the Tokugawa shogunate, until all foreigners were banned in the mid-seventeenth century. It is important to understand that *kabuki* developed in isolation, unaffected by the outside world.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 In thinking about your favorite play, how have the costumes, music, language, ideas, story or acting style been affected by “positive contamination”? Is this the result of historical contact between societies, or a new interpretation of older material by a playwright, director, actor, or designer?
- 2 What are the images on stage of a gender, race, class, or nationality? Do those represent you? Who is not represented? Are there any instances of productive or positive contamination?
- 3 What are some examples of parody and “excessive mimesis” in contemporary performances in music, television, or film? What is the effect? Do they serve a positive purpose?
- 4 If you were acting in a play, would you need to “see yourself” in the character in order to understand that character? Put another way, how might a Brazilian teenage boy go about understanding Juliet in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*?

Hybrid culture in Tokugawa Japan

Woodblock prints from around 1600 depict Okuni (d. 1610), the female temple dancer/prostitute who originated the performance style eventually called *kabuki*. She is dressed outrageously in male Portuguese garb and wears a Christian cross around her neck and a samurai's double swords at her waist (Figure 4.7). Wearing items belonging to the opposite gender, to foreigners, to Christians, or to the samurai class was forbidden. Does Okuni's scandalous mimicry suggest some influence by the West?

The Tokugawa rulers, guided by neo-Confucianism, insisted on society divided according to hereditary class. Each class was permitted garments and adornments appropriate to them and forbidden to others. For example, only samurai, the highest class, could wear the double swords. Next in the hierarchy were the farmers,

followed by artisans and craftspeople. At the bottom were the merchants, thought to contribute nothing to society, because they merely traded items grown or made by others. These three lower classes wore only cotton garments of blue and brown, with little or no pattern. Outside and above the class system were the Imperial family, the nobility, and Buddhist and Shinto priests. They could wear colored silks, embroidered and elaborately patterned. Outside and below the class system were hereditary outcasts, sorcerers, prostitutes, beggars, and actors, all forbidden to wear the trappings of those “inside society.”

However, this inflexible hierarchy was turned upside-down in reality during a long period of peace. Money could be spent on leisure instead of war. The *daimyō* (feudal lords) actually became poor because they were forced to maintain two households: in their home province and in the new capital of Edo. Unemployed



Figure 4.7

Detail from a painting showing Okuni, the Japanese female temple dancer/prostitute who originated the performance style eventually called *kabuki*, probably in the late sixteenth century. Note the Christian cross and double samurai swords. Other images show her in male Portuguese garb.

© Tokugawa Reimeikai Foundation.

samurai (*rōnin*) became bandits or lived secretly among the merchants. In contrast, the despised merchants became rich. They secretly defied the law by wearing extravagant silks and bold colors beneath their simple cotton kimonos. Seeking identity, they mimicked the external markers of the aristocracy. As the “mimetic excess” of many *kabuki* plots demonstrates, the merchants embraced the virtues and values once appropriate to the samurai and feudal lords but which these upper classes no longer possessed. They became “cultural hybrids,” mimicking and incorporating the look and behavior of “the Other,” not unlike Eliza Doolittle or colonized peoples who practice “productive . . . cultural integration.”

In the early Edo era, political opposition, rebelliousness, and the desire for excitement resulted in unruly gangs of youth, originally from all classes. Gang members sported outrageous costumes, wild hairdos, large and extravagantly decorated swords, and four-foot long tobacco pipes. Like Okuni, they resisted legal dress codes and performed “mimetic excess.” These counter-cultural people were termed *kabuki-mono*. As long as people performed and dressed outrageously, whether on stage or off, order could not be maintained.

Unlike Europeans opposed to theatre, the neo-Confucians did not suggest that stage acting, cross-dressing, or imitation were inherently evil; rather, they feared class mingling and social rebellion. Most of



Figure 4.8

The well-known Japanese male actor, Onoe Baikō, in the *onnagata* (female) role in *Fuji Musume* (*The Wisteria Maiden*). He was considered one of the finest *onnagata* of the twentieth century.

Source: Program for Grand Kabuki Theatre, Los Angeles, September 1993.

kabuki's patrons were merchants. Samurai and aristocrats, including high-born women, were forbidden to attend, but they flagrantly broke the law. Sometimes they came in disguise; in some periods, they were forced to sit behind screens where they were “invisible.” Actor/aristocrat love affairs became public scandals. The 1715 “Ejima affair” between a court lady and a *kabuki* actor resulted in one theatre being torn down and others closed; those involved were imprisoned or exiled – one was even executed.

Draconian regulations failed to destroy *kabuki*. Instead, *kabuki* actors and managers devised creative solutions to remain in business and to entertain the patrons. Attempted censorship and control actually gave birth to innovations, such as more attractive costumes and wigs, better scripts, and the creation of the *onnagata*, a term meaning “female form,” which designates the male actor who specializes in female roles (Figure 4.8).

Imaging “woman”

When women were banned from *kabuki* in 1629 (replaced by boys, who were banned in 1654), adult male actors performing female roles appeared. Female characters in *kabuki* include not only such “ideal women” as heroic princesses, virtuous wives, and glamorous courtesans, but also ugly, elderly women, stupid peasants, betrayed lovers, mothers driven mad by the death of a child, vengeful ghosts, demons, traitors, bandits, and prostitutes, among others. The *onnagata* does not need to appear “beautiful” or even typically “feminine.” He speaks in a created falsetto rather than a realistic voice. The *onnagata* does not need to be “believable” as a woman (as we might expect a Judy Garland impersonator to be a realistic, believable imitation of the original). Rather, he must be a skillful performer, creating a pleasing staged image of “woman.” Today, however, some popular *onnagata* also perform realistic women in films and on stage. For example, the *kabuki onnagata*, Bandō Tamasaburō V (b. 1950), also excels in roles such as Blanche DuBois in Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth.

The playwright Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653–1725), best known for deeply moving domestic tragedies such as *Love Suicides at Sonezaki* (*Sonezaki Shinjū*), maintained that “beauty lies in the thin margin between the real and the unreal.” He felt too much realism was repulsive; audiences would prefer the tension created by the actor’s doubleness, an awareness of opposites in the same body (actor/character, male/female). For example, he advised the *onnagata* to kneel with the upstage knee slightly raised, although this might differ from how a real woman would kneel, because it would be aesthetically pleasing.

Chikamatsu’s contemporary, the great *onnagata*, Yoshizawa Ayame I (1673–1729), maintained that the successful *onnagata* must behave like a woman on stage and in real life, even in private and even if he is married with children. He must practice a female’s outward behavior and inner thoughts: by eating, walking, and gesturing like a woman. Even at the public bath, Ayame would use the women’s section. No one objected, and no one was fooled. The *onnagata*’s body and character are neither imagined ideals nor imperfect copies. His aesthetic appeal results from being a “hybrid” that incorporates both genders within a single body through “mimetic excess.”

In a famous scene from the 1825 *Yotsuya Ghost Stories* (*Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan*), the corpses of a man and a woman are nailed to either side of a door that has been thrown into the river. As the man responsible for their deaths walks along, the door bobs up and down in the water, tossing and turning so that we see first the bloated, decaying body of the woman, then the man, and so on. Hybridity and mimetic excess are here doubled, because both dead bodies (male and female) are played by the same actor, an *onnagata*. *Kabuki* audiences love such “tricks” of quick bodily transformation. Another trick is called *hikinuki*, a spectacular on stage costume shift that reveals a character’s inner nature, often in the midst of a complex dance. In the *kabuki* version of the *nō* play *Dōjōji* (see the case study on the *nō* play at the end of Chapter 3, p. 157), stage assistants unobtrusively pull out threads basting a costume

together, then whip off the outer garment to reveal a totally different kimono, suggesting various aspects of the character's nature.

A more complex type of hybrid body is represented by the *kabuki* actor who impersonates a *bunraku* puppet. *Bunraku* developed at the same time as *kabuki* and shares many of the same plays. *Bunraku* puppets are three to four feet tall and are manipulated by three adult men (Figure 4.9). Like the boy actors of Elizabethan England, they rivaled adult male *kabuki* actors in popularity. The puppets performed as much like live *kabuki* actors as possible, and one type of *kabuki* acting developed in which the actors copied the movement of puppets.

In this special style of puppet imitation (*ningyō buri*), the *kabuki* actor appears to be a limp doll brought to life and manipulated by visible, black-robed stage attendants, who act as though they are puppet manipulators. The actor's "live" body mimics the lifeless (but mechanized) carved doll to create a new hybrid body. A famous *ningyō buri* dance in *Yaoya Oshichi* features Oshichi, the greengrocer's daughter, as she climbs a fire tower. The play is based on the true story of a love-sick girl who was executed for committing arson. Mimetic excess in this performance means that the live, male *onnagata* actor mimics the dance of a mechanical *bunraku* doll; in the *bunraku* version, the doll mimics an imaginary *onnagata*.



Figure 4.9

Japanese *bunraku* puppets. The head manipulator, without mask, controls the doll's head and right arm. The secondary manipulator, with face covered, controls the left arm. If needed, a third controls the feet.

Source: *Bunraku, The National Theatre of Japan*, published by Japan Arts Council, 1994, p.7.

Both the performing male body and the *bunraku* doll mimic a once living woman.

Merchants incorporating samurai

Just as the *onnagata* represents a successful hybrid of opposite genders, the Tokugawa era *kabuki* plays represent the way in which the code of the samurai (no longer practiced but still valued) became incorporated into the bodies and souls of the merchants. The merchant class was beginning to imagine its new, self-created identity, just as colonized peoples mimic and incorporate the dress and behaviors of the colonizers in a process that results in independent national identity.

The two plays considered below use the technique of *mitate*, in which the playwrights substitute a past historical, literary or legendary “world” for the present. They did so because censorship forbade the depiction of current events and criticism of the samurai.

Sukeroku: Flower of Edo (1713) is staged in *aragoto* (rough-house) style featuring striking, non-realistic makeup, hugely exaggerated costumes, extreme vocal patterns, and powerful gestures that are based on images of *Fudō*. *Fudō* is the patron deity of a Buddhist-Shinto sect of mountain ascetics, whose rituals include terrifying demon-quelling dances. Nothing in *kabuki* so clearly demonstrates “mimetic excess” as this *aragoto* style. At climactic moments, an *aragoto* actor may toss his head,



Figure 4.10

Danjūrō XII as *Sukeroku*, the commoner who is an aristocrat of the past in disguise, in the *kabuki* play, *Sukeroku: Flower of Edo*. Here, Danjūrō is seen striking a typical *mie* pose.

Source: *Kabukiza* program, Tokyo, January 1995, p.20.

raise his leg and stamp his foot, pose with open, outreached hand, grunt, and freeze his face in a cross-eyed grimace. Such “punctuation” in acting is called *mie* (Figure 4.10). In these moments, the expressive body of the outcast actor incorporates both the Buddhist-Shinto deity and samurai warrior, suggesting to the merchant audience that they, themselves, partake of such hybrid identity.

Sukeroku is a rowdy commoner in love with a gorgeous courtesan who refuses the advances of the evil samurai, Ikyū. The action takes place in Yoshiwara, Edo’s “pleasure district,” where theatre, tea-houses, and brothels were located. In Sukeroku’s danced entrance on the *hanamichi* (a rampway extending from down stage right through the audience to the back of the auditorium), he wears a purple headband (a color permitted only to the upper classes), suggesting disdain for society’s rules. Like a merchants’ ideal self, he is brave, clever, funny and a great lover. However, this contemporary surface is revealed as false.

Sukeroku is in disguise, and the time is not the present. He is actually one of the Soga brothers, historical samurai who avenged their murdered father in 1193. He typifies both the pluck of the Edo townsman and the abandoned ideals of the ancient samurai. Sukeroku comically insults and picks fights with samurai; when Ikyū finally draws his sword, Sukeroku recognizes it as his father’s, proving that Ikyū is the murderer. A hybrid commoner-samurai, Sukeroku has inherited the values and behaviors that the ruling samurai no longer possess.

This issue was not always treated so lightly. *Chūshingura: The Treasury of Loyal Retainers* (1748) was based on events that took place between 1701 and 1703. A young, untutored *daimyō* failed to bribe an elegant samurai, and mercilessly taunted him until the samurai drew his sword while in Edo castle and wounded his tormentor. In punishment, he was ordered to commit *seppuku* (suicide by disembowelment), his lands were confiscated, and his family line was to be stamped out. However, his former retainers (now *rōnin*, masterless samurai) attacked and murdered their lord’s tormentor,

aware that for this act of loyalty, they would be condemned to death.

Their deeds polarized society. Some people insisted they should not be punished, because they had only obeyed their obligation to their lord rather than succumbing to *ninjō* (human emotion). Others demanded their deaths. As a compromise, the *rōnin* were permitted to commit *seppuku* and were buried along with their lord.

The rapid publication of materials dealing with the incident and subsequent trial ensured that the general population was well-informed. Here were *rōnin* acting in accordance with the code of *bushidō* (the way of the warrior), seemingly a lost value. Twelve days after the mass suicide, the first play based on the vendetta was staged, set (like *Sukeroku*) in the medieval world of the Soga brothers. Nevertheless, the government closed it after only three performances. Over the years, many other versions appeared. Finally, the 1748 version, set in yet a different historical era, became the standard. The censors were appeased since the outer form of this version of the play did not violate the law, and audiences understood the real subject.

Just as the performance of the *onnagata* demonstrates how gender images were constructed through “hybridity” and “mimetic excess,” so plays such as these permitted the primarily merchant-class audience of the Tokugawa era to create a new social identity that incorporated the colonizing “Other.”

Key references

Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

The best single online source for *nō*, *kyōgen*, *kabuki* and *bunraku* – video clips (*nō* and *kyōgen*) photos (*kabuki*), historical prints, and other materials – is provided by the National Theatre of Japan at: www.ntj.jac.go.jp/english.

Video introductions to these traditional forms are also available at: <http://www2.ntj.jac.go.jp/unesco/noh/en/>.

All U.S. Japanese Consulates (and the Embassy) have cultural attaché offices which lend out for free a wide selection of videos and DVDs about Japan, including excellent videos on *nō*, *kabuki*, *bunraku*, and modern theatre. The selection at each consulate varies. Contact the one closest to your physical location several weeks before planning to show the videos; they will ship them to you or you may pick them up personally. Consulates are in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco; along with the Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Many videos, including the brief sampling below of titles we recommend are for sale from Insight Media: www.insight-media.com

Bunraku: Classical Japanese Puppet Art (28 minutes) #9AF905.

Kyōgen Classic: Poison Sugar (Busu) (28 minutes) #9AF733.

The Tradition of Performing Arts in Japan (30 minutes) #9AF350.

Overview of *nō*, *kabuki* and *bunraku*: *Theatre in Japan: Yesterday and Today* (53 minutes) #9AF1899. Dated, but includes interviews with performers including Suzuki Tadashi on modern and traditional Japanese theatre.

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CASE STUDY: Sexuality in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

By Bruce McConachie

Sexual desire has been a perennial subject of theatrical performance. Even during periods when only actors of a single sex appeared on the stage, audiences have applauded plays in which the anxieties, illusions, and expected pleasures of sexual desire took center stage. During the theatrical renaissance of the early modern

period in England (1590–1642), cross-dressed boys between the ages of eight and eighteen performed all of the women characters. Nonetheless, the comedies, satires, and tragedies of numerous playwrights, including John Ford, Ben Jonson, and William Shakespeare, featured boys playing women involved in a range of sexual relationships, including conventional romance and marriage, potential lesbian affairs, prostitution, and even

incest. The performance of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* at the Globe Theatre in London allowed audiences to explore, enjoy, and agonize about a range of sexual desires, including the desire for same-sex love.

The homoerotics of patriarchy

Most people in early modern England judged sexual urges and actions by patriarchal standards. Patriarchal ideology, the belief that males in superior social and political positions had an inherent right to their authority, generally elevated the expression of male over female sexuality. A man's desire for a woman or for another man could be more ennobling than a woman's desire for a man. Patriarchy, however, needed women as a means of cementing alliances and accumulating property through marriage, as well, of course, as ensuring male heirs. The result was a social system and a dominant ideology that tied sexuality to class hierarchy

and allowed for homoerotic acts that solidified the patriarchal order.

Within some early modern institutions – the church, the school, the household – same-sex love initiated by men in superior positions was not uncommon. Male teachers often formed liaisons with male students, and a master might act on his desire for a male apprentice living in his household without raising the neighbors' eyebrows. Likewise, powerful women might form homoerotic relationships with ladies-in-waiting or servants in their households. When these relationships threatened the procreation of patriarchy, however, society persecuted them. Although few instances of lesbianism ever came to court, men convicted of "sodomy" were imprisoned or hung. In most of these instances, "sodomy" was broadly seen as an act that threatened the social order – not just sexual morality but the hierarchy of class and gender.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Queer theory

The general acceptance of homoerotic love in early modern England raises significant questions for contemporary readers and critics. Most Westerners today draw a sharp distinction between hetero- and homosexuality and understand sexual orientation as key to a person's identity. Shakespeare's contemporaries, however, did not think about sexuality in these ways. For most Elizabethans, there was nothing unnatural about a man desiring both women and other men; if he acted on these desires, he was not a "homosexual," a confused "heterosexual," or even a "bisexual," since identity was not tied to sexual expression. Of course there were many people then, as now, who preferred same-sex or opposite-sex intimacy and practiced it exclusively, but they did not classify themselves according to their sexual orientation. Most social and literary historians recognize that the homo-hetero binary used to categorize modern sexuality derives from the late nineteenth century and should not be read back into the sexual practices of early modern England.

How, then, might we explain the homoeroticism of Shakespeare's England? Recent work by historians and critics in the field of "queer studies," so named to alter a formerly negative term into a positive one, has explored our critical assumptions about sexual desire and expression. Much of this scholarship rests on the ideas of Michel Foucault, whose three-volume *History of Sexuality* developed the contention that sexuality, like notions of insanity, varies from one culture to another; sexual expression is tied to culture, not nature. In other words, as Bruce Smith argues, we can distinguish between sex, the bio-chemical urge experienced by all humans, and sexuality, the cultural expression of that urge: "Sexual desire animates human beings in all times and places, but the forms that desire assumes, the objects to which it is directed, change from culture to culture, from era to era" (Smith 1991:3). The normal sexuality of one era may seem foolish, unethical, or inexplicable to people in another time

or culture. Thus, culture channels male and female sexual desires toward a hierarchy of approved objects and away from objects deemed inappropriate or immoral.

Drama historian Mario DiGangi deploys a useful vocabulary to discuss these possible couplings. Drawing on the assumptions of Foucault and his own knowledge of Renaissance sexual practice, DiGangi makes some helpful distinctions in his *The Homoerotics of Early Modern Drama*. He uses the term “sexuality” to refer to the social organization and erotic meanings and practices of sexual expression in the Renaissance, but denotes as “homosexual” only those “sexual acts between people of the same sex.” DiGangi continues, “Because the phrase ‘homosexual desire’ seems to ground erotic desire in a core sexual identity, I reject it in favor of ‘homoerotic desire,’ which to my mind signifies only a relation and not a causality” (DiGangi 1997:3–4). To this list of useful terms might be added “heteroerotic desire,” to distinguish it both from the “homoerotic” type as defined by DiGangi and from sexual desire generally, which could take either form.

Interpreting the history of sexuality as it pertains to theatrical performance or to similar human practices, then, will involve attempting to answer the following questions.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 How did the historical culture construct sexuality?
- 2 Toward what kinds of approved objects did the culture direct hetero- and homoerotic desire?
- 3 How did the culture’s construction of sexuality intersect with other practices and ideologies?

Homoerotic desire and the boy actors

The convention of boy actors cross-dressed to play women’s roles had been the norm in play productions throughout medieval Europe. This changed on the continent during the sixteenth century with the widespread touring of *commedia dell’arte* troupes, the first professional theatres to cast women in female roles regularly. Slowly, other continental theatres also began employing women actors, but English companies did not.

Historians and critics have suggested several reasons for the continuation of cross-dressed boys on the English stage. Fear of female sexuality probably played a part, although powerful men on the continent would have been no less wary of a woman’s desire and procreative ability than the patriarchs of England. Then, too, few *commedia* troupes crossed the channel to perform in

London; English audiences, consequently, had little familiarity with the possibilities of women on stage. Further, the practice of boys dressing as women was a theatrical convention of proven and continuing effectiveness. Even after the banning of all religious plays in 1559 and their complete suppression in the 1570s, boys continued to play female roles in secular mummers plays and medieval farces as well as in school productions at boys schools, such as Eton. In fact, plays written specifically for and performed by all-boy troupes were enormously popular in London after 1576. From 1600 to 1608, an all-boy Queen’s Revels company at the Blackfriars Theatre, an indoor playhouse more exclusive and prestigious than the outdoor theatres, did better business on average than any of the adult companies in London.

The popularity of the boy companies suggests a fourth reason for the continuation of boy actors in

female roles: they may have provided a safe, conventional means of exploring the pleasures and anxieties of homoerotic desire on the stage – safe in most ways, at least. The Master of the Revels, a censor appointed by the royal household to guard against religious and political subversion in all dramas performed by licensed troupes, did not forbid plays on the basis of sexual suggestiveness, homoerotic or otherwise. Puritan critics of the stage, however, repeatedly pointed to the dangerous eroticism of beautiful boys. Opposed to any public displays of sexual desire, homo or hetero, Philip Stubbs, for example, singled out the “whoredome & unclennes” induced by the boy players in 1582: “[For proof], but marke the flocking and running to Theaters and curtens . . . to see Playes and Enterludes, where such wanton gestures, such bawdie speaches; such laughing and fleering; such kissing and bussing; such clipping and culling; such wickinge and glancinge of wanton eyes, and the like is used, as is wonderfull to behold. These goodly pageants being done, every mate sorts to his mate . . . and in their secret conclaves (covertly) they play the Sodomits, or worse” (Brown 1990:250). Although their fear of the theatre made the Puritans biased reporters, Stubbs’s description, echoed in less overheated phrases by more objective observers, does suggest that the boy actors were trained to make themselves objects of sexual desire on the stage.

The adult companies of Renaissance England generally employed four to six boys, both for female roles and for roles of their own age and sex. As in other master–apprentice relationships in early modern England, the boys lived in the household of the company member under whom they served, and the company paid the master a small fee for the boys’ services. The Lord Chamberlain’s Men, the company for which Shakespeare wrote and in which he had a financial share, probably employed four boys in the early 1600s, when they produced *Twelfth Night* at the Globe.

Historians know little about the acting style of adults on Renaissance stages and less about the techniques used by boys to impersonate women. The skimpy evidence does suggest that the boys playing major female roles

attempted to fully embody the voice, movements, and emotions of their characters rather than merely indicate them. That Shakespeare wrote such complex psychological portraits as Juliet (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1594–1595), Rosalind (*As You Like It*, 1599), and Cleopatra (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1606–1607) also suggests that his company had boy actors who could play these roles believably. For their part, spectators probably focused on either the female characters or the boy underneath during different moments of the performance. And Shakespeare, like other Renaissance playwrights, frequently reminded his auditors of the sexual incongruity between the two.

Twelfth Night at the Globe

Early modern audiences in London could attend an outdoor, public playhouse most days of the year, except for the Christian season of Lent and for periods of intense heat (and possible plague) during the summer months. For Londoners, a trip to the Globe took them across the River Thames beyond the reach of a city government dominated by Puritans and into an area populated by taverns, brothels, bear-baiting arenas, and other playhouses. The theatres south of the Thames, like others north of the city, drew audiences of all classes. Apprentices, journeymen, soldiers, and others paid a penny for admittance into the yard of the playhouse, where they could stand to watch the show on the thrust stage, roughly four to six feet high (Figure 4.11). For an additional penny, merchants and their families, courtiers of both sexes, foreign travelers, and others might purchase a bench seat in one of the three-tiered galleries that surrounded the yard and the stage. If the Lord Chamberlain himself came to enjoy the troupe he sponsored, he and his retinue might sit in a lord’s room behind and above the stage platform, an excellent location to see and be seen. Although the Globe could hold perhaps 2,500 spectators, the average crowd for most performances was probably around 600.

When *Twelfth Night* began near two o’clock in the afternoon, the audience heard the musicians – probably six instrumentalists in an elevated gallery – playing melancholy music as Duke Orsino and his court entered

Figure 4.11

A 1596 drawing of the interior of the Swan Theatre, London, probably generally similar to the nearby Globe Theatre. Note the figures in the gallery above the two stage doors; this area may have been used as a Lord's Room and as an acting space. The only picture of the interior of an Elizabethan public theatre, it is a copy by Arend von Buchell of a lost original drawing by his Dutch friend, Johannes DeWitt who had visited London.

From E.K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (1923). Buchell's drawing is in the Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Utrecht.



through the two doors at the rear of the stage. Music would have played a significant role in establishing the various moods of the comedy and the auditors' attitudes toward its major characters. No doubt the spectators also noted the lavish costumes worn by the Duke and his court, costumes which gave important information about the social class and gender of these and other characters (including the cross-dressed boys) at their entrance. A throne-like chair, placed center stage for the Duke, was all the scenery needed to establish the setting of the first scene.

Twelfth Night tells the story of two shipwrecked twins stranded in the fairy-tale land of Illyria. They eventually find their rightful, aristocratic place by

marrying into the two powerful households of the country. In order to secure her livelihood, Viola dons male attire and apprentices herself to Duke Orsino as his page. Unknown to Viola, Sebastian, her twin brother, survived the wreck and also is seeking his fortune in Illyria. He is initially helped by Antonio, whose apparent homoerotic desire shapes their relationship. The plot focuses on Viola, who is soon caught up in the romantic intrigues of the two households. Duke Orsino is trying to gain the hand of the Countess Olivia, who disdains his love. When Viola, in male disguise as Cesario, goes to woo her as the Duke's agent, Olivia falls in love with "him," not realizing Cesario/Viola's sex (Figure 4.12). Viola, meanwhile, is "desperate" for the Duke.



Figure 4.12

Interior of the reconstructed Globe Theatre, London, which opened in 1997. Shown is a scene from an all-male production of *Twelfth Night*, with Mark Rylance as Olivia and Michael Brown as Viola/Cesario.

Photo by John Tramper, © Shakespeare's Globe Picture Archive.

The character relationships in the secondary plot reflect the sexual “madness” of the major characters. Olivia’s uncle, Sir Toby Belch, gulls Sir Andrew Aguecheek into believing that Olivia loves him. Knowing that Olivia’s steward, Malvolio, also loves the Countess, Sir Toby and his friends trick Malvolio into believing that she wants to marry him. Malvolio’s attempts to confirm Olivia’s love land him in prison for his “madness.” After Viola (costumed the same as her twin brother, Sebastian) refuses to help Antonio, he also falls into a kind of “madness.” Next, Olivia assumes Sebastian is Cesario and promptly marries the amazed lad. In the end, the twins finally appear together on stage, the mistaken identities are resolved, and Viola reveals her male disguise. The Countess reaffirms her marriage to

Sebastian, and the Duke, affectionate throughout with Cesario/Viola, pledges to wed her.

Staging homoeroticism

The double marriage at the end of *Twelfth Night* is a conventional comic ending that satisfies patriarchal values, but it does not resolve the homoerotic relationships hinted at and, arguably, even established during the play. The ending promises that both family households, once threatened by the narcissistic self-love of their heads and by eventual, childless dissolution, can flourish in the future. Threats to the aristocratic position of both families, such as Malvolio’s desire for the Countess, have been averted or punished. In the case of Orsino’s love for Viola, however, the Duke remains

attached to the image of Viola as a boy. He even calls her “Cesario” in his final speech, perhaps reflecting his ongoing attraction to Viola’s boyish role.

The marriage of the woman to the boy in Olivia’s – now Sebastian’s – household may be based on a firmer heteroerotic desire, but ambiguities remain here as well. Olivia’s former love for Cesario, a girl in boy’s clothing, continues to shadow her attraction to her new husband, costumed identically to his sister. And Sebastian’s past homoerotic relation with Antonio may influence his marriage to Olivia. Sebastian’s greeting to Antonio when they are reunited is: “How have the hours racked and tortured me / Since I have lost thee” (5.1.211–212 – all citations are from Greenblatt 1997). This might suggest that Antonio would be a welcome guest in Sebastian’s new household. In short, the ending guarantees the reproduction of patriarchy, but it does not rule out the continuation of homoerotic desires and alliances. At the same time, however, the finale puts potentially disruptive homoeroticism under the control of patriarchy. Olivia’s covert desire for other women, evidenced in her attraction to Viola/Cesario, is now channeled into a marriage with Viola’s twin. And Sebastian’s homoerotic desires must now take second place to his marital responsibilities with Olivia.

Considered from a theatrical, rather than a simply dramatic point of view, the action of *Twelfth Night* allowed the audience even more opportunities to identify with homoerotic attractions. While dramatically the ending presents two opposite-sex couples united in wedlock, theatrically an adult male actor (who played Orsino) held the hand of a cross-dressed boy actor (Viola), while near them on stage two boys (Olivia and Sebastian) also posed as a heterosexual couple. Shakespeare frequently reminded his audience that boy actors were playing all the female roles by having Viola disguise herself as Cesario. This triple-level gender confusion entailed a boy actor playing a girl playing a boy. Shakespeare gave Viola several lines of dialog that underscored these multiple layers of sexual identity: “I am not that I play” (1.5.164) and “Disguise, I see thou art a wickedness” (2.2.25), for example. The script also

required the boy actor playing Viola/Cesario to change his voice in order to separate his two roles. Thus, every time the actor shifted from high-voiced Viola to boy-voiced Cesario (probably the boy-actor’s natural intonation), auditors were reminded of the boy actor underneath Viola and behind all the other female roles.

The intimate scenes between Viola/Cesario and Olivia – they are alone together on stage three times – consequently carried multiple homoerotic charges that may have created anxiety and pleasure in Shakespeare’s audience. (For a modern all-male production, see the photograph in Figure 4.12.) Dramatically, Olivia’s love for Cesario hinted at same-sex desire among two women, because of audience knowledge of Viola’s disguise. Theatrically, one boy actor (Olivia) flirted with another boy actor, while the second boy (Viola/Cesario) demurred to profess his love for a man (Orsino). How could the need for patriarchy to reproduce itself find a way through the maze of homoerotic possibilities presented in the drama and theatre of such scenes? Shakespeare set up the situation and then relied on the comedy of “time” – “O Time, thou must untangle this, not I” (2.2.39) – to untie the knot, resolving in the end only the audience anxieties about the fate of these patriarchal families.

Some of this is speculative. What Elizabethan audiences made of these homoerotic possibilities can never be known with certainty, of course. Some may have understood but ignored the homoerotic enticements of the performance while a few of both sexes may have come to the theatre chiefly to be aroused by them. Given their familiarity with both homo- and heteroerotic desire, most early modern auditors probably feared for and enjoyed the performance of both sexualities. Clearly, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men put both on stage in their Globe production of *Twelfth Night* in the early 1600s.

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Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com.

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Theatres for knowledge through feeling, 1700–1900

By Bruce McConachie

As noted in the Introduction to Part II, European print culture began to change around 1700 with the regular publication and broad dissemination of periodicals – newspapers, magazines, journals, and other time-sensitive publications. Unlike many books in the eighteenth century, which were printed “for the ages,” periodicals were the websites and listservs of their day, intended to bring current news to a broad readership with common interests. Where early book culture generally helped to legitimate absolutism, periodical culture after 1700 enabled the new bourgeoisie to solidify its values and to enlarge the arena of public discourse. Periodical culture, in turn, helped to underwrite a sentimental theatre that embraced the morality and feelings of the emerging middle class.

Although “sentimentality” has negative connotations today, many eighteenth-century playwrights, actors, and spectators in Europe valued sentimental emotions for the refinement, knowledge, and moral uplift they might provide. For them, a sentimental play (or poem or novel) could evoke feelings of sympathy, joy, and sorrow for worthy others that allowed genteel spectators (and readers) to test the depths of their own emotional responses and to broaden the reach of their moral

concerns. Those who embraced sentimental culture believed that human nature was innately good, and that personal and social bonds would thrive if individuals were true to their “natural” virtues. As we shall see, a significant school of philosophy endorsed this moral and aesthetic point of view in the eighteenth century. Sentimental theatre chose middle-class figures rather than aristocrats as its heroes, endorsed benevolent paternalism instead of royal absolutism for its ethics, and reconfigured the traditional neoclassical forms of tragedy and comedy to accommodate its perspective. Bourgeois sentimentalism helped to drive baroque culture out of favor and challenged aristocratic neoclassicism in the theatre throughout Europe during the 1700s.

The French Revolution (1789–1799) marked the end of genteel sentimental culture, both in the theatre and elsewhere. The Revolution re-channeled much of the emotional fervor and moral earnestness of sentimentalism into melodrama, a broad-ranging genre that eventually gained popularity with all classes and came to dominate nineteenth-century theatre. As we will discover, the chief difference between nineteenth-century melodramas and eighteenth-century sentimental plays was their understanding of evil. Where sentimental

theatre optimistically assumed that evil characters might reform, most melodramas – drawing on popular perceptions deriving from the French Revolution – divided humanity into good and evil types. Melodrama fostered the belief that evil people would always conspire against the innocent. Like the sentimental theatre before it, melodramatic theatre was fundamentally bourgeois in orientation, although it sometimes embraced other values.

This chapter, then, examines major changes in European middle-class theatre oriented toward gaining knowledge through feeling from 1700 to 1900. To some extent, the shift from sentimental to melodramatic theatre in Europe mirrored actual changes in bourgeois values and in the bourgeoisie itself. In the early 1700s, the emerging bourgeoisie, a small group of merchants and investors living in large cities, adopted sentimentalism to distinguish itself from the aristocrats who dominated urban life. After 1800, a much larger and more fragmented bourgeoisie was trying to salvage what it could from the French Revolution and protect itself from radical and reactionary conspiracies above and below. Although sentimental theatre had become more sophisticated and diverse, many in the bourgeoisie embraced melodrama as more suited to their psychosocial and ethical needs. By the early twentieth century, when the bourgeoisie had become masters of the Industrial Revolution and the major governing class in Western Europe and the United States, playwrights of melodrama, like the previous artists of sentimental theatre, had broadened the appeal of their genre to gain more respectability and success. By then, however, a few middle-class artists and spectators were rejecting melodrama for the aesthetics of modernism, as we will see in Part III.

Included in this chapter are case studies on David Garrick, the premiere English star of the mid-eighteenth century renowned for his portrayal of sentimental roles, and a case study examining changes in nineteenth-century melodrama, which gradually altered to embrace the materialism of its mid-century bourgeois spectators.

Sentimental drama in England

Sentimental theatre first flourished in London. After 1688, merchants, traders, and investors gained more power in England, where problems of religion and royal succession undercut attempts to establish absolutism on the French model. The top tier of the English bourgeoisie, having grown rich on colonial domination, expanding domestic markets, and the international slave trade, sought a government that would protect and expand its interests. They and other middle-class men and women also sought periodicals that would provide important news, keep them up-to-date on current trends in fashion and the arts, and justify their emerging cultural values.

They found such reading material initially in two periodicals: *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, edited by Joseph Addison (1672–1719) and Richard Steele (1672–1729). The editors of both weekly journals, which began publication in 1709 and 1711, respectively, strove to create the sense of a benevolent community among their readers. Addison and Steele published pieces advocating mutual trust and self-disclosure within circles of families and friends, and they invited letters-to-the-editor to foster such a circle of affection within their readership. In contrast to aristocratic culture, which emphasized a hierarchical order and the public projection of social status, Addison and Steele underlined the importance of social bonds and fellow-feeling in public communications, especially in print. As the models for hundreds of subsequent periodicals, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator* broadcast the principles of sentimental culture in the early eighteenth century. The form as well as the content of the new periodicals thus underwrote the legitimacy and increased the reach of bourgeois sentimentality.

English sentimental culture drew on the precepts of “moral sense” philosophy. Liberal thinkers of the age distinguished their ideas from those of previous philosophers, who had advocated absolutism. Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), for example, had argued that a strong monarchical government was necessary to control the problems created by rapacious individual interests.

In contrast, John Locke (1632–1704) urged that free individuals in a state of nature might form civil governments that could channel competing interests toward socially beneficial results. Locke, immersed in print culture, also believed that people were like blank pieces of paper when they were born, awaiting the “imprint” of their parents and society. Later “moral sense” philosophers built upon Locke’s premises to argue that humanity had an inherent sense of right and wrong and would generally choose the right for its natural beauty and worth. A bad environment, however, could “impress” other values on children, they believed. According to moral sense philosopher, Adam Smith (1723–1790), all people had within them an “ideal spectator of our sentiments and conduct” (Kramnick 1995:287), who, awakened by social pressure, would ensure that each person does his or her moral duty. In addition to friendly conversation and the sight of strangers in distress, watching the right play could awaken that “ideal spectator” in the mind and steer the playgoer toward affection and beneficence. For the moral sense philosophers, morality was inherent and natural; doing the right thing flowed from emotional sensitivity, not abstract reason.

In the English theatre, early advocates of sentiment found temporary allies among the Puritans. Puritan attacks on the wickedness of the London stage increased in the 1690s, culminating in Jeremy Collier’s *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* in 1698. Beginning with the neoclassical precept that “the business of plays is to recommend virtue and discountenance vice,” Collier castigated several comedies from the aristocratic Restoration era for “their smuttiness of expression; their swearing, profaneness, and lewd application of Scripture; their abuse of the clergy; and their making their top characters libertines and giving them success in their debauchery” (Collier 1974:351–352). Collier’s attack aroused indignation in some, struck home for others (a few playwrights even apologized), and led to controversies that continued into the next century. Even before Collier’s *Short View*, however, some playwrights were already softening

Restoration cynicism and arranging sentimental endings for their plays. In *Love’s Last Shift* (1696), for instance, actor-playwright Colly Cibber (1671–1757) celebrated several characters for their inherent goodness and featured a rakish hero, Loveless, who gladly repents of his compulsive woman-chasing in the last act. While Cibber was writing popular variations on this formula in the first decade of the eighteenth century, playwright George Farquhar (1678–1707) took several of his dramatic characters and conflicts out of London into the more sentimental air of the English countryside.

In *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, Richard Steele campaigned to replace the wittiness and eroticism of Restoration comedy with sentiment. He demonstrated what he had in mind with his play, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722). Its plot centers on young Jack Bevil, who has hidden a mysterious female stranger in rooms that he is paying for, even though he has promised his father that he will wed a girl of his father’s choosing. Although Jack loves the beautiful stranger, Indiana, whom he treats with courteous respect, he obligingly prepares to marry his father’s choice. Then, a rich businessman who suspects Jack of duplicity, decides to investigate the relationship between Jack and his mysterious beauty. This sets up a recognition scene in which Indiana is discovered to be the long-lost daughter of the rich businessman. Jack can now marry Indiana, who is suddenly rich, and still obey his father’s command. (Steele’s plot conveniently provides a secondary hero for the other girl.) Eleven years before in *The Spectator*, Steele had announced his belief that “A man that is temperate, generous, valiant, chaste, faithful, and honest, may, at the same time, have wit, humor, mirth, good breeding, and gallantry” (*The Spectator*, 28 April 1711, in Dukore 1974:392). He created Jack Bevil partly to prove his point. *The Conscious Lovers* drew sympathetic tears as well as laughter from English audiences for the rest of the eighteenth century.

Notions of sentiment altered tragedy as well as comedy during the 1700s. Early in the century, Nicholas Rowe (1674–1718) wrote several tragedies featuring pathetic heroines that partly broke the mold of neoclassical tragic form. With *The London Merchant* (1731), however,

playwright George Lillo (1693–1739) crafted a tragedy that dispensed completely with the idealized aristocratic heroes and constraining unities of neoclassicism. Its apprentice-hero, George Barnwell, is enticed by an evil woman, Millwood, who tempts him into stealing from his bourgeois master. Barnwell eventually murders his rich uncle for his money. Throughout the play, Lillo contrasts the optimistic and benevolent sentiments of the merchant, Thorowgood, with Millwood's deep-rooted resentments (based, interestingly, on her misuse by men). Despite Thorowgood's attempts to save him, a repentant Barnwell dies on the gallows – but not before Lillo props him up as an example of the destructiveness of a wanton sexuality that threatens the social stability that the merchant has built. *The London Merchant* achieved immense popularity and inspired several imitations. Real-life London merchants, who expected the morality of the play to produce wholesome and profitable results, sent their own apprentices to see the show during the Christmas season for the next 100 years.

Watching *The Conscious Lovers*, *The London Merchant*, and other sentimental plays, spectators generally expected to immerse themselves in the feelings of sentimental heroes and those with whom they sympathized. The objects of sympathetic concern in sentimental plays ranged from slaves, to the poor, to distraught heroines, all the way to general pity for suffering humanity. According to sentimental aesthetics, exposure to such feelings on stage would spark a sentimental response in the genteel viewer, who might then use this response to improve his or her own sensitivity and morality. Like *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, sentimental plays sought to evoke a benevolent community in the audience. Neoclassicism, in contrast, generally kept spectators at a greater emotional distance and involved them more typically in feelings of awe, disdain, and suspense rather than sympathy, pity, and generous good humor.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the battle between sentimentalism and neoclassicism on the London stage had changed tragedy and comedy. The neoclassical tragedies that had dominated the repertory

were fading in popularity for new tragic performances that featured more pathos and tears. The success of several minor genres – ballad opera, pantomime, burlesque, and comic opera – influenced the development of comedy. Mid-century comedies featured sententious moralizing and few laughs. By the 1790s, however, most new comedies had made their peace with a less didactic mode of sentimentalism. Nonetheless, even comic playwrights who professed a dislike for sentimentalism still bowed to most of its precepts. Oliver Goldsmith (1730?–1774), for example, provides much robust humor in *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773), but arranges a sentimental ending for his lovers. Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751–1816), parliamentarian, theatre manager, and playwright, tweaks the excesses of sentiment and derides those who pose behind a sentimental mask in *The School for Scandal* (1777). But he comes down firmly on the side of paternalistic benevolence and morality in wedlock. By 1780, the bourgeois morality behind sentimentalism had made its way into the dominant culture of England.

Sentiment on the continent

Until the 1789 Revolution, neoclassicism and its absolutist values were more firmly entrenched in France than England. The major French playwright of the eighteenth century, Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778), added significant complexities in plot and characterization to his tragedies, for example, but did not break with neoclassical precepts. Pierre Carlet de Chamblain de Marivaux (1688–1763) injected subtle expressions of feeling into his love comedies, but his heightened prose style kept his plays much less sentimental than Steele's. Nonetheless, French sentimental comedy, called *comédie larmoyante*, enjoyed a brief run of popularity in the 1730s and 1740s, with *The False Antipathy* (1733) and other plays by Pierre Claude Nivelles de La Chaussée (1692–1754). In the 1750s, Denis Diderot (1713–1784) urged the adoption of “middle” genres between comedy and tragedy that would encompass sentimental notions of morality and domesticity. As editor and chief writer of the *Encyclopédie*, the first



Figure 5.1

At left, strolling players on their temporary stage before an audience in a market square in Munich in 1780.

From a painting by Joseph Stephan. © Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich. Photo courtesy the Deutsches Theatermuseum.

modern compendium of knowledge and a triumph of Enlightenment culture, Diderot argued for a type of comedy emphasizing tears and virtues, domestic tragedy centered on bourgeois family problems (*drame*), and more realistic dialog in all plays. Diderot won many readers throughout literate Europe. A few *dramas* based on Diderot's ideas saw production in some French theatres, but the actors at the Comédie Française saw little in the new genre that would advance their careers, and interest in it faded in France. Although the country had a large bourgeoisie by the middle of the eighteenth century, state monopolistic practices retarded the growth of a sentimental, bourgeois theatre in France until after the Revolution.

In the German theatre, sentimentalism had taken a firmer hold by 1780, despite an early crusade for neoclassicism. Public theatre was in its infancy in

Germany at the beginning of the eighteenth century, apart from a few court theatres and occasional visits from *commedia dell'arte* troupes. Still recovering from the devastations of the religious wars, German society could afford little more than performances by fairground troupes, which were nonetheless enjoyed by peasants, workers, burgers, and aristocrats (Figure 5.1). Although these troupes acted a variety of genres, the star of most of them was the clown, who generally performed a character called Hanswurst. This fun-loving, hard-drinking, and often devilish figure combined attributes from several previous clown-figures seen in Germany, including medieval fools, Falstaffian figures (introduced by English actors who played in Germany during the English Civil War), and Harlequins (known to German audiences from *commedia* tours). Within this context, two reformers, Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700–1766)

and Caroline Neuber (1697–1760), used their combined companies to introduce several neoclassical innovations into the German theatre after 1727. Gottsched translated and adapted French plays into German, and Neuber staged them and polished their troupe's performance style. Although the Gottsched-Neuber company made some allies among the German aristocracy, they never found a large audience for their neoclassical plays in Leipzig and Hamburg, their primary sites for performance. Both had hoped to banish Hanswurst and the kind of theatre he represented from the stage, but Hanswurst plays at fairground theatres remained popular when their troupe broke in two in 1739.

The turn to sentimentalism in Germany came with the popularity and influence of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1727–1781). Lessing was one of the first writers in Germany to make his living from his pen and he gained success as much from his criticism as his plays. Influenced by Diderot, he advocated domestic tragedy in his writings in the 1750s and used these ideas for his middle-class play, *Miss Sara Simpson* (1755). By 1759, Lessing was attacking Gottsched and French neoclassicism and advocating Shakespeare as a better model for German theatre. The literary advisor of the Hamburg National Theatre for a short time, Lessing used his *Hamburg Dramaturgy* (1767–1769) to offer a non-neoclassical interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics* and to urge the writing and production of more sentimental plays. He put this criticism into practice with *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767), a romantic comedy that unites lovers from two sides of a recent war that divided Germany. Like his model Diderot, Lessing was critical of aristocratic privilege and morality and attacked both in his next influential drama, *Emilia Galotti* (1772). Although Lessing did not intend *Nathan the Wise* (1779) for the stage, his dramatic demonstration of the wisdom of tolerance and understanding among representatives of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity became one of his most widely-produced plays in the German theatre. Together with other playwrights and companies after 1750, Lessing had helped to ensure that German drama would gravitate more toward sentimentalism than neoclassicism for the rest of the century.

Acting in the eighteenth century

Although actors performed both sentimental and neoclassical plays during the century – and necessarily adapted their playing styles to suit each type of production – a gradual change from grand rhetoric toward everyday speech and from heroic to more homely emotions occurred between 1700 and 1790. Acting remained idealized and presentational by today's standards, with performers striking poses, playing directly to the spectators, and inviting applause in the middle of scenes. Nonetheless, the new emphasis on affecting audience emotions gradually pushed playing style toward more intimacy and vulnerability.

Print played an important role in turning acting styles toward sentimental culture. Actors continued to rely on their voices to express the dialogue, of course, but after about 1660 they paid as much or more attention to the poses and gestures that made them visually expressive and interesting to spectators. Since the arrival of writing, the voice had gradually declined as the chief repository of meaning in Western Europe. Where earlier music and voice had been the path to spiritual transcendence, critics now feared that mere sound could too easily seduce the other senses. Further, many commentators were laying more emphasis on the importance of gestures in human communication. One treatise written in 1644, for example, suggested that human gestures were a kind of universal alphabet of nature; preachers, actors, and orators must know this alphabet to communicate effectively. Increasingly in society, people were “reading” the appearances of others in addition to listening to their voices to understand human behavior and emotion. To be legible, a character on the stage (like a print “character” on the page) had to look right.

By the eighteenth century, actors were striving to please a print-soaked public eager to read the gestures and poses of their performances. Many treatises and manuals instructed actors in the proper embodiment of their characters’ “passions.” Perhaps the most systematic of these in England was *The Art of Speaking* (1761), by James Burgh and John Walker. Despite its title, this

manual offered a series of illustrated “lessons” demonstrating which pose should accompany each passion, so that the audience could understand the desired “affect.” By reading *The Art of Speaking*, actors learned how to register the progression of poses involved in “Awe – Horror – Fear” with their spectators, for example (Figure 5.2). In addition, the theatre-going public praised actors who could hold these poses believably for an extended moment of stage time. Not only was it important for actors to model the right attitude, they also had to manage a believable transition from one to the next. As Lessing explained in his *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, the actor must prepare for each of his poses “gradually by previous movements, and then must resolve them again into the general tone of

the conventional” (Roach 1985:73). The result in performance was a kind of garlanded effect that alternated between static poses and graceful movement as the actor used a character’s lines and emotions to transition from one tableau to the next. It was crucial that each pose make an “impression” on the minds of the spectators before the actor moved on – a printing metaphor widely used in the eighteenth century to describe theatrical communication.

Several significant performers after 1740 embodied the audience’s increasing interest in sentiment. On the London stage, for example, Charles Macklin (1699–1797) altered the traditional clownish interpretation of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* to emphasize the character’s domestic affections and fierce ambition. In the 1770s,



Figure 5.2

The Passions classified: “Terror.” From J.J. Engel, *Ideen zu Euer Mimik* (1812).

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Friedrich Ludwig Schröder (1744–1816) performed the major plays of Lessing and Shakespeare with his company in Hamburg, Germany, with greater attention to his characters' emotions than had been common in the past. At the Comédie Française in the 1750s, Mademoiselle Clairon (Claire-Josèphe-Hippolyte Lérés de la Tude, 1723–1803) challenged the traditional rhetorical force of French heroic acting by adopting more conversational tones for her tragic roles. Henri-Louis Lekain (1729–1778) followed in her footsteps in the 1760s and garnered applause for his more restrained style in neoclassical tragedy. Because leading actors usually chose their own costumes during this time, Macklin, Schröder, Mlle Clairon, and Lekain also won acclaim for their costuming innovations, which generally shifted stage dress from lavish toward domestic.

The eighteenth-century bourgeoisie, many of them new to the pressures of social performance, welcomed these and other actors as models for enacting their own emotions in public life. This social anxiety prompted a wide range of investigations into all manner of public performances, the first general outpouring of interest in the topic since classical times. The elocutionary movement of the mid-1800s in Britain, for example, excited numerous lectures and publications that engaged a range of professions from lawyers and merchants to preachers and politicians. In general, the advice given to these budding public speakers was the same as that given to actors: coordinate your words with your gestures, express emotions through the attitude of your body as well as your voice, and pause to “impress” your listeners. Attentive readers and listeners also learned to avoid accents and affects that would mark them as Scottish or Irish and how the voice and body could be pressed into the service of marking one as a member of a higher social class.

Theorizing acting

Given this broad interest in public speaking, it is not surprising that some writers pushed beyond general social advice to analyze how actors accomplished their artistic work. Among the most significant of these were

reflections by Aaron Hill (1685–1750), an English playwright and critic who published them in his theatrical journal, and *The Paradox of the Actor*, written by Diderot in 1773 (and published posthumously in 1830). Both dealt creatively with problems that still concern actors today.

Hill examined the process used by actors for producing emotion and based his conclusions on the mechanistic assumptions about the body that Cartesian philosophy had made popular among many literate Europeans. (French philosopher René Descartes [1596–1650] argued that reason is the only means of producing reliable knowledge. A foundational point of this rationalism was his famous observation, “I think, therefore I am” [*cogito ergo sum*] – the proof of my existence is that I think. For Descartes, the body was a machine, following the laws of physics.) Denouncing those who advocated mere rhetorical technique, Hill depicted a three-step process that involved the will operating the body almost as though it were a computer game. First, the actor's imagination was to generate an image of the body expressing a specific emotion. Or, as Hill put it in a poem in *The Prompter* (where he deployed a print metaphor to capture his Cartesian idea): “Previous to art's first act – (till then, *all vain*) / Print the *ideal pathos*, on the *brain* . . .” (Roach 1985:81). Next, the actor was to allow the “impressions” of the emotion in his mind to play out in his face. Third, facial expression would impel what Hill took to be the “animal spirits” of the mind and nerves to affect and shape the muscles, so that the actor would fully embody the emotion he had first imagined and thus could speak and act accordingly. In the end, wrote Hill, “the *mov'd* actor *Moves* – and passion shakes” (1985:81). Hill's ideas are similar to modern theories that assume that the actor's mind can trick the body into automatically producing the necessary emotions for a role.

Diderot also built his ideas upon mechanistic Cartesian assumptions, but broke with Hill (and most other acting theorists of his time) to argue that emotion actually got in the way of good acting technique. Like Hill, Diderot believed that the actor must use

observation, imagination, and rehearsing to create an inner model of the character, but this preparation provided the basis for enacting an illusion of that character, not embodying the figure's actual emotions in performance. From Diderot's point of view, actors who relied on spontaneity and emotion rather than study and technique reduced the character to themselves, undercut the illusion of the character's emotional life for the audience, and compromised the range of characters they could create. In *The Paradox of the Actor*, Diderot praised performers who could marry a flexible vocal and physical technique to a perfect conception of the role and its emotional dynamics, thus enabling them to present their character in exactly the same way at every performance. Aware that enacting even the illusions of various emotions would tend to involve the actors in experiencing them directly, Diderot drew on Enlightenment science to argue that actors could effectively separate their minds from their bodies and control themselves on stage, much as a puppeteer controls a puppet. As we will see, Diderot's cool-headed, self-manipulative actor might be compared to the ideal actor of Meyerhold and Brecht in the twentieth century.

Diderot held up Mlle Clairon and David Garrick as exemplars of his theory. He had watched Garrick perform a parlor entertainment in which the great actor shifted his facial expressions instantly to embody a wide range of characters, much to the amazement and delight of his Parisian hosts. Diderot published his *Observations on Garrick* in 1770, and it is clear that the English star significantly influenced his thoughts on acting. Garrick's conscious, sophisticated creation of images of himself in paintings and in inexpensive prints that could be widely distributed is the focus of our first case study in this chapter.

Performers and the public

Just as print culture reshaped acting and its reception in the eighteenth century, it also altered the public image of the profession. Few Europeans even thought of acting as a profession at all until print helped to elevate

it in public esteem. When the public could read about actors in weekly newspapers and monthly journals and began to understand the difficulties of actor training, the past mystery and opprobrium surrounding their work began to dissipate. The press began its long love affair with actors in the eighteenth century. In addition to theatre reviews and manuals, actors' pictures appeared in printed plays, in theatre almanacs and books of anecdotes, and in collections of engravings and illustrations, where performers often posed in costumes in evocative moments of their most characteristic roles. Soon after the press began to use actors, actors found ways of using the press – to puff their latest role, to create printed programs that boosted their reputations, and to write articles and memoirs that shaped their recollections of “great” performances. Without the actor-press mutual admiration society, theatrical “stars” could not have been “born.”

One of the first things that actors did with their newfound authority was to remove spectators from the stage. Throughout Europe, auditors had been sitting on public stages and occasionally interrupting the performers since late medieval times. This practice was a legacy of the easy flow between spectators and actors in medieval festivals and it continued off and on into the mid-1700s. Male aristocrats eager to display their wits or wigs, for example, often chose to sit among the performers and drew occasional focus from their efforts. With help from the actors, Voltaire pushed for architectural reforms at the Comédie Française that removed Parisian spectators from that stage in 1759. Garrick effected this reform at the Drury Lane Theatre in London in 1762. The relative ease with which performers were able to claim the stage as their own space reflected their increasing social status in Europe.

As texts and images circulated more and more widely, the stars increased the circumference of their circuits. In the 1750s, Garrick was a star in London. In the 1840s, the U.S. actor Edwin Forrest (1806–1872) could claim stardom throughout the U.S.A. and England. By 1900, Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) had performed around the world and her image was recognizable on

every continent. Print (along with better transportation and other factors) had made this possible.

Changes and challenges in sentimentalism

Although the French Revolution would shatter genteel sentimentalism irreversibly in Europe, there were several cracks in the sentimental vase before 1789. At one extreme of eighteenth-century sentimentalism was the cult of sincerity that drew its ideas from Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778). In his writings, Rousseau criticized Enlightenment rationalism and celebrated natural, sincere, authentic humanity, unencumbered by social masks. These ideas eventually led Rousseau to damn the theatre because acting necessarily trades in what he took to be duplicitous role-playing. Despite Rousseau's anti-theatrical prejudices, his ideas carried wide influence in the theatre and culture of his time, both before and after the Revolution, and shaped the work of several playwrights.

Rousseau's extreme version of sentimentalism fired the imagination of a young generation of German playwrights, loosely grouped together as the Storm and Stress movement. Friedrich Maximilian Klingler's (1752–1831) *Sturm und Drang* (1776), which posed Rousseau's natural, sentimental humanity against the restrictions of rationality, gave the movement its name (Figure 5.3). Not all in this rebellious generation of playwrights embraced Rousseau, but most rejected Lessing's synthesis of sentimental and Enlightenment values and challenged conventional social norms. Recognizing the natural sexual desires of young soldiers, for example, Jacob M.R. Lenz's (1751–1792) *The Soldiers* (1776) advocated state-sponsored prostitution. Although many Storm and Stress plays, including *The Soldiers*, never made it past German censorship and into performance, several circulated in print. Three plays from this movement, however, gained some productions and are still in the standard German repertory: *Goetz von Berlichingen* (1773), by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832); and *The Robbers* (1782) and *Fiesko* (1782), by Friedrich Schiller (1759–1865).

Another German playwright, Friedrich von Kotzebue (1761–1819), avoided the dramatic and social excesses of the Storm and Stress movement, but popularized its rejection of rationalism and its general embrace of Rousseau. Kotzebue's first hit, *Misanthropy and Repentance* (1787) – a pot-boiler stuffed with Rousseauian sentiments, pathetic situations, comic relief, romantic love, and moral didacticism – set the formula for his later successes. Several of Kotzebue's more than 200 plays retained popularity for the next 70 years in translations and adaptations in Russia and the United States as well as in Western Europe. Among his most successful plays were *The Stranger*, *Pizarro in Peru*, and *Lovers' Vows* (to use their English titles). Kotzebue explored the democratic potential of Rousseau's philosophy in theatrical terms. Where most previous sentimental plays had invited middle-class audiences to test their sentimental feelings and ethics within a genteel and rational framework, Kotzebue's dramas appealed to a wider audience by encouraging spectators to believe that all people, with or without enlightened reason, were already natural, ethical, and authentic human beings. By downplaying rationality and democratizing sentiment, Kotzebue's plays anticipated a significant aspect of nineteenth-century melodrama.

Gothic thrillers anticipated another. Sentimentalism had never arrived at an adequate explanation for evil. If human nature were essentially good, as the moral philosophers, Rousseau, and most other Enlightenment thinkers believed, sentimentalism could not explain the perseverance of evil in the world. Gothicism, popular first in novels and then on stage after the mid-1790s, explored this shortcoming of sentimentalism in English and American theatres. At the center of the gothic thriller was the hero-villain, usually a remorseful but still passionate figure who rules female captives and fights ghosts from his past in a crumbling castle. Although these hero-villains struggle to reform in the proper sentimental fashion, most go to their deaths without renouncing their desire for lust and revenge. In such plays as *The Castle Spectre* (1797) and *Blue Beard* (1798), gothicism offered no complete answer for the evil of such



Figure 5.3

A scene from Friedrich Maximilian Klingens's *The Twins*, a Storm and Stress play, in a contemporary engraving by Albrecht.

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protagonists, but it did fix images of horror that fascinated audiences – all the more so because the spectators' sentimentalism could not explain the evil they witnessed. Gothic thrillers continued to be popular on English-language stages well into the 1820s.

The French Revolution and melodrama

While problems in sentimental culture laid the groundwork for melodrama, the shock of the French Revolution provided a more general cause for its

emergence and its immense popularity during the nineteenth century. In 1789, many Europeans looked to France as the most prosperous and civilized country in the world. The bourgeoisie who read periodicals and shared the values of the Enlightenment welcomed most of the first stages of the Revolution, such as the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the abolition of state monopolies, and the attempt to separate the French Catholic Church from the power of Rome. With the beheading of the king and the Reign of Terror (1793–1794), in which Enlightenment principles were

deployed to justify revolutionary slaughter, however, many literate Europeans saw the utopia they had hoped for in France slide into chaos and horror. The political turmoil, civil strife, and international wars of the late 1790s brought more confusion, and many Europeans were relieved when Napoleon emerged as a strong leader in 1799. Although Bonaparte's rule ensured stability in France, his imperial ambitions soon brought parts of the Revolution to the rest of Europe and engulfed the entire Western world in intermittent warfare until 1815.

In the pre-revolutionary theatre of the 1780s, the aristocrats and bourgeoisie of France, Great Britain, and Germany had been applauding neoclassical and sentimental comedies and tragedies, together with several minor genres. Twenty years later, by 1810, most European theatre-goers in these countries were thronging to see nationalistic spectacles, gothic thrillers, and melodramas. In theatres where heroic virtues or genteel pathos had inspired neoclassical or sentimental responses, the emotions of rage, fear, and panic now stirred spectators. The temperate values of pre-revolutionary times seemed quaint and uninteresting. Some pre-1789 plays continued to be performed, of course, but few dramatists after 1800 wrote popular plays within the old conventions. In short, the revolutionary era had transformed the genres of European theatre. How had this happened?

We need to focus primarily on the shattered expectations of theatre-goers in Paris during the Revolution to understand this transformation. According to Matthew S. Buckley's *Tragedy Walks the Streets: The French Revolution in the Making of Modern Drama*, several events occurred between 1791 and 1794 that alienated Parisian playgoers from the kinds of enjoyments that they had come to expect from the old genres. Consequently, the Revolution, says Buckley, "became a nightmarish, originary drama of modernism, a material, historical experience of [traditional] drama's failure that could be neither reversed nor banished from cultural awareness" (Buckley 2006:6). By the start of 1791, many in Paris (including several revolutionaries) expected that the antipathy between the people and the French crown

would soon play out like a sentimental comedy, with the king and the revolutionaries agreeing to a constitutional monarchy. Instead of a reconciliation involving tears of gratitude from the people and smiling beneficence from his majesty, however, King Louis XVI attempted to flee the country with his family in June of 1791. This revealed to many Parisians that the hope of a sentimental ending had been a seductive fiction all along, and it set the stage for the king's execution, which followed in 1793. During the Reign of Terror in 1793–1794, when Robespierre and his Committee of Public Safety were attempting to purge the Revolution of its enemies, many Parisians looked upon this lawyer-turned-politician as an "uncorruptable" hero in a neoclassical tragedy and they cheered his attempt to form a republic of virtue. But again their hopes were dashed. Instead of sacrificing himself to establish a triumphant reign of goodness in the neoclassical mode, Robespierre's Terror petered out and his botched attempt at suicide revealed him to be more of a fool than a tragic hero.

In Buckley's interpretation, then, crucial events in the Revolution radically undercut the believability of two of the major narratives that had sustained French culture in the decades leading up to 1789. Throughout his discussion, Buckley emphasizes that the traditional genres of sentimental comedy and neoclassical tragedy were not simply abstract devices of literary discourse. For literate Frenchmen, they were narratives about the shape of events that rested on reliable historical knowledge and evoked deep-seated expectations for the future. When the events of the Revolution spun away from the reassuring contours of these narratives, many citizens could no longer give form to their experiences. Similar to the events of 9/11 for many U.S. citizens, the events of 1791–1794 unhinged their worldview. With their old dramatic genres rendered unreliable and irrelevant, Parisians sought new ones.

Many found a hopeful replacement in the new narrative of melodrama, which stirred up the memorable emotions Parisians had experienced during the Terror but provided a safe and moral resolution. As the old genres declined in popularity in Paris after 1794,

playwrights began to experiment with new forms. Melodrama as a distinct genre emerged in 1800 with the production of *Coelina, Or the Child of Mystery*, by Guilbert de Pixérécourt (1773–1844). Soon, several other playwrights had joined Pixérécourt in writing melodramas, and the new genre was all the rage in the boulevard theatres of Paris for the rest of the decade. For evidence of the connection between the experience of the Revolution and the new genre, Buckley cites an introduction to the published plays of Pixérécourt written by his friend, Charles Nodier:

The entire people had come into the streets and the public space to perform the greatest drama in history. Everyone had been an actor in this bloody play, everyone had been a soldier, a revolutionary, or an outlaw. To its solemn spectators who had smelled gunpowder and blood, there was a need for emotions analogous to those from which they had been cut off by the re-establishment of order. . . . There was [also] a need to be reminded anew of the framework, always uniform in its result, of this great lesson that comprehends all philosophies, supports all religions: no matter how low, virtue is never without recompense, crime never without punishment. . . . This was the morality of the revolution.

(Nodier quoted in Buckley 2006:66).

Buckley recognizes that the narrative of early melodrama as described by Nodier provided a form of cultural wish fulfillment. Nodier's belief that the "morality of the revolution" proffered a kind of poetic justice experienced by many between 1789 and 1799 was far from the truth, however. Melodrama may have reassured a traumatized people, but it could never allay the gut-wrenching fears or encompass the moral panic undergone by many Parisians.

Had it not been for the network of periodical print culture in Europe, the traumas of the revolutionary decade in Paris might have remained relatively isolated.

Most of Europe, however, still looked to Paris as the center of the enlightened world. Journalists, poets, travelers, and others soon spread the word about the events of the Revolution, first to the French provinces and then to all of the capitals of Europe. Although print was slow by today's standards of instant reporting, the news stories in London, Berlin, and elsewhere (which included many exaggerations and rumors) swept up many literate Europeans in the emotions and politics of the Revolution. For them, too, reading about events in Paris in the early 1790s produced the feeling that the bottom had dropped out of their world. After such vicarious experiences, many European playgoers, like their counterparts in Paris, also sensed that the older forms of comedy and tragedy could no longer accommodate what they were reading about in their newspapers. In the wake of the Revolution and especially during the European wars that followed, melodrama claimed more and more adherents.

Early melodramas like *Coelina, Or the Child of Mystery* had much to offer their new audiences. The Revolution, coupled with the Rousseauian thinking of the previous decade, had induced a desire for utopia, the conviction that naturally good people might create a society in which evil could be banished from the world. *Coelina* and other plays in the new genre often depicted such a utopia, typically finding it in the traditional rhythms of peasant life. As we will see in more detail in the next chapter, the Revolution and the Napoleonic wars also incited ardent nationalism in much of Europe. Similarly, early melodrama enjoined Europeans to make absolute distinctions between hero and villain, French and Prussian, "us" and "them." Revolution and war also degraded the value of enlightened reason, which many believed had led to the Terror. Like the plays of Kotzebue, melodrama elevated nature and intuition over reason as better guides to morality and possible utopia. The first melodramas presented a world in which a traditional utopia of order and happiness was just around the corner if only the good people used their intuition to root out and banish the bad people from society. This was effectively the plot of *Coelina*, which

was soon translated and adapted by Thomas Holcroft (1745–1809) for the English stage as *A Tale of Mystery*. The original and the adaptation present utopian hopes of different kinds and embrace very different political points of view, an early indication of the flexibility that would help to keep melodrama on the boards (and, later, on film and television screens) for a long time.

Melodramatic spectacle

The demands of melodrama, plus improved technology, led to an expansion of theatrical spectacle. In 1800, painted flats, rigged for chariot-and-pole or wing-and-shutter changes, remained the dominant mode of scenic

representation in Europe. On the London stage, Philippe Jacques DeLoutherbourg (1740–1812) had expanded the possibilities of this mode of staging through the addition of ground rows masking the bottoms of flats and drops, better lighting, attention to the unity of design, and other reforms. On the continent, many scene designers had found new ways of deploying the chariot-and-pole system to enhance palatial grandeur or establish a dominant mood. But the basics of perspectival illusionism had changed little for 150 years. Part of the appeal of melodrama, however, was its interest in hiding nothing from the public (another similarity tying it to the culture of the French Revolution). Where



Figure 5.4

An 1890 print showing the mechanics for staging a horserace, which involved a moving panorama and treadmills powered by electric motors, at the Union Square Theatre in New York.

From George Moynet, *La Machinerie Théâtrale* (1893). © Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

neoclassical and sentimental theatre generally kept violence offstage, melodrama reveled in physical combat and spectacular calamity.

The melodramatic mandate to show all tested the limits of the illusionist stage and kept inventors and technicians busy throughout the nineteenth century. Several early melodramas set in exotic lands demanded the construction of practical land bridges and waterfalls. As the size of stages expanded to accommodate the increased demand for spectacle, playwrights called for more three-dimensional scenic units – fortresses that could collapse in an explosion and a mountain up which a horse and rider could ascend to near the top of the proscenium, for example. A craze for nautical melodramas in the 1840s led several theatre managers to invest in huge water tanks, expensive pumps, and partly rigged ships and cannons. As candlelight changed to gaslight for general theatrical illumination after 1825, the possibilities for spectacle skyrocketed. Now the auditorium could be partially darkened to increase the on stage effectiveness of steamboat explosions and erupting volcanoes. By the 1880s, sinking ships, steaming trains, and galloping horses – the latter done with treadmills and revolving scenery – stretched the ingenuity and endurance of technicians and stagehands (Figure 5.4). All of these devices and effects, of course, would later be taken over, improved upon, and eventually digitized by Hollywood in the next century.

Melodrama gains audiences

Although some audiences initially rejected melodrama as obvious and crude, the genre proved flexible and diverse enough to overcome most objections to it by the 1880s. The middle class provided the core audience for melodrama from its beginnings in Paris to the end of the century. Working-class spectators, attending the theatre in increasing numbers after the 1820s, enjoyed plays like *The Carpenter of Rouen* (1837) that pitted plebeian avengers against decadent aristocrats. Temperance and abolitionist melodramas like *The Bottle* (1847) and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) converted some

sober, even anti-theatrical Protestants to playgoing. After 1840, many star-struck playgoers enjoyed their favorites in melodramatic spectacles. Charlotte Cushman (1816–1876) gained stardom performing as a cross-dressed Romeo in Shakespeare's tragedy, but audiences knew her best for her electric performance as the preternaturally prophetic old woman in the melodrama, *Guy Mannering*, which she played for much of her long career. English star Henry Irving's (1838–1905) most famous role was Mathias in *The Bells*, a haunted figure who robbed and murdered to gain success early in his career (Figure 5.5). As we will see in the next chapter, melodrama mixed easily with romantic drama and also organized the dramatic plots of many nationalistic war plays.

After 1850, many melodramatists incorporated aspects of the well-made play into their plots. French playwright Eugène Scribe (1791–1861) pioneered the form, which was later perfected by Victorien Sardou (1831–1908). In brief, the plot of the well-made play depends on a secret, known to a few characters and the audience, on which the fate of many – perhaps an entire nation! – hangs. Through the clever manipulation of chance and circumstance, all of which must appear logical and plausible, the playwright leads the audience to an “obligatory scene” in which the secret is revealed and the characters must resolve their conflicts. Dion Boucicault (1822–1890) was one of the first dramatists to successfully merge melodrama and the well-made play, thereby lending melodrama more flexibility and credibility than before. In the last case study following this chapter, we examine Boucicault's alterations to melodramatic form and the changes to bourgeois values they reflect.

The combination of melodrama and the well-made play shaped many successful dramas at the end of the nineteenth century. Several English playwrights linked the two to dramatize social problems, among them Henry Arthur Jones (1851–1929), whose *Mrs. Dane's Defense* (1900) examined the scandal of “the woman with a past.” In London and Paris, Victorien Sardou's

Robespierre (1899) painted a melodramatic picture of The Terror during the French Revolution, using over three hundred actors. In New York, *The City* (1909) by Clyde Fitch configured the moral adjustments necessary for urban life as melodramatic problems with individual solutions. These productions used the conventional realism of the era to reinforce their melodramatic messages. (On the rise of stage realism, see the Introduction to Part III.) As had sentimental theatre before it, the melodramatic stage had become a part of the dominant culture of the bourgeoisie.

Dramatists claim authority

The popularity of melodrama during the nineteenth century boosted the general prestige of playwrights in

Europe and the U.S.A. Their success, however, had more to do with improvements in the legal status of authorship than with excellent playwriting. By 1900, dramatists in the West had the right to bargain with publishers for royalties and had secured national and international copyright protection that guaranteed them remuneration for all future productions of their published plays. While print made this possible, dramatists themselves and the widening market for play readership made it happen. In the process, dramatists elevated their social status from artisan playwright to legally protected bourgeois author. To gain some perspective on the rise of intellectual property rights for playwrights, we close this chapter with an overview of the major developments in the profession between 1700 and 1900.



Figure 5.5

Sir Henry Irving in his production of *The Bells* at the Lyceum Theatre, London, 1871.

© V&A Images, Victoria and Albert Museum.

The elevation of the dramatic writer from “playwright” to “author” was the first step in this development. Although the terms are used interchangeably now, they have different connotations and carried different historical meanings. Playwright, like the word “wheelwright,” is a term for a craftsperson – one who makes plays for another. Author and authorship, in contrast, share the same root as “authority.” One who writes for him or herself and retains some control of the product is an author (or so the word would suggest). Before 1700, most dramatists shared the title page of their published play with other “authorities” – often a printer, an acting company that employed them, a wealthy patron who subsidized the publication, and perhaps others. The only dramatists in print with real cultural authority in 1600 were ancient Greeks and Romans. Playwrights increased their cultural capital initially by reviewing and editing their plays before publication. By the end of the seventeenth century, many more of them were also supervising the publication of an entire collection of their dramas, not just single volumes. In the eighteenth century, the authoritative edition, corrected by the dramatist or reliant on the author’s original manuscripts (if the playwright were dead), had become the accepted standard for play publication. Implicit in this institution of publication was the belief, still widely accepted today, that a printed play text could faithfully represent the intentions of a single author. (For further discussion of this assumption, see Chapters 9 and 12.)

The change in the social status of dramatists and their printed plays substantially undercut the prestige of the *commedia dell’arte* troupes, still widely popular throughout Europe in the early eighteenth century. As early as the 1690s, a French neoclassical critic complained that the Italian *commedia* “was not truly Drama”; instead, it was “nothing but a kind of ill-formed concert among various Actors” (Peters 2000:103). In 1738, the Italian dramatist Carlo Goldoni (1707–1793) set off a debate by advocating an increase in the authority of the playwright in *commedia* performance. Instead of crafting a scenario with some traditional business and a few speeches that a *commedia* troupe could use as it pleased, Goldoni wrote

out the principal role of a play that he intended for *commedia* enactment. By 1743, when Goldoni authored his comic masterpiece *The Servant of Two Masters*, he left only one role to be improvised. He even wrote dialogue for that one when he published the play in 1753. As the debate continued, several managers and playwrights defended the tradition of actor-dominated *commedia*, and Goldoni responded with *commedia*-like plays that eliminated the half-masks, cleaned up the dialogue, and sentimentalized the stock characters. Neither side won the public debate, but by 1800 many *commedia* troupes had folded and their actors were seeking work in dramatic theatres. The increasing prestige of dramatic authorship, coupled with the powerful ideology of sentimentalism, was the primary reason for *commedia*’s demise.

With the gradual shift in their status from playwright to author came more leverage with acting companies. Most companies still purchased plays outright from their authors for production in 1800, even though the troupes had lost control of publication rights. The names of acting companies rarely appeared on the title pages of plays anymore, and most could no longer dictate when a play would reach print. In fact, some dramatists published their new plays before they opened at the theatre, both in the hope that play readership would generate an audience and that early publication might stop others from pirating their play. By 1800, it had become standard practice in the Anglo-American theatre for the author to reap the profits of the third night of the performance of a new play. New playwrights could at least expect something for their efforts, and celebrated authors, of course, could demand much more.

Dramatists still lacked full copyright protection for their intellectual property, however. French playwrights, though, were better off than most. In 1790, the new National Assembly granted production as well as publication rights to playwrights. English dramatists had to wait until 1833 for greater control over the production of their plays. Spain and the United States passed copyright laws in 1847 and 1856, respectively. None of these laws was very well enforced outside of major

theatrical centers, however. Until the 1880s, it was common practice for managers to pirate plays from other theatres, make a few minor alterations, and pay nothing to the original playwrights when the play was produced. The international traffic in pirated plays was even higher because until 1886 no treaties protected the rights of non-national authors. By 1900, although dramatists continued to have difficulties collecting payments due from managers, they had won the cultural and legal battle for full copyright protection. The prestige of print had trumped business-as-usual in the theatre. As a result of these developments, a part of the general triumph of the bourgeoisie, dramatists in the twentieth century could claim the same rights as other authors.

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CASE STUDY: Theatre iconology and the actor as icon: David Garrick

By Gary Jay Williams

Theatre is a transitory art that thrives in the immediacy of the cultural moment that performer and audience share, most especially, it seems, at times of dynamic

cultural change. Past performances cannot be hung in a museum or replayed from a score. To appreciate performances of the past, theatre historians turn to several kinds of primary sources – among them, pictorial representations. These pose both intriguing

opportunities and problems. This case study offers examples of interpretive *iconological* analyses of such images, here informed by cultural studies. Iconology is used here, following Erwin Panofsky (1955), rather than “iconography,” a term that is often associated with the work of documentation, such as the thematic cataloging of paintings. This study uses iconology to designate the analysis of images to understand the cultural work the image was doing in its time. Among other things such analysis considers visual vocabularies and conventions, inherited or innovative, and the culture forces surrounding the artwork. This case study discusses four pictorial representations of the famous English actor, David Garrick (1717–1779), with particular emphasis on the relation between these images and two culturally important issues for eighteenth-century England: sentimentalism (discussed in Chapter 5); and England’s reinvention of its national identity. Garrick was a significant – and richly signifying – figure in England’s construction of itself.

As a gifted actor, manager, and playwright, Garrick dominated the British stage and became a focal point in British culture across the mid-century. In his debut, he astonished London as Shakespeare’s Richard III in a small, unlicensed theatre in 1741. His first biographer, Thomas Davies, wrote: “Mr. Garrick shone forth like theatrical Newton; he threw new light on elocution and acting; he banished ranting, bombast, and grimace, and restored nature, ease, simplicity and genuine humor” (Davies 1780: I, 43). All of fashionable London turned out to see him; poet Alexander Pope went three times. Garrick became the leading actor at Drury Lane Theatre, where, within a few years, he won extraordinary acclaim for his performances in his signature roles, tragic and comic, including Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Archer in *The Beaux’ Stratagem* (1707) by George Farquhar (1678–1707), and Abel Drugger in Garrick’s own adaptation of Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (1743). As artistic manager of Drury Lane from 1747 to 1776, Garrick was especially dedicated to Shakespeare, staging 26 of the plays and playing leading roles in 14. With his 1769 Shakespeare “Jubilee,” he made Stratford-

upon-Avon a site for literary pilgrimages, capping his long promotion of Shakespeare as the national poet. In effect, this dedication to Shakespeare and to Enlightenment England was framed as one and the same.

His successes derived from his genius in the performance on stage and off as the new “natural man” of reason and moral sensibility. Easy and graceful in motion, with a quick intelligence, Garrick offered a nimble, fluent model of the century’s ideal of the rational mind and natural sensibility in the confident governance of the self. He planned his performances meticulously, blending physical and vocal grace with the virtuous responses of the Lockean “natural man,” which is to say, the self-possessed man of vital moral sympathy, in whose bosom was the potential for the virtue and the benevolence toward others that the new social order required (see Chapter 5 on sentimentalism). Garrick, who had been born of a relatively poor family, thus offered the persona of a gentleman by nature more than by class, a persona seen in some of the key plays of the period, such as *The Beaux’ Stratagem*. This made the actor an appealing figure for an England still negotiating its transition from an old social order, which had its roots in the concept of a divinely ordained, absolutist monarchy, toward a relatively democratized monarchy and a new social order based on civic and personal virtue across the middle class. The middle, merchant class saw itself as the keeper of the moral and economic foundation of a stable society.

Garrick is an ideal figure for iconological studies; portraits of him have been the subject of many articles and exhibitions. The number of engraved portraits of him in the British Museum is exceeded only by those of Queen Victoria. The painting of him as Richard III by William Hogarth (1697–1774) is probably the most famous portrait of a Western actor ever done (Figure 5.6). But many other major English artists painted portraits of him, in his roles or in private life, including Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Gainsborough, Johann Zoffany, Benjamin Wilson, Nathaniel Dance, and Angelica Kauffmann. Louis François Roubiliac did neoclassical busts of Garrick in marble and bronze, and



Figure 5.6

Mr. Garrick in "Richard III," engraving by William Hogarth and Charles Grignion, 1746, based on Hogarth's painting. This popular image of Shakespeare's version of the English king served several narratives of English national identity in the mid-eighteenth century.

Courtesy Gary Jay and Josephine S. Williams.

images of him appeared on porcelain dishes, silver tea caddies, enameled boxes, and medallions. Garrick was arguably the West's first modern commodified celebrity.

He himself did much to bring that about. He commissioned many paintings and prints of himself in his most successful roles, the prints being intended for wide circulation. Visiting Paris in 1764 as England's most famous actor, he wrote back urgently requesting prints for distribution to friends and fans. He also commissioned portraits of himself in his off-stage role of the natural gentleman, a role that straddled old and new ideas of class.

Moreover, he conceived his performances with a visual acuity that intersected perfectly with trends in English art (Garrick was a knowledgeable art collector) and theatre. Garrick was among the first of a younger generation of actors with a freer physical style and more appeal for the eye than had been the case in the older, declamatory school, which emphasized classical, rhetorical music for the ear. He was, as Michael Wilson has suggested, well aware of the visual lexicon of painters of the time for portraying the passions. Applying this knowledge to his acting, Garrick brought a new visual legitimacy to the stage that aligned performance with

the legitimacy of art. Hogarth expert Ronald Paulson makes an acute point about Hogarth's painting of Garrick as Richard III: "If Hogarth tended to make his painting look like a play, Garrick made his play look like a painting" (Paulson 1992:III, 250). Maria Ines Aliverti offers the accessory observation that on stage in Garrick's era, "actors affect the art and practice of making portraits . . . because they create images that generate portraits" (Aliverti 1997:243). Garrick might be described as an iconic actor in his use of visually arresting poses, which

he planned carefully – his acting choices being influenced by his media consciousness, as we shall see. He then reified these images by commissioning paintings and prints of them – the visual media of his time. In so doing, he advanced his career and inscribed his performances on the national social consciousness. Today, this kind of self-conscious use of the media is familiar in almost every corner of the world. Garrick's entrepreneurialism might be compared to that of many modern stars, such as Prince, Madonna, or Michael Jackson (d. 2009).

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Cultural studies and theatre iconology

Theatre iconology is used here to denote the interpretive analyses of theatre and performance-related pictorial representations, such as prints, paintings, and photographs, to better understand the cultural work the images were doing and so to better understand the theatre of the past. Recently scholars have used pictorial sources aware that any representation of performance will itself be the product of many forces at play in the culture of the time. Such images are as valuable for what they can tell us about the social formations in which actor and audience, painter, and viewer participated than they are as literal depictions of performance.

Analyzing images in this way will involve, as Christopher B. Balme notes, the interpretive task of "uncovering the semantics of a painting's 'sign language' and its relation to the larger social formation" (Balme, 1997:193). To uncover what Balme calls "the semantics of a painting's 'sign language'" is to approach the image as a system for making meaning within a particular culture that operates with both explicit and underlying tacit conventions and codes. While pictorial representations may aspire to the general truth-level of myth, as Roland Barthes notes, they are always constructions of reality, embedded with value choices (Barthes 1973:117–174). The cultural historian's task may involve some demystification in order to understand the cultural forces at work in an image.

Among the sign-systems in a painting to be considered are the usual compositional ones: choice, size, and placement of the main figure and its spatial relation to other figures, the relation between the figure(s) and their environment, or their clothing, gestures, or postures – but as matters not just of form but as revealing social relations. (The discussion that follows of Hogarth's *Mr. Garrick in "Richard III"* offers examples of this kind of analysis.) Such analysis draws on the field of semiotics, which began with the study of language but expanded to consider how meanings inhere in all kinds of human endeavor, from the use of colors in military uniforms to the rules for social rituals or athletic games. (For more on semiotics, see the case study on Brechtian theatre which follows Chapter 10, p. 450.) Not only the painting or print itself, but also the circumstances of its production and distribution can tell us what cultural work it was doing. For example, the analyses here point to the fact that the Garrick images were produced in response to a new market for accessibly priced prints of popular actors. This is a symptom of middle-class economic development to which enterprising artists responded, a variation on print capitalism.

The analysis of a painting and print representing a performance may also involve examining it in relation to all the other theatrical primary sources on the performance, such as eyewitness accounts and promptbooks (play texts annotated by those involved in the production), or other related paintings and prints. The analysis of such visual resources requires some understanding of the conventions of the art. For example, portraits of actors in Garrick's day reveal more about individual personalities than did those in the preceding period, which were in the French neoclassical mode that monumentalized actors. To take an eighteenth-century example from Japan, the study of *kabuki* theatre using the contemporary color prints of *kabuki* actors would need to consider the conventions of this special genre of *ukiyo-e* woodcuts. Also, artists derive some of their compositional vocabulary from the works of other artists, as will be seen below in the discussion of Hogarth's composition.

Artists of Garrick's time drew on a widely known illustrated book that offered a science of archetypal facial expressions of emotions (horror, anger, surprise, grief), *Methode pour apprendre à dessiner les Passions* (*A Method for Learning to Delineate the Passions*) by Charles Le Brun (1619–1690), President of the French Academy. Both Hogarth and Garrick knew the work. In Hogarth's painting, *Mr. Garrick in "Richard III"* (Figure 5.6), Garrick's expression of horror and amazement is closer to Le Brun's sketch of an archetypal expression of horror than to a likeness of Garrick. Denis Diderot described Garrick doing a demonstration of Le Brun-like expressions when Garrick visited Paris in 1764 (Diderot 1957:32–33) (compare Figure 5.2).

Iconological studies may also look at scenery, costumes, and staging arrangements. Pierre Louis Ducharte's *The Italian Comedy* (1929) draws on 259 prints, paintings, and drawings as sources for the costumes, properties, and poses typical of each of the stock characters of the *commedia dell'arte*. Martin Meisel's *Realizations* (1983) explores relations between nineteenth-century fiction, painting, and drama.

These are questions that could be asked in analyzing any pictorial representation of a performance.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 How does the image correspond to other primary sources on this production – promptbooks, eyewitness descriptions?
- 2 Why was this subject of special interest?
- 3 What were the circumstances of its production? Who did it? Who commissioned it? Who benefited?
- 4 What cultural ideals of the time did it reinforce (or critique)? How does it compare with the conventions of other works of the time? What does it reveal about class, gender, or race?
- 5 If any stories travel with this picture, what might lie behind their construction?

Thirty Garricks

One comic color print made in England in the mid-nineteenth century serves both as an amusing index to the Garrick image industry and as an insight into the long English fascination with him. *Garrick and Hogarth or The Artist Puzzled* (1845) by R. Evan Sly was based on an amusing anecdote about a Hogarth–Garrick skirmish that had appeared in a London newspaper several years after Garrick’s death (Figure 5.7). Reportedly, every time Hogarth thought he had captured Garrick’s likeness in a painting session, the actor mischievously changed his expression; by all accounts, Garrick’s expressive face was famously mobile, never at rest, even offstage. Discovering the trick, Hogarth drove Garrick from his studio in a hail of brushes (Paulson 1971:285–286). Sly used a clever mechanical device to capture the mercurial Garrick face. He placed a rotating wheel on the back of the print so the viewer could change the face of Garrick on Hogarth’s canvas and also the face on the seated actor, bringing into view thirty different likenesses of Garrick. These likenesses are, in fact, caricatures of other artists’ portraits of him. The faces in the sketches on the floor – caricatures of other Hogarth works – also change with a turn of the wheel.  (You can see all the 30 likenesses on the Folger Shakespeare Library’s website on a Garrick exhibition by visiting www.folger.edu and searching for “Garrick.”) The dog on the left, whose knowing look at the viewer heightens the joke on Hogarth, is borrowed by Sly from a Hogarth self-portrait with his own dog, Pug (1745).

The anecdote that Sly’s print illustrates is the kind of lore about celebrity actors of which the public in any era is fond. The public often wants to get a fix on the “real” identity of the actor who so ably constructs different personas. The print also might be seen as a joke on two famous image-makers. However, its main subject is Garrick as a protean actor (after the Greek myth of Proteus, the sea god who could change shapes at will).

The tale on which this print was based was probably an embellished one; its construction and repetition (there was a Gainsborough version) suggest some

complexity in the fascination with Garrick. Behind the tale and the print was a paradox: the figure who had become a national exemplar as a natural gentleman was an actor, a very adroit member of a profession that was historically suspect, morally and socially. Eighteenth-century English audiences with a hunger for outward signs of interior moral sincerity were enthralled with a talented professional who was skilled in creating meticulous semblances of sincerity. Could an *actor* be a natural, virtuous gentleman? The question went to both class and morality. Horace Walpole seems to have been sniping at Garrick for class jumping when he warned his friend, Sir Horace Mann, the British Envoy in Florence, “Be a little on your guard, remember he is an actor” (Shawe–Taylor 2003:11). The English had been through a war against the art and the whole theatre profession led by the 1698 book by the cleric, Jeremy Collier, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*. Collier had accused the theatre of threatening the moral welfare of the nation. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele had then set out the moral majority program for a national theatre of virtue in their newspapers and provided plays for it (see Chapter 5).

Appealing as Garrick was, in this moral climate the fascination with his face-changing skill betrays some anxiety about both the class and the ostensible moral center of the actor: could an actor adroit with images be a national model of the sincere, natural, virtuous man? In addition, there was not only Garrick the meticulous actor, but also Garrick the adroit manager of many media images of himself in prints and paintings. The late twentieth century offers an instructive comparison. The American public was similarly intrigued when an attractive Hollywood actor became the President of the U.S.A. and a spokesperson for the conservative right. Was Ronald Reagan acting, or was he sincere? How much of the public impression of him was the result of clever stage management of his image in the media? How much of his presidential persona was created by the public as they conflated Reagan and the heroic film roles he played? David Garrick managed



Figure 5.7

Garrick and Hogarth, or The Artist Puzzled. Color print by R. Evan Sly, 1845. The face on Hogarth's canvas and the face of the seated David Garrick can be changed by rotating a wheel on the back of Sly's print, bringing into view 30 different likenesses of Garrick. The print is based on an eighteenth-century anecdote about Hogarth painting the actor which is evidence of the public fascination with the protean Garrick.

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to perform his roles and himself successfully. Sixty-six years after Garrick's death, Sly's print could still play broadly with the legend of the famous image-maker.

Four Richards III

In Hogarth's *Mr. Garrick as Richard III*, there is Garrick and more. Garrick debuted in 1741 in the Shakespearean role, as compelling a protean character as any in Western drama. Plotting his ascent from Duke of Gloucester to King of England, Richard vows (in an earlier Shakespeare play that includes him) to deceive everyone like a good actor and to kill anyone between himself and the throne:

Why I can smile, and murder whiles I smile,
And cry "Content" to that which grieves
my heart,
And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,
And frame my face to all occasions.
[. . .]
I can add colours to the chameleon,
Change shapes with Proteus for advantages,
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.
Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?
Tut, were it farther off, I'll pluck it down.
(*Henry VI*, Part 3, 3.2:182–195,
in Greenblatt 1997)

His deception and murders bring him to the throne, but they finally result in his overthrow and death in battle at the hands of the decent Earl of Richmond, Henry Tudor.

Hogarth's painting represents the moment when, on the night before the battle, Richard wakes in his tent from a dream in which he has been visited by the ten souls of those he killed, including his king, his brother, his two young nephews, and his wife. Awaking terrified, he cries out, "Give me another horse! Bind up my wounds! / Have mercy, Jesu! – Soft, I did but dream. / O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me?" (*Richard III*, 5.5.131–133). The adaptation of the play by Colley Cibber that Garrick used stressed Richard's

villainy heavily, and, in this scene, Cibber added the ghosts' demand that Richard "wake in all the hells of guilt," which he does, though he goes on to fight to his death.

For a mid-eighteenth-century English audience, this anguished recognition of his sins by this, the most evil of men, would have been a critical moral turn, and Garrick turned it into a moral awakening of great visual power, meticulously arranged. Arthur Murphy, a contemporary playwright and Garrick biographer, wrote, "His soliloquy in the tent scene discovered *the inward man* [*italics added*]," a code phrase in England's age of moral sensibility signifying the natural, inner potential for good in humankind. Hogarth renders Richard's expression of horror in the wide eyes that stare out over the shoulder of the viewer of the portrait and in the outstretched arm and extended fingers. However, Hogarth does not render Garrick's face with individualized particularity, nor is the figure and costume in the more natural mode of that in his earlier theatrical paintings of *The Beggar's Opera* (1728–1729). Rather, the painting of Garrick as Richard III is rendering the theatrical moment in the grand manner of history painting, a genre in which Hogarth had worked in the previous decade. Hogarth took his general composition from Le Brun's *Tent of Darius*; the voluminous flowing robes and other fabrics were painterly strokes to convey nobility. The painting's huge size – over eight feet long and six feet high – is in the mode of history painting, and here it magnifies and ennobles the figure of King Richard. This Richard is, then, a combination of four Richards III: the Richard of Garrick – meticulous master of the morally iconic moment for the age of sensibility, the Richard of English history, the Richard of Shakespeare, the great national poet (whom Garrick was promoting in his playhouse), and the Richard of Hogarth, by then the great English artist. Each presence complements the other. Together they constitute a national narrative aspiring to the status of myth. The buyer, Thomas (William?) Duncombe, paid 200 pounds (sterling) for the painting, more than had ever been paid to an English painter for a portrait (Paulson 1992:3,

256–257). The engraving that followed shortly after served the interests of both Garrick and Hogarth. Painting and print inspired a new vogue of theatrical portraiture. Analyzing the work and its cultural valences today, we can see not only a vestige of Garrick's iconic performance but the ways in which the image was speaking from, and to the English people's construction of their national identity in the eighteenth century.

Two rivals, two prints

Many other of Garrick's performances resulted in images suitable for framing, including those of his *Hamlet* and *Lear*, considered briefly here (Figures 5.8, 5.9). James McArdell did mezzotints of him in these roles. Published in 1754 and 1761, respectively, they were based on paintings (both lost) by Benjamin Wilson (1722–1788). (Zoffany also painted the same scene from *Hamlet*.) Both images seem to aspire to the effects of Hogarth's

hugely successful portrait of Richard III. Both advance Garrick's moral agenda. Collaboration among actor, painter, and printmaker on both is very probable.

The very method of these prints – the mezzotint – represented a new media technology. A special engraving tool was used to create surface texturing on the paper that allowed inking in gradations of shading and subtle chiaroscuro effects. This allowed the capturing of more subtle, emotional facial expression or more emotionally charged landscapes. Both prints also served Garrick's media campaign. Spranger Barry, the “silver-tongued” actor who was a close competitor of Garrick, was playing these same roles at the rival theatre, Covent Garden, at about the time that these Garrick images were published – likely in order to imprint Garrick's triumph in these roles in the public mind.

Garrick had taken special visual care with both scenes. He was proud of the scene from *Hamlet*,



Figure 5.8

Mr. Garrick in Hamlet, mezzotint print by James McArdell, 1754, after a painting by Benjamin Wilson, depicting Garrick at the moment of Hamlet's encounter with his father's ghost.

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Figure 5.9

Mr. Garrick in the Character of King Lear, hand-colored mezzotint by James McArdell, after a painting by Benjamin Wilson. With the mad Lear are Kent behind him (Astley Bransby) and Edgar (William Havard). The Fool is missing because the role was eliminated in Nahum Tate's sentimental adaptation. Neoclassicism dictated that comedy and tragedy should not be mixed.

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performing it in private for friends. He reportedly used a mechanical wig that he could manipulate to make his hair rise in fright, the better to capture scientifically Hamlet's horror. The effect seems to be apparent in McArdell's print (Figure 5.8). The print is corroborated by a detailed description of the scene by Georg

Christoph Lichtenberg, who saw a performance. Garrick's sentimentalized Lear, seen in Figure 5.9, is frail and vulnerable in the storm scene. Consistent with the Nahum Tate adaptation that Garrick used, his Lear is the sentimentalized father of the family whose demise is tragic in the domestic sphere, that sphere where

eighteenth-century Britain had now relocated its national moral center. Tate has Cordelia live to marry Edgar, assuring succession to the throne and a stable future for kingdom and family more than Shakespeare's play does. Both of McArde's prints were among those Garrick sought supplies of for distribution to friends in Paris.

In summary, this case study provides examples of theatre iconology that reads pictorial representations not only for what they might tell us as depictions of performance but for what they tell us about the social formations in which the actor and audience, and painter and viewer all participated. Garrick's performances and the making of the theatrical images of him are parts of a large historical picture, albeit one in which his uses of the media of his time are very recognizable today.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can also be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites always should be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

For many images of David Garrick from the Folger Shakespeare Library exhibit, "David Garrick (1717–1779) A Theatrical Life," go to www.folger.edu and search for "Garrick."

Shakespeare Illustrated. Website in progress by Harry Rusche on nineteenth-century paintings, criticism and productions, listing and reproducing illustrations by play: http://shakespeare.emory.edu/illustrated_index.cfm.

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CASE STUDY: Theatre and cultural hegemony: Comparing popular melodramas

By Bruce McConachie

Melodrama in history

The Titanic sinks, the police arrest a murderer, and aliens threaten to conquer the earth! These are three examples of stories that make good melodrama, a popular dramatic form during many historical eras that continues to terrify, reassure, and propagandize audiences today. Briefly defined, melodrama allows spectators to imaginatively experience an evil force outside of themselves, such as a greedy person, a rapacious criminal, or a vast conspiracy. Consequently, melodrama dramatizes social morality; it names the “good guys” and “bad guys” in our lives and helps us to negotiate such problems as political power, economic justice, and racial inequality. It may also point audiences beyond their present circumstances to transcendental sources of good and evil.

Because melodrama can help audiences to identify new types of virtue and vice, it is often in demand during periods of rapid historical change. Melodramatic plays flourished, for example, in fifth-century B.C.E. Athens, seventeenth-century England, and eighteenth-century Japan. Melodrama rose to prominence again in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States, first in response to the American and French Revolutions (1776, 1789) and later as a means of coping with the vast economic and social changes caused by the Industrial Revolution. As we will see, two very different kinds of melodrama spoke to people’s need for a new social morality in the wake of each of these transformations. By comparing these types of plays, we can trace significant changes in the practical ethics of Western societies during the course of the nineteenth century.

Comparing popular melodramas

To compare the social morality of two kinds of melodrama using only one play of each type, the

historian needs to be sure that she or he is comparing dramas that were popular in their time and broadly representative of many similar plays. Both *Coelina, Or the Child of Mystery* (1800) by Guilbert de Pixérécourt and *The Poor of New York* (1857) by Dion Boucicault fit these criteria. *Coelina* achieved nearly 1,500 performances in France during the first 30 years of the century. English, German, Dutch, and Italian adaptations also flourished. In 1857, Boucicault adapted *Les Pauvres de Paris*, already a popular melodrama in Paris, as *The Poor of New York*. Following the play’s success in New York, Boucicault re-tooled the melodrama for theatres in other cities by keeping its basic plot but altering local references. Over the next 15 years, the drama resurfaced as *The Poor of Liverpool*, *The Poor of the London Streets*, *The Streets of Dublin*, and similar titles for other industrial cities in the British Empire and the United States. Both *Coelina* and *Poor*, then, enjoyed international success for a significant period of time.

Both dramas are also broadly representative of two types of nineteenth-century melodrama. The success of *Coelina* and other plays by Pixérécourt spawned dozens of melodramas with similar plots and characters. Likewise, other playwrights at mid-century repeated the formula of Boucicault’s melodramas to gain success. Like writers and producers of television melodrama today, theatre people in the nineteenth century strove to reproduce plot situations, character types, and significant themes that had worked in the past. The results were two distinct types of melodramatic entertainment, each involving more than 100 plays: providential melodrama, popular from roughly 1800 to 1825, and materialist melodrama, successful from around 1855 to 1880.

Providential melodrama

Coelina is a typical *providential* melodrama. The setting for these kinds of plays is usually timeless and universal,

as in a fairy tale. *Coelina* occurs before the Revolution of 1789 in a village in rural France that has changed very little since the Middle Ages. Like other providential melodramas, the agent of evil in *Coelina* is a single villain, alienated from the social institutions that provide order in this society of hardworking peasants and small shopkeepers. Truguelin, the “monstre” of *Coelina*, scorns the Catholic faith, flees from the king’s law, and attempts to use his family to advance his greedy ambitions. When Coelina, the heroine of the play, refuses to marry his son, Truguelin has her driven from her home and persecutes her and her true father to gain her inheritance.

Providential melodramas, however, always assure the audience that God watches over innocent goodness and His power will ensure a happy ending. In *Coelina*, nature works in conjunction with the Almighty, causing Truguelin to crumble in fear at a thunderstorm, a symbol of the Final Judgment that awaits him. Unlike the villain, the natural innocence of Coelina and her father, whose identity is unknown to her, gives them insight into Truguelin’s machinations and draws them together to protect each other. Like other providential melodramas, the play ends with the villain banished from the stage and the good characters returned to the rural utopia from which they started (Figure 5.10). No original sin stains the virtue of good characters in providential melodrama; eliminate persecuting villainy, *Coelina* promises, and Paradise can be regained.

Materialist melodrama

The Poor of New York by Boucicault differs significantly from *Coelina* and its providential spin-offs. Instead of a fairy-tale-like setting, materialist melodrama places the action within time-bound, historical realities – the streets, mansions, and tenement rooms of a depression-wracked New York in *The Poor of New York*. In this materialist world, the institutions of liberal, bourgeois government and society provide order and justice. The villain of *Poor*, Gideon Bloodgood, violates their codes when he ignores legislated laws, breaks with sound business practices, and attempts to use his money

to gain social respectability. The financial “panics” of 1837 and 1857 and the economic depressions that follow frame the plot of Boucicault’s play. When a rich depositor dies in his bank in 1837, Bloodgood steals the money rightfully due to the Fairweather family, and the plot of the melodrama examines the consequences of this theft, its discovery, and the eventual restitution of the money 20 years later. As in a well-made play, the plot of *Poor* hinges on a secret known to the audience but not to most of the characters (who stole the money?), which is finally revealed at the end of the play. The social world of *Coelina* ensured worldly justice through idealized hierarchical institutions – the Church, the autocratic state, and the patriarchal family. In *Poor*, the actual, historical institutions of the United States in the 1850s have taken their place.

Gone from productions of *The Poor of New York* were appeals to Providence and the expectation that the Almighty would restore a utopian paradise to characters of virtue. Where natural instincts, heroic action, and God’s grace could reveal the “mysteries” of *Coelina*, the characters of Boucicault’s play inhabit a denser, more impenetrable world. For much of the play, the Fairweathers do not know that Bloodgood is the primary cause of their distress; it takes a detective-like figure, Badger, to reveal his villainy. (Indeed, the detective, a figure with specialized knowledge of the mysteries of the industrial city, first gains prominence as a dramatic character in materialist melodramas.) In addition to man-made villainy, chance causes much of the evil in materialist melodrama. Characters in *Poor* may be wealthy one day and poor the next, as happens to one of the heroes as a result of the “panic” of 1857. While the ending of providential melodrama banished evil from the stage to rejoice in the return of a traditional utopia, materialist melodrama, more fatalistic than utopian, typically allows villains to reform and rejoin society. Thus, the Fairweathers forgive Bloodgood and his daughter, both of whom also suffered from mistakes and accidents, and the ending celebrates the reconciliation of these two families. Chance, not providential design, structures much of the action of materialist melodrama (Figure 5.11).



Figure 5.10

This print depicts a scene from Pixérécourt's *The Forest of Bondy*, still popular in 1843 when this print (known as a "penny character print") was published. For this providential melodrama, a dog was trained to jump at the throat of the actor playing the villain, the killer of the dog's master.

Penny character print, Mr. Cony-Landri-Webb, W.C. HTC 28, 321. © Harvard Theatre Collection.



Figure 5.11
In the “Water Cave Scene” from *The Colleen Bawn* by Boucicault, a servant misunderstands his master’s wishes and tries to kill the peasant girl his master has secretly married. Many materialist melodramas featured similar scenes of high emotion and scenic illusionism. From an acting edition of the play.
Source: Brockett and Hildy (2003), *History of the Theatre*, p.346.

The code of bourgeois respectability regulates class relations in this type of play. Although the Fairweathers are middle-class, they have less money during the 1857 depression than the Puffys, a working-class family characterized as Irish-American. Nonetheless, the Puffys, temporary landlords of the Fairweathers, treat the middle-class family as their “betters,” even sacrificing their own welfare to feed and house them. Bloodgood and his daughter have the wealth to claim upper-class status in the play, but lack sentimental affection. Because the respectable bourgeoisie looked askance at rich people whose pretentiousness led them to believe they deserved special privileges, the action of *Poor* snubs the Bloodgoods’ social ambitions. By the final curtain, the Bloodgoods and Fairweathers are on the same social plateau, while the Puffys are placed below them in social status. The social hierarchy of *Poor* is less steep and has fewer gradations than that of *Coelina*, which began at the top with the Church and the King, descended to landed gentry, made a place for royal officers, and bottomed out with tradesmen and peasants.

Two Major Types of Nineteenth-Century Melodrama	
<i>Providential</i> (popular 1800–1825)	<i>Materialist</i> (popular 1855–1880)
Timeless, universal setting	Time-bound historical setting
Autocratic institutions ensure order	Liberal, bourgeois institutions ensure order
Natural innocence glorified	Social respectability honored
God ensures happy ending	Chance puts happy ending at risk
Return to utopian paradise	Acceptance of material status quo

Why did the successful formula for melodramatic entertainment change so radically between the 1820s and the 1850s? Where popular theatre is concerned, the answer can never be limited to the changing intentions of playwrights and other artists in the theatre. Certainly

Boucicault and those working with him after 1855 wanted to write and produce different kinds of plays than had Pixérécourt and his fellow artists, but both groups of theatre-makers, eager for popular success, were primarily responding to their audience. Why, then, did audience tastes for melodramatic theatre change in this thirty-year period from an embrace of providential plays to materialist ones? Contrary to popular belief, matters of taste are primarily social and historical in origin, not individual. People enjoy certain types of melodramas (and melodramatic films, songs, and DVDs today) because their performances represent their hopes, fears, and beliefs about social morality. These enjoyable feelings and ideas – present in both the

content and form of any theatrical performance – are shaped by social and historical experience. Certain kinds of plays attain popularity because they appeal to the values and emotions of specific social groups, often groups able to exercise significant power in their historical societies.

One way for historians to understand the changing popularity of types of melodramatic plays in the nineteenth century is to use the concept of cultural hegemony. From this point of view, the popular formula for melodramatic theatre changed from providential to materialist because the 1850s audience sought different definitions and assurances about social morality than had previous spectators in 1800.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Cultural hegemony

Theories of cultural hegemony began in the 1920s with the work of Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Communist who was trying to figure out why the Italian working class had not risen in revolt against Mussolini's fascism. In the 1970s, British scholar Raymond Williams and others introduced Gramsci's ideas into the field of cultural studies, where they were taken up by many neo-Marxists eager (like Gramsci) to understand how and why working people often embraced ideas and practices that did not serve their interests. Since the 1970s, a variety of intellectual movements – including feminism, postcolonial theory, and postmodernism – have put their own spin on Gramsci's ideas to explain several varieties of social-historical domination by consent.

According to Raymond Williams, Gramsci's ideas about cultural hegemony posit culture as an arena of conflicting ideas and values. Different classes and social groups – Gramsci calls them “historical blocs” – are always contending for legitimacy and power within every historical society. This competition, however, does not occur on a level playing field. Despite what might appear to be consensus among several groups, the ideas and values of the ruling class tend to predominate, primarily because those with more power and wealth effectively manage the cultural conversation. In complex societies, the ruling class maintains most of its authority through cultural and moral leadership, rather than by direct control. Instead of killing, jailing, censoring, or even conspiring against their political and cultural opponents, the watchdogs of the ruling class mostly constrain the terms of allowable rhetoric within a culture in such a way that truly oppositional ideas and movements rarely gain visibility and traction.

Gramsci calls these cultural watchdogs “organic intellectuals.” While all men and women have the capacity for significant intellectual activity, according to Gramsci, some people emerge within every historical bloc to function as class organizers and promoters. In addition to a few academic intellectuals, these politicians, preachers, lawyers, newscasters, entertainers, and prominent public figures lend their social group the appearance of homogeneity, plus an awareness of its possible roles in the politics and economics of their society. Organic intellectuals maintain their authority primarily by framing and defining reality; they label the views of those who oppose them as

“immoral,” “irrelevant,” “tasteless,” and/or “irresponsible.” Despite the competition among them, contending organic intellectuals from various historical blocs typically arrive at compromises that favor the powerful. In times of significant historical change, however, the play of competing historical blocs can break down, allowing for the emergence of new movements and the resurgence of reactionary elements.

In the past, due to the social importance of the stage, some theatrical stars and dramatists functioned as Gramsci’s organic intellectuals. The cultural prominence of Garrick and Voltaire, for example, gave them significant authority within specific historical blocs in England and France during the eighteenth century. Even artists who exert less self-conscious sway over their publics may gain substantial influence with theatre audiences, especially if their plays and performances attain mass popularity. Today, the kinds of characters and stories in dramas on television both limit and empower how people in our society understand their lives and their potential for changing the power relations that enfold them. Told that “the Almighty” or “the economy” determines their place in society, for example, some people will feel inspired to challenge these “realities,” while others will accept the structures of the status quo. Gramsci’s ideas, modified and elaborated by later theorists and historians, have shaped many investigations of popular culture and the persuasiveness of its ideological limitations.

Theatre historians can begin to apply the notion of cultural hegemony to understanding a specific period of theatre history by asking and answering the following questions.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 Which historical blocs had the most power in that historical period?
- 2 When these powerful groups attended the theatre, what kinds of plays did they enjoy?
- 3 How did performances of these kinds of plays position these spectators to understand their power and privilege? Did these plays legitimate or undercut the power relations of the status quo?
- 4 What other, less powerful social groups enjoyed these plays of the dominant culture? How might their enjoyment have helped to convince these spectators that the status quo was necessary and just?

In addition to examining the hegemonic role of plays, theatre historians can also draw on Gramsci’s ideas to relate acting style, theatre architecture, and all other aspects of theatrical events to questions of social power and cultural domination. Further, historians can use the concept of cultural hegemony to compare two historical types of the same genre of drama and the reasons for the success of each in related periods of theatre history.

Melodrama and cultural hegemony

During the first decade of the 1800s, the social groups with the most power in France applauded the rise of Napoleon and his restoration of political and social order after a decade of revolutionary turmoil. These

reactionaries also renewed their faith in Christianity and the traditional authority of the Catholic Church, which began to recoup much of the power it had lost in the 1790s. At the same time, these powerful groups, especially significant factions of the bourgeoisie and many in the military, had come to accept the sentimental

and utopian promises of the Revolution. That is, they believed that natural intuition was a better guide to morality than reason and continued to hope for a society in which evil could be banished from the world. And no wonder – these plays induced nostalgia for the authoritarian order of the *ancien régime*, the old aristocratic, monarchical rule in France in the centuries before the Revolution. They also complimented their audiences on their inherent innocence and spiritual wisdom. Although many working-class groups in Europe and the United States also applauded providential melodrama, the genre undercut values supporting the kinds of reforms that might have benefited them.

By the 1850s, the capitalist revolution in Western Europe and the United States had created an international middle class with very different desires and anxieties than the post-revolutionary groups of the early 1800s. Like the earlier social groups, however, many Americans and Europeans responded to the economic revolution of the nineteenth century in contradictory ways. Many embraced the apparent efficiency of the contracts, train schedules, and increasingly complex manufacturing processes of industrial capitalism. The belief that man's rational mind could control the material world for the betterment of all undercut the need for religion and undermined traditional, hierarchical forms of authority. The new bourgeoisie, however, also attempted to brake the steam-powered forces of nineteenth-century capitalism through the code of respectability. Respectability taught that profits alone were no guarantee of social status; the respectable also needed sentimental affection and correct manners, behavior that could get in the way of simply making money. Consequently, just as providential melodramas helped powerful social groups early in the century to craft a new morality in the wake of the French Revolution, so did materialist melodramas assist the new bourgeoisie in forging a social morality that would benefit their class in the 1850s. Arguably, this kind of melodrama was even more antithetical to working-class interests than the providential kind because it rendered fundamental reform unthinkable in a chance-ridden world.

Melodrama continued to change after the 1880s, when the materialist plays written by Boucicault and his imitators went out of fashion. And the concept of cultural hegemony continues to be a useful way of understanding the effects of their popularity. Which social groups benefit from current conceptions of “good guys” and “bad guys” in detective stories on television today? What is the social morality behind the popular genre of disaster films? By understanding how these dramas help to legitimate or undercut the values of powerful social groups, we can begin to answer these questions.

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Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com.

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Theatre, nation, and empire, 1750–1900

By Bruce McConachie

As we have seen, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars led to major changes in European culture and its theatre. In addition to inciting a need for the black-and-white morality of melodrama, the revolutionary era also inflamed European nationalism. Unlike earlier European wars, much of the combat between 1795 and 1815 involved citizen-soldiers who believed they fought to defend people like themselves, not to advance the interests of a king or emperor. As in subsequent wars involving nation-states, the bloodshed of the revolutionary era required justification, and the ideologies of nationalism provided ready answers. Consequently, the rise of melodrama and nationalism in the theatre after 1800 were linked. Like melodrama, nationalism separates a group of people whom it defines as moral and benevolent from others who are represented as unethical and dangerous. In both kinds of contests, spectators, voters, and combatants come to believe that the “good people” must prevail over the “bad people,” or chaos and immorality will triumph. The bloodstained logic trumpeting nationalistic goals through melodramatic means sustained thousands of theatrical productions during the nineteenth century and still pervades many Hollywood melodramas today.

After 1800, nation-states increasingly combined the ideology of nationalism with the political authority and military might of the state. This combination was relatively new in world history. The idea that a people, a nation, loosely united by a common language or culture, has an inherent right to its own geographical and political state would have seemed absurd to most of humanity before 1700. As historian Benedict Anderson notes, the imagined fellowship that undergirds nationalism has to be invented and continuously reaffirmed. Nations, as gatherings of strangers, must both build upon and surpass the affiliations that draw people together as families and neighbors. According to Anderson, a nation is “an imagined political community – and imagined as both limited and sovereign” (Anderson 1991:6). That is, the nation and its accompanying state is limited with regard to its territorial expanse and sovereign in terms of its ability to take independent political action within its boundaries and against other countries.

Nationalists in England, France, and the Netherlands were the first successfully to transform their countries into national “imagined communities,” and this development gave their bourgeoisie a decided advantage in international politics and economics over other countries

during the nineteenth century. Although the wars against Napoleon had inspired nationalists throughout Europe to dream about their own nation-states, the peace of Vienna in 1815 restored most of the pre-1789 borders to the map of Europe. Despite some commonalities of language and culture, Italy and Germany remained divided into small states, and the Austrian Empire encompassed a patchwork of national cultures, including Polish, Hungarian, and Czech, in 1815. During the century, Cavour, Garibaldi, and a series of short wars brought most of Italy under one rule (in 1861). A decade later Bismarck, the Prussian army, and more wars united most German-speaking lands within the German Empire (in 1871). Meanwhile, cultural nationalism – a belief in the uniqueness and greatness of one’s language-based culture – flourished within European nations that could not yet claim their own state. Only after World War I (1914–1918) and the dissolution of several European empires could cultural nationalists climb to political power within the new nation-states of Ireland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Finland, and several others.

This chapter examines the kinds of theatre that followed from and helped to legitimate Western nationalism and imperialism from 1750 to 1900 (actually 1914). As we will see, the nationalism that empowered the English and French governing classes to solidify their authority at home also emboldened many of them to seek empire abroad. European imperialism flourished alongside nationalism during the last half of the “long” nineteenth century, from 1789 to the start of World War I (the Great War) in 1914. After tracing the rise and proliferation of nationalistic and imperialistic theatre in the West, we turn to two case studies. The first examines dramatist-historian Friedrich Schiller’s theatrical career in terms of his vision of the kind of aesthetic experience that would make the human sensibility whole again and thereby be a formative force for a German nation. The second considers cultural nationalism and the rejection of imperialism in Ireland. One faction of Ireland’s cultural nationalists rioted to protest the work of another when the Abbey Theatre in Dublin produced *The Playboy of the Western World* in 1907.

Print, theatre, and nationalism

Before the French Revolution, print culture had helped some bourgeois Europeans to envision themselves as a potential governing class. Several historians have examined how printed periodicals legitimated and maintained a bourgeois “public sphere” in eighteenth-century Western Europe. As literate Europeans read more about current affairs and shared ideas for improving their societies, they developed a sense of themselves as a public, with interests separate from the dukes, kings, and emperors who ruled most of them. The news press was especially important in forming notions of public consciousness, but so was the theatre. By 1750, many of the same people (nearly all of them male) in Paris, Vienna, London, Milan, Hamburg, and other large cities went to the theatre, read plays, and gathered in coffeehouses and salons to discuss developments in science, the arts, and current events. As the news press and the theatre influenced each other, both helped to shape what we may call a public sphere in their countries.

After 1750, these publics increasingly thought of themselves as national audiences, with rights that all theatrical spectators could expect to exercise. Royal and aristocratic patronage had waned, especially in England and Germany, and the public had taken its place as the major benefactors of the theatre. But what kind of public was this? Most of the literate bourgeoisie looked to the power of rational public opinion expressed in print to regulate behavior in the theatre. They strove to cultivate a theatrical public that might rise above the petty emotions of the aristocracy to sustain a theatre that could explore many of their new, enlightened ideas. Stung by the response of a small group of critics to his *The Barber of Seville* in 1775, lawyer-playwright Beaumarchais, for example, addressed a “Temperate Letter” to the reading public of France. “I recognize no other judge than you,” wrote Beaumarchais, “not excepting Messieurs the spectators, who – judges only of first resort – often see their sentence overturned by your tribunal” (Peters 2000:249). Although Beaumarchais might distrust, he knew he could not dismiss the theatrical public. Indeed,

he relied on this public to understand and approve his critique of the class system of pre-revolutionary France when *The Marriage of Figaro* was produced nine years later. But like many of his contemporaries, Beaumarchais believed that the reading public, less easily seduced by a cabal and with more time for rational reflection, could gradually educate the theatrical public. Press and playhouse could work together, thought Beaumarchais, to shape an enlightened public opinion that might change the nation.

Before 1789, many of the literate bourgeoisie in Europe shared Beaumarchais' belief that public opinion elevated the nation above the state. Although the state was mired in royal monopolies, such as the Comédie Française, the public sphere of the nation might support a more nationalistic kind of theatre. Influenced by this belief, German critic Johann Friedrich Löwen (1729–1771) published his hope that a little theatre in Hamburg could help to unify the German nation. Löwen proclaimed this company the Hamburg National Theatre and induced critic-playwright Gotthold Ephraim Lessing to join his troupe as a literary advisor. Lessing thereby became the first dramaturg in Europe, an in-house critic in charge of recommending plays and advising the company on artistic matters (see Chapter 5 on Lessing and sentimentalism). The tradition of dramaturgy grew out of the eighteenth-century bourgeois goal of educating a rational theatre public for national responsibilities. Löwen's theatre opened in 1767, with bourgeois backing, and closed two years later. Despite its failure, the notion of a theatre based on the public values of a bourgeois nation rather than an absolutist state had caught on and this idea flourished after the French Revolution.

By challenging and, in some cases, overthrowing absolutism across Europe, the revolutions and the wars that followed empowered the bourgeoisie in France and elsewhere and reignited the hopes of those eager to fuse print, theatre, and nationalism. After 1800, many of the wealthier members of the French, English, and Dutch bourgeoisie were playing important roles in their governments. Print culture broadened their influence

and also led to the construction and proliferation of other nation-states dominated by the bourgeoisie. Print involved the standardization of national languages and facilitated communication among groups that shared that language. In effect, print allowed the literate classes in Italy, Germany, and elsewhere to imagine the existence of other people like them as they read their books, newspapers, and journals. Print gave more power to the laws and procedures emanating from the capitals of nation-states and enabled their bureaucrats to prevail over officials tied to local customs. The increasing legitimacy of the nation-state sparked an interest in the writing of national histories, and the dissemination of printed histories, in turn, increased the imagined coherence of nation-states. By 1914, many bourgeois Europeans believed that their own imagined community was unique and superior to others. In addition, as we will see, some of them were able to look to productions at their new national theatres to validate their beliefs.

Romanticism and the theatre

The French Revolution fragmented European literate opinion into four major political-cultural camps: liberals clung to Enlightenment principles of rationality and hoped for a return to moderation; conservatives rejected the rationalistic excesses of the Revolution and looked to national traditions for stability; radicals, believing the Revolution had not gone far enough, continued to work against despotic regimes; and reactionaries rejected all aspects of the Revolution and yearned for a return to a Catholic and absolutist Europe. These political-cultural positions on the Revolution had hardened by 1815 and the smaller European revolutions of 1830 and 1848 kept them alive. Although the positions changed over time, their general orientations would shape European politics and culture into the 1860s.

Within the orientations left by the French Revolution, romanticism grew best in either radical or conservative soil. In the theatre, as in literature and music, romanticism prized the subjectivity of genius, looked to nature for inspiration, elevated strong emotions above rational restraint, and often sought to embody universal

conflicts within individual figures. Although romanticism built on some of the premises of eighteenth-century sentimentalism, it was generally less rationalistic and more individualistic. Initially, romantic theatre artists shared the radical utopian hopes of the revolutionaries, but later romantics, especially after the fall of Napoleon in 1815, turned pessimistic and conservative. In Germany after 1815, for example, romantics Christian Dietrich Grabbe (1801–1836) and Georg Büchner (1813–1837) wrote pessimistic plays about history’s ironies and life’s absurdities, but found few companies willing to produce them. Most of their best work, *Jest, Satire, Irony and Deeper Significance* (1822) by Grabbe, and *Danton’s Death* (1835) and *Woyzeck* (1836) by Büchner, would await discovery and production in the twentieth century.

In another sense, however, the political-cultural orientations left by the Revolution could not contain the intense subjectivity of romanticism. In the music of Beethoven and the poetry of Wordsworth, romanticism marked a new point on the continuum of cultural modes for gaining knowledge about the self. In medieval and early modern times, Western culture taught humans to look primarily to external entities – the feudal order, the Church, the logic of absolutism – for self-understanding. Beginning with the Protestant Reformation and moving to the Enlightenment, to sentimentalism, and then to romanticism, Western culture increasingly invited humans to discover purpose and understanding from within. The romantic movement from 1790 to 1850 marked a new step in this 500-year development in the West from external institutions to internal subjectivity – a development epitomized by the gradual shift from the Catholic confessional to the Freudian couch.

The theatre of the early 1800s, however, lacked many of the means that later avant-garde artists would use to explore subjectivity in the twentieth century. Primarily reliant on poetic dialog and the human body, romantic poets who turned to the stage too often wrote plays that relied on monologue instead of action that aimed at engaging an audience. Several of the great English romantic poets tried playwriting, for example, but

Wordsworth’s *The Borderers* (1796), Keats’s *Otho the Great* (1819), and Shelley’s *The Cenci* (1819) either failed to gain production or to move spectators in performance.

The principles of romanticism, however, broke the hold of neoclassicism in theatrical criticism and shaped a new generation of European critics and audiences. Romantic criticism began primarily with August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), a devotee of Shakespearean production in Germany, who sharply distinguished between neoclassical and romantic theatre. According to Schlegel, Shakespearean dramatic form was organic – it germinated and flowered from within, like a plant. In contrast, neoclassical plays achieved unity externally and mechanically. Schlegel’s ideas influenced a whole generation of English romantic critics, primarily through the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834). Like Schlegel, Coleridge advanced the concept of organic unity and dismissed the neoclassical unities of time and place. In France, Victor Hugo (1802–1885) emphasized Schlegel’s belief that dramatic genres are primarily distinguished by their distinctive emotions. Hugo claimed that romantic plays, for example, combined sublime with grotesque moods. These and other romantic critics emphasized the power of the imagination, in authors, readers, and spectators. The reader’s engagement in the fiction of a good poem will involve what Coleridge called “that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment that constitutes poetic faith,” a turn of phrase that has been frequently applied to the spectator’s imaginative engagement in performance (Coleridge 1989:306). By 1850, romantic criticism, aided by the ongoing proliferation of scholarly works, journal articles, and newspaper reviews in print, had helped to alter audience expectations at the theatre.

Romanticism, with its emphasis on individual genius, also energized European acting and star power. Although each star crafted a public image to convey the impression that his or her talent was unique, star acting during the romantic era shared many attributes: close attention to the individualizing details of characterization, sudden bursts of powerful emotion, and the display of eccentric behavior. Ludwig Devrient (1784–1832),

who performed in Berlin and Vienna from 1804 into the early 1830s, was known for his novel interpretations of Shakespearean roles. Edmund Kean (1787–1833) electrified London audiences with his eccentricities and raw emotionality. Between the mid-1820s and 1850, the stage-lover roles of Bocage (1797–1863) and the emotional power of Rachel (1821–1858) flourished on the French stage, where romanticism came late.

Romanticism, history, and nationalism

Arguably, romanticism's primary influence on nineteenth-century theatre sprang from its advocates' fascination with national history. When most Enlightenment thinkers looked at history in the eighteenth century, they tried to deduce universal principles about human behavior from the past that they could apply to all nations in the present and future. Romantic historian Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), however, denied that this was possible. In his *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784), Herder argued that every historian's understanding of the past was necessarily subservient to a *Volksgeist*, the spirit of a national people. Not even well trained historians could transcend their particular *Volksgeist* to write universal history because the history of each national people was unique, said Herder. Although Enlightenment notions of the potential universality of historical interpretation remained dominant in much of the West for the rest of the century, Herder's ideas about history and later modifications to it shaped most discussions about cultural nationalism during the nineteenth century. Napoleon's armies had conquered in the name of universal Enlightenment principles, and Europeans oppressed by the French looked to Herder and his followers to justify their nation's opposition to French imperialism. Although Herder himself never argued that one nation or racial group might be superior to others, several of his later disciples claimed that his historicism justified their nationalistic and/or racialized superiority. In general, Herder's legacy animated historians and others to search for the origins of their nation's *Volksgeist*, to explore what

they took to be the unique features of their "imagined community," and to celebrate their own national heroes. Many of Herder's ideas continue to be influential today.

The mix of romanticism, historicism, and nationalism inspired by Herder played out primarily in conservative ways in many countries in nineteenth-century Europe. In England, theatre artists began working with historians to mount more accurate productions of national historical plays, principally the dramas of Shakespeare. This was a part of the movement known as antiquarianism, which aimed to immerse spectators in the spirit of past and exotic cultures through an accurate rendering of their details. Under antiquarianism, Shakespearean productions in England became a means of honoring the genius of the national poet and a conservative understanding of the national past. This began with Charles Kemble's (1775–1854) production of *King John* in 1824. James Robinson Planché (1796–1880) based his costuming of Kemble's actors on scrupulous research into medieval dress, an innovation welcomed by Kemble's bourgeois audience. Planché, a leader in antiquarianism, costumed subsequent Shakespearean productions with attention to historical detail and provided managers with extensive information on the banners and insignia of medieval heraldry (Figure 6.1). William Charles Macready (1793–1873), who dominated the English stage from the 1830s into the early 1840s, popularized the goals of antiquarianism by aiming consistently for historical accuracy in costuming, props, and painted scenery for his major productions. Perhaps the highpoint (or low point) of English antiquarianism came in the 1850s, with the Shakespearean productions of Charles Kean (1811–1868). Aware that many in his respectable audience were interested in historical accuracy, Kean printed lists in his programs of the sources he and his designers had consulted in putting together his productions. Kean even subjected Shakespearean comedy to his pedantry, claiming, for instance, that the tools depicted as a part of Peter Quince's workshop in his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had all been copied from archeologists' discoveries at a Roman ruin. Eighteenth-century

Figure 6.1

James Robinson Planché's historically accurate design for the King's costume in Charles Kemble's 1824 London production of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*.

From Planché's *Costume of Shakespeare's King Henry IV, Parts I and II* (1824), Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington.



nationalists like Beaumarchais and Löwen had hoped that nationalism would teach their countrymen rational deliberation and liberal values. Herder's version of nationalism, however, and its spin-offs in antiquarianism in England and elsewhere, pushed conservative values and an emotional attachment to historical artifacts and ancient customs.

In France, romantic revolutionaries staged nationalistic, open-air festivals to celebrate the victory of the people in the 1790s. Napoleon, however, revived neoclassicism and the theatrical institutions of the old regime soon after he became emperor. After 1815, with the return of the monarchy, reactionaries blocked the rise of romanticism in France. Nonetheless, by 1830, Victor Hugo had announced the goals of a romantic theatre in his preface to his historical play *Cromwell* in 1827, and romantic productions had already achieved some success at the Comédie Française.

The French reactionaries took their stand in 1830 at the Comédie's production of Hugo's *Hernani*. Hugo put together an alliance of conservatives and liberals to

support his romantic *Hernani*, which intentionally violated many of the rules of neoclassicism. After an initial three nights of calm, a shouting and shoving match raged for the remaining 36 performances between the romantics and the reactionaries in the audience, drowning out the actors (Figure 6.2). In the end, most of the Parisian press hailed the romantics as the victors, chiefly for outlasting their opponents, and the romantics mounted many more productions in the 1830s and achieved widespread respectability. French romanticism on the stage mixed easily with melodrama, both in the generally liberal plays of Hugo and in the conservative costume dramas of Alexandre Dumas père (1802–1870), such as *Henri III and His Court* and his adaptation of *The Three Musketeers*.

European cultural nationalists in nations without major states (that is, most of the lands in Germany, Italy, and several language groups in the Austrian and Russian empires) wrote plays and sponsored national theatres to celebrate what they believed was their people's unique culture and glorious past. As we have seen, this tradition



Figure 6.2

Contemporary illustration of the *Hernani* riots, showing the audience and the final scene on stage of Victor's Hugo's play at the Comédie Française in 1830.

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began with Löwen's Hamburg National Theatre in 1765. Later troupes in other German cities also announced their plans for a theatre that might unify the many distinctive dialects and traditions of an imagined "German people," and several dramatists attempted such a synthesis in their plays.

Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805), a celebrated historian as well as a playwright and director, was the most ambitious, complex, and talented of the early German cultural nationalists. Following his early plays during the Storm and Stress movement and his tenure as a professor of history at the University of Jena, Schiller returned to the theatre in 1799 as a playwright at the Weimar Court Theatre. Like Goethe, the director at Weimar, Schiller had reassessed his earlier embrace of Storm and Stress anarchy; his late plays reflect an interest in classical restraint and Enlightenment morality. *Mary Stuart* (1800), for instance, demonstrates the guilt and emotional isolation Queen Elizabeth I of England must face despite her triumph over her rival for the throne, Mary Stuart, who achieves tragic sublimity in defeat. In *The Maid*

of Orleans (1801) and *William Tell* (1804), Schiller investigates the role that moral independence must play in the fight for religious and national freedom. Although later German nationalists often pointed to *William Tell* as the model of the Germanic hero who would unite the nation, Schiller's nationalism was firmly tied to the universal principles of the Enlightenment, not to Herder's historicism. Indeed, the "Weimar classicism" that Schiller and Goethe achieved in their productions at the Weimar Court Theatre remained a model of Enlightenment restraint against the xenophobia that more fervent German nationalists expressed during the nineteenth century. Our first case study for this chapter tests the Weimar experiment against Schiller's concept of a transformative aesthetic experience that could help shape a German nation.

German attempts to establish national theatres and write national history plays set the precedent for later cultural nationalists in the Austrian and Russian empires. As a result of three land-grabs by Russia, Austria, and Prussia, Poland had ceased to exist as a sovereign

state by 1795, but Polish nationalists throughout the nineteenth century pushed for a return to independence and mounted two major revolts against the occupying powers. Many prominent theatre artists were also nationalists, among them Wojciech Boguslawski (1757–1829), who worked to develop a repertory of nationalistic dramas during his intermittent tenure as Director of the National Theatre in Warsaw from 1783 to 1814. While in exile, two of Poland's outstanding poet-playwrights, Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) and Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849), wrote romantic nationalistic plays that gained substantial influence as texts but could not be produced until the twentieth century. Several Hungarian-language plays in the 1840s dramatized the plight of Hungarian peasants, and their cultural nationalists partly succeeded in gaining legitimacy for their heritage within the Austrian empire, which became the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867. In Prague, Bedřich Smetana (1824–1884) composed nationalistic operas about his native Czech lands and rallied public support for a national theatre, which opened in 1881. Cultural nationalists in Finland pushed for more independence from Russia in the last decades of the nineteenth century. National poet Aleksis Kivi (1834–1872) celebrated the Finnish qualities of his peasant hero in *Cobblers on the Heath* (1875), while he and others demanded a Finnish-language national theatre, finally established with a new building in 1902. For the most part, these cultural nationalists followed in Herder's conservative footsteps in their assumptions about the organic uniqueness and potential greatness of their imagined national communities.

Nationalistic stars

Many theatrical stars emerged in Europe who embodied nationalistic aspirations for their audiences. Critics had celebrated some of the best eighteenth-century stars, such as Garrick and Mlle Clairon, as international models of brilliant acting. After 1815, however, many spectators and critics primarily looked to star power to reflect glory on their nation. As commercial theatres played to larger and more popular audiences, many of

these new spectators wanted to applaud stars who performed recognizable nationalistic figures believed to be specific to their imagined community.

On the London stage in the 1820s and 1830s, for example, actor T.P. Cooke (1786–1864) exemplified the manly and sentimental virtues of an idealized English seaman. Cooke had actually served in the English navy against the French and used this experience to promote his image as the archetypal British tar. Among his favorite starring roles were Long Tom Coffin and Harry Hallyard in two nautical melodramas. As William in Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Ey'd Susan* (1829), Cooke found his most popular vehicle, performing it 785 times in his long career. When William returns from three long years at sea, he finds his faithful wife beset by two villains, one of whom is his own Captain. The brave seaman strikes his commanding officer to defend his wife's honor and later is about to be hung when the Captain repents and saves him. Jerrold's melodrama, awash with nautical metaphors, led to several other plays featuring heroic sailors – and eventually to W.S. Gilbert's brilliant parody of the character type in *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878).

In Paris, Frederick Lemaître (1800–1876) came to embody the revolutionary values of heroic freedom and working-class grit denied to most French citizens by a conservative French state between 1815 and 1848. Whereas Cooke upheld the values of the English nation-state, many of Lemaître's vehicles implicitly divided the French state from the nation in order to criticize the repressive regime and champion the French people. Lemaître played a wide variety of melodramatic roles in non-subsidized theatres between 1825 and 1850, the era of his greatest renown. These included a moody and violent gambler, a scorned lover who throws himself out of a window and into the Seine, and the English star Edmund Kean, played by Lemaître as an erratic and tempestuous melodramatic actor. Many critics favorably compared Lemaître to the English celebrity. Novelist Victor Hugo, for instance, praised Lemaître as “capable of movements, utterances, cries that could cause an audience to shudder violently, and of astounding flashes which transfigured him and made him appear in

the dazzling halo of absolute greatness” (Hemmings 1993:221).

Lemaître gained fame initially in 1823 when he played the dashing thief, Robert Macaire. Although he used the character to parody the heroic costuming and broad playing style of early melodrama, he also aimed some pointed barbs at the current French state for its graft and greed. Lemaître worked with the authors of the original piece to fashion a new play in 1834, called simply *Robert Macaire*. In this vehicle, Lemaître’s anti-hero attacked the villainy and hypocrisy of the wealthy, especially those who had profited from the largely futile French Revolution of 1830. Not surprisingly, the authorities eventually banned all versions of Macaire melodramas, including several other plays that only hinted at the character type. This censorship, of course, helped the star to seal his image as the defender of France’s revolutionary heritage. In the 1840s, Lemaître chose several vehicles that also positioned him as a champion of the poor. He appeared, for instance, in a feature role in Eugene Sue’s stage adaptation of *The Mysteries of Paris* in 1844, an exposé of poverty in Paris. The next year, Lemaître starred as a philosophical Parisian rag picker. In one scene, while discussing the sweepings of the day with the audience, Lemaître’s character compared his odds and ends of rubbish with the trash of some new stock issued for gold mines and railways. Like the Macaire plays, these and several other melodramas performed by Lemaître mixed cynicism about wealth and exploitation with popular notions of revolutionary outrage and hope. Lemaître inspired nationalism in many of his spectators by contrasting present corruption with the remembered glories of 1789.

Tragedian Tommaso Salvini (1829–1915) represented Italian pathos, passion, and power for his admirers, both in Italy and abroad. Following the Revolution of 1848 in Italy, Salvini fought the Austrians in defense of the short-lived Roman Republic and later welcomed nationalist Garibaldi and his “Red Shirts” into Naples when they overthrew the Neapolitan Kingdom in 1860. Salvini’s nationalism remained a part of his public

image and colored his international reputation. After performing in Italy for most of the 1860s, Salvini embarked on a series of tours in the 1870s and 1880s to South America, the United States, England, France, Spain, and even Russia (where a young Konstantin Stanislavsky marveled at his power). In addition to a few Italian vehicles, Salvini played Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, and other Shakespearean tragic heroes, performing them all in Italian. Salvini’s Othello (Figure 6.3) overwhelmed American novelist Henry James:

His powerful, active, manly frame, his noble, serious, vividly expressive face, his splendid smile, his Italian eye, his superb, voluminous voice, his carriage, his tone, his ease, the assurance he instantly gives that he holds the whole part in his hands and can make of it exactly what he chooses, – all this descends upon the spectator’s mind with a richness which immediately converts attention into faith and expectation into sympathy. He is a magnificent creature, and you are already on his side.

(Cited in Carlson 1985:61)

For James and for many other spectators around the world, Salvini’s Othello, his most popular role, was more Italian than African. Nationalism was in the business of producing positive stereotypes and Salvini’s Othello fit the bill. If the new Italian nation-state could produce such a combination of power and presence, its national pride was surely justified.

Imperialism and Orientalism in the theatre

As we saw in Chapter 3, empires have ruled much of the world since the days of Babylon and Rome. Empires, ancient and modern, subjugate others through overt conquest or indirect coercion; they structure their societies and economies to benefit the powerful few in the imperial center at the expense of thousands on the periphery. Unlike nationalism, imperialism depends on a universalizing ideology to justify its concentration of



Figure 6.3

Tommaso Salvini as Othello. Despite his darkened skin and Moorish headdress and costume, Salvini retained his own Italian-style moustache for the role.

Photograph © Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C.

power and wealth and to conceal its brute force and political manipulations. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, British, French, and Dutch imperialists told themselves and others that they were extending the rule of law or enlightened civilization to those they vanquished and controlled. Likewise, many white settlers in the United States argued that they were expanding the area of freedom when they exterminated Native Americans to extend African-American slavery. In Europe and the U.S.A., a universal concept of racism often provided a justification for imperial conquest and order. While forcing black, brown, red, and yellow peoples toward “civilization,” many Western imperialists congratulated themselves on their morality. British poet Rudyard Kipling wrote a poem in 1899 entitled “The White Man’s Burden” that voiced the imperialist’s

view of the American take-over of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. In his poem, Kipling enjoined the white men of the world to assist “Your new-caught, sullen peoples, / Half-devil and half-child.”

Northern and Western Europeans, especially, looked upon the Muslim countries in Africa and all of Asia to the south and east of Russia through the lens of Orientalism. A version of racism, Orientalism viewed Turks, Egyptians, Afghans, Indians, and Chinese as indolent, exotic, devious, and irrational – and in need of civilizing. (For further discussion of “Orientalism,” see the case study “Global Shakespeare” at the end of Chapter 12, p. 537.) English imperialists gained influence and control in many Muslim countries, including Egypt, the Sudan, and Pakistan, and they won several

concessions from the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which stretched from the Balkans through Turkey to the Arabian peninsula and to present-day Iran before 1914.

Print culture (including the printing of Kipling's poem) sped the advance of Western imperialism. Print had helped England and France to become nation-states, and now the same standardizations and management efficiencies that print enabled were helping their governing classes to transform much of the world into areas for their exploitation. Behind the Western drive for empire were economic goals, as competing national economies vied for raw materials, cheap labor, and new markets. Print helped to articulate these goals for increasingly powerful capitalists in several nation-states. Printed manifestos, religious tracts, and political speeches also helped the governing classes to justify imperial ambitions to those in their national populations who could support the empire through taxation and military service, but who would reap few of its rewards.

In European theatre, print culture worked in conjunction with visual display to excite audiences about the temptations of an exotic Orient. In starring roles in plays set in the Middle East, the romantic actor Edmund Kean excited substantial interest in the lures of "the Orient" on the London stage during the 1810s and 1820s. Kean performed Turkish kings, Saracen warriors, Arab princes, and half-Greek-half-Turk heroes. In addition, he offered an exotic, Moorish Othello and what critics termed an "oriental" Shylock. Through various make-ups, costuming, physicality, and accents, Kean racialized these roles to such an extent that his critics claimed that he embodied the spirit of each exotic people he portrayed. Several of Kean's star vehicles, including a stage adaptation of *The Bride of Abydos* (1827), a romantic poem by Lord Byron, centered on episodes set in a harem. These scenes not only allowed for parades of female beauty in skimpy attire, but also encouraged the Western imperialist dream of rescuing exotic maidens from evil Muslim rulers. The same romantic, pictorial scenic antiquarianism that was reshaping Shakespearean productions on the

London stage was brought into play in orientalist scenery for such plays to excite English audiences in the wake of British imperial conquests in the Middle East.

The London Exhibition of 1851, the first of many world fairs to present the non-Western world as a marketplace open for Western tourists and capitalists, added to the desirability of "oriental" lands. Like the Exhibition, Victorian plays about British triumphs in the Middle East also celebrated the technology that made imperialism possible. London audiences watched *Freedom* (1882), for example, in which the British invade Egypt to quell the slave trade and save the daughter of a British financier from sexual slavery in a harem. They were assured that the steamships, railroads, and international trade that the white men brought to the brown people of Egypt more than made up for the unfortunate deaths of a few Egyptians. One of the key figures in *Khartoum* (1885) is a newspaper reporter who uses the telegraph and other new modes of communication to tell English imperialists about the dire circumstances in that Sudanese city. The melodrama actually reversed General Gordon's loss of Khartoum to rebelling Islamic tribesmen the year before. Like later adaptations of *Around the World in Eighty Days* and dozens of other imperial plays, these two well-made melodramas presented British domination as the march of white progress and civilization. London theatre managers used the techniques of realism and anti-quarianism for these plays to assure their audiences that their knowledge of the "primitive" cultures around the globe was geographically accurate and anthropologically correct.

Imperialism and nationalism on the Russian stage

Russian imperialists in the nineteenth century looking to the south and east of their empire also shared many of the prejudices of Orientalism. Like the British, they justified their conquests of Georgians, Turks, Kazaks, and native Siberians on the universalist grounds of advancing their civilization and religion. Although many native

Russians turned to nationalism in the nineteenth century, Russia remained an empire under an absolutist Tsar, with little change in its imperial dynamics until the Russian Revolution of 1917. Despite occasional criticism, the Russian theatre mostly supported the regime.

Before the 1820s, neoclassicism dominated the Russian theatre. Tsarina Catherine II (1729–1796) imported French drama and the French theatrical system, built neoclassical theatres, and even wrote her own plays on the French model. Sentimentalism also enjoyed some success with the Russian nobility and the small middle class that constituted most audiences; Kotzebue's plays continued to be popular throughout the nineteenth century, for example. Alexander I (1777–1825) imposed censorship on printed as well as performed drama and a monopoly on theatrical production, which lasted until 1882. As such laws had done in France before the Revolution, these severely restricted theatrical expression, fostered cynicism about the regime, and spawned numerous ways to evade imperial regulations.

Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 sparked a patriotic response in the Russian theatre, which the absolutist regime turned to its own purposes. The fight against France boosted the popularity of V.A. Ozerov's (1769–1816) neoclassical history play, *Dmitry of the Don* (1807), which reminded the Russian nobility of their victory against the Tartars in 1380. Tartars, Turks, and Muslim tribesmen – the historic foes of the Russian empire in its drive to extend its power from Moscow south to the Black Sea and east to China and Alaska – would recur as frequent villains in many nineteenth-century historical epics and melodramas. By the 1830s, neoclassicism had yielded to romanticism in the Russian theatre, but imperial censorship favored the reactionary romantic plays of N.V. Kukolnik (1809–1868) and N.A. Polevoi (1796–1846). Kukolnik's *The Hand of the Almighty Has Saved the Fatherland* preached the divine right of the Tsars to rule the Russian empire. He followed this 1833 piece with other historical epics depicting heroic and paternalistic

Tsars and noblemen, picturesque and grateful serfs, and exotic Muslims in need of Russian Christianity. N.A. Polevoi (1796–1846) blended sentimentalism into Kukolnik's reactionary world of nationalism and imperialism with such epics as *The Grandfather of the Russian Fleet* (1838). These and similar plays helped to justify the Tsar's declaration of war against Turkey in 1853 in another attempt at imperial expansion. However, the Crimean War (in which France and England joined Turkey to defeat Russia) punched holes in the image of Russia advanced by the reactionaries and led to some reforms.

Liberal and radical romantics in Russia such as Alexander Pushkin (1799–1837) had also turned to history for inspiration. But the radical politics of his *Boris Godunov* (1825), a sprawling masterpiece, kept it out of publication until 1831 and off the stage entirely until 1870. Censorship eased somewhat in the 1850s, allowing the staging of poet Mikhail Lermontov's (1814–1841) *Masquerade*, inspired by Shakespeare's *Othello*. However, his play *The Spaniards* – written in 1830 about the Inquisition to expose the repression of Tsar Nicholas I's reign (from 1825 to 1855) – was not published until 1880 and was never performed during the nineteenth century. Russian comic satirists A.S. Griboyedov (1794–1829) in *Woe from Wit* (1824) and Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) in *The Inspector General* (1836) had more success with their attacks on individual bumbler, embezzlers, sycophants, and hypocrites, but their generally conservative politics offered little offense to the ideology of the regime. It would not be until later in the century that playwrights could examine Russian history and publish their dramas without propagandizing for absolutism. In his trilogy of plays about three Russian feudal monarchs, *The Death of Ivan the Terrible* (1864), *Tsar Fyodor Ivannovich* (1868), and *Tsar Boris* (1870), Aleksei Tolstoy (1817–1875) focused on the psychological and ethical ramifications of political rule. Most Russian historical plays, however, like many operas and ballets popular with the regime, continued to fuse together Tsarist rule, Christianity, patriotism, and imperialism until the Revolution of 1917.

Settler colonialism and racism in the theatre of the United States

Although the U.S. conquest and settlement of territories west of the Allegheny Mountains shared some similarities with Russian imperial expansionism, it is more accurate to characterize this historical pattern in North America as settler colonialism. When the British established a few colonies along the eastern seaboard of the continent, they purposefully encouraged British subjects to begin agricultural and (later) commercial ventures that could profit the mother country through trade. Unlike the Spanish and Portuguese, British imperialists did not set out to exploit natural resources and enslave the natives. Their model of imperialism, first practiced in Ireland, proved much more stable and profitable. In brief, this involved the removal or extermination of native peoples from the land, the settlement in the colony of substantial populations from the British Isles, and the importation of new workers (African slaves, in the case of America) to sustain agriculture and trade. British imperialists imposed the same general pattern of settler colonialism in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Although the American Revolution (1776–1783) ended British hegemony in North America, the British governing class had reaped substantial profits from the American colonies for 150 years. In contrast, the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in Latin America foundered and drained the treasuries of their imperial centers.

The society and culture of the new United States reflected its origins as a settler colony. The nation-state inherited slavery, white supremacy, bourgeois capitalism, and Western expansionism from its imperial past. In addition, the legacy of Puritanism, which preached that America might separate itself from the decadence of Europe and lead the world to salvation, reinforced American self-righteousness and the claim of moral exceptionalism. Given this perspective, few Americans for most of the nineteenth century understood their conquest of other peoples as imperialism. Although the U.S. was continuing to practice settler colonialism,

most citizens believed that the incorporation of western lands into their nation-state expanded freedom and democracy, even when these wars increased the reach of chattel slavery. Only when the U.S. conquered territory in the Caribbean and Pacific in the Spanish–American War did many citizens comprehend that their nation-state had embraced imperialism. Two years before the war, however, in 1896, imperialist Theodore Roosevelt explained to his fellow countrymen that their settler colonialism already linked them to the great imperial powers. In *The Winning of the West*, Roosevelt enthused:

The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman. The rude, fierce settler who drives the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under a debt to him. American and Indian, Boer and Zulu, Cossack and Tartar, New Zealander and Maori – in each case the victor, horrible though many of his deeds are, has laid deep the foundations for the future greatness of a mighty people.

(Gaido 2006: 27)

In the period between the American Revolution (1776–1783) and the Civil War (1861–1865), many U.S. playwrights continued to look to London, the former imperial center, for models of good playwriting at the same time that they attempted to enhance American exceptionalism. Royall Tyler (1757–1826), for example, stole most of his plot for *The Contrast* (1787) from Sheridan's *A School for Scandal*, but used it to sharpen the differences between decadent Europeans and virtuous Americans. U.S. playwrights sometimes added stereotypical Irish men and women from the London stage to their plays for comic relief, but also changed some of these figures into black men and women with little alteration of the stereotype. A virtuous people fighting to free themselves from decadent oppressors dominated the plots and sentiments of many American romantic melodramas, including *Metamora* (1829),

The Gladiator (1831), and *Jack Cade* (1835), vehicles crafted to boost the appeal of American-born star Edwin Forrest (1806–1872). The playwrights who designed these engines of patriotism, however, looked to English models for their heroes, situations, and plots. Several dramatists in the 1830s and 1840s wrote plays that justified settler colonialism in the West by depicting Native Americans as either noble representatives of a dying race or as uncivilized savages, fit for destruction by advancing whites. Before the Civil War, British plays usually outnumbered U.S. dramas by ten to one in any given season on most American stages. Not surprisingly, perhaps, President Lincoln was watching an English comedy that poked fun at American provincialism, *Our American Cousin*, when he was shot in 1865.

After the Civil War, many playwrights sought to valorize a white racial identity in contrast to the non-white ethnic groups in the West. In plays like *Across the Continent* (1870), *Horizon* (1871), and *Davy Crockett* (1872), American dramatists mixed marauding Indians, comic Chinese, foolish Irishmen, and white love-interests in melodramatic pot-boilers to celebrate the settlement of the West (Figure 6.4). As in several British plays, the telegraph and the railroad played key roles in exemplifying U.S. imperial power. Several later dramas, including *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905) and *The Great Divide* (1906), used the West as the appropriate setting to explore what they took to be the white essences of American gender roles. Tellingly, the commercial theatre rarely engaged the dramatic possibilities of the Civil War until the failure of Reconstruction had settled the fate of black citizens in the U.S., and even then the plays ignored the issue of slavery that had divided the Union. Bronson Howard (1842–1908), the first U.S. citizen to make his living solely as a dramatist, penned *Shenandoah* for the New York stage in 1888. Its emphasis on romance – with four love-interests across the battle lines – drove home the need to ignore race and reconcile Northern and Southern whites after the war. Other popular Civil War melodramas, such as *Secret Service* and *The Heart of Maryland* (both 1895), offered a similar mix of romance,

sensation, and conventional villainy in well-made melodramas. The need for national unity based on whiteness implicit in these plays evaded and abetted the racism that was increasing against black citizens and many groups of foreign immigrants. Many post-Civil War plays helped to unite white Americans for racism at home and imperialism abroad. These values flourished in patriotic melodramas and spectacles from 1898 until 1914 – during the Spanish-American War, the repression of Philippine independence, economic exploitation in China, and numerous U.S. incursions into Latin American countries to protect American interests.

Theatre riots

Although the new fields of geography and anthropology helped imperialists to fix and classify the peoples they were subjugating, these disciplines rarely predicted “native” opposition. In Europe, many stateless cultural nationalists carried the fight against imperial domination into the theatre by fomenting riots. Theatre riots in the West have a long history, only partly connected to the dynamics of nationalism and imperialism. From the Renaissance through the nineteenth century, audiences rioted for many reasons – to protest an increase in ticket prices, to take sides in feuds between actors, and to denounce the perceived undermining of their status. In addition, rioters rejected slurs against their national identity and protested what they took to be signs of imperial arrogance. Sometimes these causes worked together, as when anxiety about higher ticket prices, lower status, and national identity led to 67 days of rioting at the Covent Garden Theatre in London in 1807. A feud between a British and an American actor, William Macready and Edwin Forrest, was the initial cause of the Astor Place riot in New York City in 1849, but protests against English domination and class privilege also fueled the disturbances. Although the Astor Place Opera House was privately owned, social custom understood all playhouses as a part of the public sphere and consequently an available site for public protest.

Theatre riots in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, like most riots in marketplaces, at worksites,



Figure 6.4

Poster for O.D. Byron's melodrama, *Across the Continent* (ca.1870), that celebrated the technology of western expansion. Note that the steam locomotive is scattering Chinese and Irish workers and is about to run over an Indian on the tracks.

Rephotographed from Richard Moody, *Dramas from the American Theatre, 1762–1909*.

and elsewhere, usually involved noisemaking and fighting, but little property damage and few deaths. Despite fistfights and uproar, no one died in the *Hernani* riots of 1830, for instance. Aware that most people considered rioting a legitimate form of social protest, local elites and the constabulary generally let a riot run its course and only intervened if excessive damage occurred. Rioting waned in the major theatre capitals of the West after 1850, largely because of better policing, the dimming of house lights during performances, and the increasing privatization of cultural life under bourgeois authority.

Occasional riots continued in provincial theatres and at the margins of European empires. Before Ireland gained independence in 1922, it was a part of the British

Empire. Our final case study for this chapter examines the cultural nationalist, anti-imperialist riots that greeted the first week of the Abbey Theatre's production of *The Playboy of the Western World*, by John Millington Synge, in Dublin in 1907.

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CASE STUDY: Friedrich Schiller's vision of aesthetic education and the German dream of a national theatre

By Gary Jay Williams

If we had a national stage, we would also become a nation.

(Schiller 1784)

In recent years, theatre historians have been exploring the relations between theatre/performance and national/cultural identity. This has been fruitful because of theatre's conspicuous place as a mirror of culture in the public sphere. Moreover, theatre often has been recruited to help configure a national/cultural identity, as was the case in Hamburg, Mannheim, and Weimar in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. German-speaking peoples since, more than most, have pursued

aggressively the idea that theatre and the other arts are necessary to the health of a society. In fact, the effort may be rightly characterized as having become a lasting attribute of the culture. The ideas of playwright, historian, and theorist Friedrich Schiller, the subject of this case study, are significant in that pursuit. Schiller launched his ideas from the philosophy of art of Immanuel Kant. That their idealism would be appropriated and perverted to serve the barbarism of the Nazis was a tragedy they could not have foreseen.

This case study explains Schiller's vision, advanced in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), in which he proposes that the aesthetic experience can contribute to the social good in its power to better integrate the human sensibility. He argued that art

could heal the division between reason and feeling, a division to which he believed history had brought humankind. Schiller's proposition is located in the context of the eighteenth-century efforts of German artists (including his) to create a theatre that would be both a voice of German culture and a force in shaping

it. It immediately precedes his years of collaboration with Goethe in their theatre in Weimar. So, this case study speculates on whether his tragedy for the Weimar stage, *Mary Stuart*, probably his finest play, would have contributed to the kind of aesthetic education he hoped would make humankind whole.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Studies in theatre and national/cultural identity

The work in this field is, of course, related to the larger issue of how nations define themselves, an interest spurred by many contemporary developments. Among them have been the struggles of once-colonized nations to redefine themselves; the collapse of the Soviet Union; "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia; the long, violent antagonism between Israelis and Palestinians; and, of course, globalization. The aggressive capitalism that drives globalization has challenged conventional notions of the sovereign nation, now become the "market-state" (see the Introduction to Part IV).

Studies in theatre and national/cultural identity draw on a range of late twentieth-century works in cultural history and philosophy. For example, Raymond Williams and Fredric Jameson articulated the implications for literature and the arts of the classical Marxist critique of capitalism and the oppressive social structures it creates, in which states have been complicit. Michel Foucault made visible the networks of social formations and institutional practices that shape our knowledge. Eric Hobsbawm and others have shown how nations reinvent their "traditions" to try to produce a coherent national narrative. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), much used by theatre historians, offered the concept of nations as imagined political communities. Anderson demonstrated in particular how the rise of print culture was a major force in the imagining of European nation-states after 1700 (see Chapter 6).

Theatre and performance practices can refract agendas and anxieties related to the always-ongoing processes through which peoples construct their cultural or national identity. Carol Sorgenfrei has explained how post-war Japanese theatre artists have adapted ancient Greek tragedies since World War II. Their work reflects the troubled adjustment of Japan from its past as a samurai nation defending Asia to its post-war status as a defeated nation upon which the U.S. left a strong Western imprint (Sorgenfrei 2005). Mechele Leon's *Molière, the French Revolution and the Theatrical Afterlife* reveals the ways in which theatres, literary critics, and biographers reconfigured Molière's plays, his career, and even his physical remains after his death to suit rapidly changing agendas for French literature and nationhood after the Revolution. Patricia Ybarra has shown how the excavated ruins of Mesoamerican civilizations in Mexico have been used in performances for audiences of largely native tourists to suggest an imaginary national heritage (Ybarra 2005).

Scholars have recently been inquiring into the ways that "national" theatres have been involved in configuring a national/cultural identity. Many kinds of ships have sailed under that flag, from the Hamburg National Theatre

to theatres today such as the Royal National Theatre (RNT) of the United Kingdom. As of 1988, the RNT, vying for status and funding with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), won the Crown's permission to describe itself as "Royal" as well as "National," and so is doubly dubbed. Such weighty titles invite interrogation into the mission and practices of such theatres. How are they funded? Do such titles come with the obligation to reinforce the agendas of the government? Are they chartered to preserve the culture's approved dramatic canon and a traditional performance style? Who, or which part of the "nation," do "national" theatres serve? Are there discrepancies between the stated mission of the theatre and its practices? Loren Kruger's *The National Stage: Theatre and Cultural Legitimization in England, France, and America* (1992) shows the contradictions between the pretexts and the actual practices of three distinct twentieth century national theatres, including France's Théâtre National Populaire, that were intended to represent and serve "the people." Mary Trotter, writing on Ireland's Abbey Theatre, places the riots at the 1907 premiere of J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* in the context of conflicting views on Irish nationalism at the time, pointing out that the theatre was itself a site of two nationalist identities (Trotter 2001). (See also the case study following this one.)

This case study, in its discussion of whether Schiller's *Mary Stuart* contributed to the kind of aesthetic education he hoped would make humankind whole, asks questions often raised in studies of theatre and national identity. Did the plays fulfill the mission, the vision of a theatre that aspires to give voice to the culture and/or to be formative in the life of the nation? How can we determine their efficiency in this respect?

Schiller's vision and its context

Dreaming of a theatre that would be a voice of German culture and a force in shaping it, Schiller wrote in his 1784 essay, "The Stage as a Moral Institution":

If all our plays were governed by one principle, if our poets were agreed and allied to this end, if a rigorous selection guided their work and their brushes were dedicated only to national matters – in a word, if we had a national theatre, we would also become a nation.

(Schiller 1985: 217–18).

Schiller's German-speaking world in 1784 consisted of the Germanic regions within the Holy Roman Empire. The "Empire" was a loose amalgam of principalities between the Baltic and northern Italy, each governed by a king or duke in the divine authority

tradition. Its collective power had long since been exhausted in the Thirty Years War between Protestants and Catholics (1618–1648). That infamously long war had ended indeterminately with Protestantism in the north, Catholicism in the south, and ashes everywhere. (The German Empire formed later, under Prussian rule in 1871, and modern Germany evolved from it.) As Schiller was writing his essay, other German intellectuals were actively trying to foster a German consciousness, prominent among them the philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803). As explained in Chapter 6, Herder advocated seeking German cultural identity in the *Volksgeist* – the spirit of the people, embodied, for example, in their folk songs, collections of which he published. His chief example was Shakespeare's use of English traditions and "organic" English characteristics (Williams 1990:17–22). Herder's idea of mystical national roots influenced both Schiller and Goethe and romanticism as a whole.

As we have seen in Chapter 6, Schiller's essay had been preceded by major efforts to create theatres with a German voice in the cities of Hamburg and Mannheim – which had staged Schiller's phenomenally successful play, *The Robbers*. These efforts were possible in part because of a developing middle class that was rising through a strong if autocratic education system; Schiller himself was a product of it. When J.F. Löwen and a group of local businessmen took over Hamburg's existing theatre in 1767 to found what they described as a *Deutsches Nationaltheater* (a German national theatre), Löwen's manifesto called for a theatre that would "raise the dignity of German drama" and "inspire the nation's authors to [the writing of] national dramas" (cited in Sosulski 2007:16). In the commentaries that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing wrote as the theatre's literary advisor (see Chapter 6), he rejected French neoclassical plays as models for German drama (on neoclassicism, see the Introduction to Part II). In a prologue written for the opening night, Madame Löwen envisioned a theatre that would "succor the state to transform the angry, wild man / Into a human being, citizen, friend and patriot" (Fischer-Lichte 2004:152). The passage is a typical expression of Enlightenment idealism, albeit touched with a special fervor about the potential for the transformation of the spectator.

The Hamburg repertoire did not change Hamburg audience preferences for farces and ballets, however. Attendance declined and the idealistic enterprise closed after two seasons. In those two years, 39 of the 111 plays staged by the Hamburg National Theatre were original German-language plays; the rest were foreign plays in translation (Kindermann 1961:523–530). Lessing's final essay in his *Hamburg Dramaturgy* expressed his deep disappointment that the public had not supported the theatre. More importantly to Lessing, the public apparently had no desire to create something distinctly German (Lessing 1962:262). The Hamburg *Deusthetheater* was, however, an inspirational model for the more than a dozen "national" theatres that flowered in other German-speaking cities by 1800.

By the late 1780s and early 1790s, Schiller was working out a systematic philosophy of aesthetics, influenced by Kant, and by 1794 was developing a close friendship with Goethe. (See Chapter 6 for a discussion of his early career.) He had become a history professor at the University of Jena and had written important European histories, including a history of the Thirty Years War. The French Revolution had dismayed German intellectuals; for Schiller, the savagery of the masses after the Revolution showed that the Enlightenment had failed to touch the heart and make humankind whole. In his letters *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller looked to the potential of art to heal what he believed to be the fragmented psyche of modern humankind, to restore the once natural balance between reason and feeling, between intuitive and rational processes. This harmony would never be restored by political means or by revolution. Only through aesthetic experience can modern humankind who has lost its primal unity, become whole: "... it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom" (Wilkinson 1967:9, Letter 2; Sharpe 1991:146–148). The experience of high art can affect the feelings and bring the spectator to a synthesis of reason and feelings, resulting in an integrated sensibility. Kant's philosophy provided some of the basis for this theory, and Schiller, working especially from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, hoped to make a case that art could renew the social order.

In Kant's quest to articulate the first principles of human understanding (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781), he argued that through the use of reason any individual will be able to understand and can live up to the basic principles of knowledge and moral action, without recourse to any metaphysics or the divine. Rather, it is through the data of our experience that our reason derives the laws of nature and human conduct. In his *Critique of Judgment* (1791), he argues that our aesthetic judgments are free expressions of individual autonomy but also must be based in cognitive capacities we share with others if such judgments are to have any claim on their assent (Kant 1971: Sections VII, VIII). Yet this

pleasurable exercise is not constrained by rules. It involves “free play” between the imagination and understanding in a process in which, as Paul Guyer summarizes it, “the imagination satisfies understanding’s need for unity by presenting a form [to us] that seems unitary and coherent . . .” (Guyer 2004: Section 12). The aesthetic work of artistic genius cannot properly be judged by how well it conforms to external standards (such as neoclassical rules). Nor can art be judged by whether it fulfills some external, pragmatic purpose (moral instruction). The aesthetic object has an internal purposiveness, a “purposiveness without purpose” (Kant 1971:XV, 386–387).

Schiller wanted to take this further and attempted to show that high art had the potential to do work in the world, that the aesthetic experience could re-integrate reason and feelings. Schiller certainly agreed with Kant that art did not have moral purpose or effect in any direct, literal way; that is clear in his essay “The Stage as a Moral Institution” (1784), and he is emphatic about it in his *Letters* (Wilkinson 1967:147, Letter 21). He and Goethe disapproved of the domesticated moralizing of eighteenth-century sentimental drama. Schiller’s plays of the 1780s, such as *Passion and Politics* and *Don Carlos*, exploring heady quests for individual freedom in the face of tyrannical aristocracies, nonetheless have a complexity that does not allow them to be reduced to simplistic lessons. Schiller’s theatre would have the poetic dimension of transcendent, classical art. It would have efficacy but of a high order. Influenced by Kant’s notion of the “play-drive” in humankind, Schiller contends that the ultimate form of play is the contemplation of beauty. “Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays” (Wilkinson 1967:107, Letter 15). It is this “play,” this contemplation of the beautiful that will restore in humankind that lost unity of sensibility. Schiller’s reference point here was an idealized vision of an ancient Greece that had allowed for the development of the balanced individual.

Schiller joined Goethe at the Weimar Court Theatre in 1799 for their legendary artistic partnership (Figure 6.5). They made “an open declaration of war on naturalism

in art” and sought to create a poetic theatre where spectators could have the kind of aesthetic experiences that would refine and educate their audiences (Sharpe 1991:253). Their plays and their carefully disciplined production style became known as “Weimar classicism.” Schiller wrote five historical verse dramas for Weimar: *Wallenstein’s Camp* (1799); *Mary Stuart* (1800); *The Maid of Orleans* (1801); *The Bride of Messina* (1803); and *William Tell* (1804), the last before his early death (aged 45) in 1805. “For only great affairs will have the power / To stimulate mankind’s first principles,” wrote Schiller in his prologue for the reopening of the remodeled Weimar with his *Wallenstein’s Camp* (Schiller 1991:9). All of these history plays were staged with historically accurate settings and costumes, the better for audiences to contemplate the magnitude of the issues.

This case study turns now to consider Schiller’s vision in relation to *Mary Stuart*, probably his most enduring work. (In our companion website, www.theatrehistories.com, the discussion questions for this case study also suggest ways to think about Schiller’s *William Tell* in relation to Schiller’s vision.)

Schiller creates his tragedy out of the conflict between the famed sister queens of English history, depicting Mary’s final days leading up to her execution by her sister, Queen Elizabeth. He invents a one-on-one meeting between them for his capstone scene and renders Mary younger than she was in the 1580s. He characterizes Elizabeth as the woman who has a clear understanding that the throne will often require her to sacrifice herself in order to rule with an iron will. Schiller’s Catholic Mary is the charismatic and sometimes impetuous ruler who, following her strong passions, has inspired devotion in her followers but also made profound moral errors. Taking the queens symbolically, as Schiller surely intended – which points to his high expectations of spectators in a theatre – the women might be said to exemplify Schiller’s view of the modern splintered psyche. Neither character is whole – Elizabeth, the rational, political pragmatist, or Mary, the emotionally volatile, charismatic spirit. Mary, confronting the inevitability of her execution at Elizabeth’s hand,

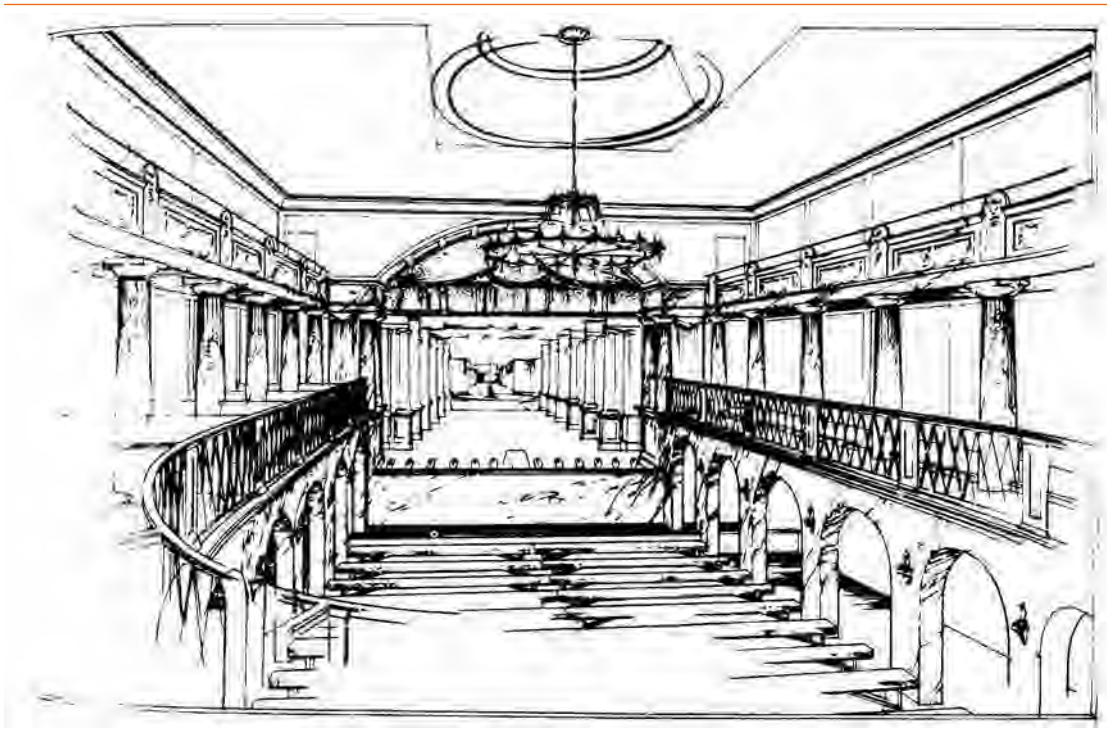


Figure 6.5

Artist's impression of the interior of the Weimar Court Theatre in 1798 in a drawing by Alfred Pretzsch. Prosperous bourgeoisie sat on red-covered benches in the orchestra, poorer spectators upstairs in the side galleries. The duke and wealthy patrons sat in center rear of the gallery, watching from the vantage point of this drawing from which perspective scenery was seen to full advantage. On this stage (approximately 38 feet wide), Schiller and Goethe staged their plays with historical period settings and costumes, an innovation that had wide influence.

Drawing in Philipp Stein, *Deutsche Schauspieler, Eine Bildnissammlung*, Berlin 1907, reproduced in Michael Patterson, *The First German Theatre*. London and New York, Routledge, 1990.

achieves grace and serenity at the end. Schiller attempts to embody theatrically this spiritual transcendence by having Mary receive the sacraments from a priest before going to her death. At the end of the play, Elizabeth, victim of the necessity of being the guardian of order and power, is left on stage alone. Her elder counselor, Shrewsbury, says to her before he leaves her, “I could not / preserve the better part of you. . . . Your rival’s dead.

You have from this day forward / no more to fear, and no more to respect” (Schiller 1998:615).

The tragedy was reported to have been successful at Weimar, as were all of Schiller’s plays. But if we are to hold Schiller to his vision, we must ask if his theatre produced the kind of transformative aesthetic experience for spectators that Schiller envisioned would result in that healing of the divided modern sensibility, the goal of

his program of aesthetic education. German theatre historian, Erika Fischer-Lichte, thinks this unlikely, arguing that few in the Weimar audiences would have been able to resist emotional identification with the major characters. This would have prevented them from achieving the kind of distance that is implied in Schiller's characterization of the contemplative aesthetic experience from which a balanced self would emerge (Fischer-Lichte 2004:197–199). To this, we may add that Goethe's occasional autocratic scolding of Weimar audience members from his box and his heavy fining of actors for "extemporizing" and for unrefined comic business in violation of his stringent *Rules for Actors* suggest that audiences were not always experiencing aesthetic contemplation (Schwind 1977:100, 98). In addition there is the fact that even in idyllic Weimar, during Goethe's administration of the theatre down to 1826, pieces by August von Kotzebue and A.W. Iffland, including melodramas, comedies, and other lightweight works were staged twice as often as plays by Lessing, Goethe, Shakespeare and Schiller (Sosluski 2007:27–28). The idealistic Weimar theatre had to offer popular fare to make its budget, only one-third of which was covered by patron Duke Karl August.

Schiller's dream of an aesthetic experience that could heal the modern psyche probably was never realizable. *Mary Stuart* has had a long stage life, apart from Schiller's philosophy, and a musical life in Gaetano Donizetti's opera (1834). Schiller – and the theatres at Hamburg, Mannheim, and Weimar – did lay a foundation for a relationship with theatre that many Germans today take as a cultural norm. Many Germans today see a vital connection between the work of their government-funded theatres, whose work is often challenging and controversial, and their lives as engaged citizens.

It must also be said that German idealistic convictions about art's efficacy in improving humankind stand in tragic and ironic contrast to the perverted nationalism of the Nazis and their slaughter of millions of Jews in their program to establish a master race. One of the Nazis' immense killing camps for Jews was erected

at Buchenwald, within walking distance of Weimar. Among the tasks assigned to some of the prisoners before they were executed in the gas chambers was the building of wooden boxes for preserving Schiller's papers. Surely the poet would have been horrified that German nationalism had come to this.

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Discussion questions for this case study will be found on our companion website: www.theatrehistories.com. English language editions of Schiller's works are listed below; German editions will be found together with additional readings in our website bibliography.

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CASE STUDY: The *Playboy* riots: Nationalism in the Irish theatre

By **Bruce McConachie**

Background to the riots

In 1900, many factions in Dublin had conflicting views on the future of Ireland, which had been a part of the British Empire for over 300 years. Some groups hoped that the colonial status of Ireland could be improved with no major changes to the status quo. Others urged a

political union with Great Britain, in which the Irish might share in the limited democracy of English subjects. A small minority argued for an immediate revolution against British rule. Several groups looked to a revival of one or several aspects of Irish culture – its mythic heroes, hardy peasants, Catholic tradition, or its Gaelic language – as the key to eventual national independence. Catholic and Protestant groups favoring cultural

nationalism often disagreed on strategies and goals. Many Catholics among the nationalists elevated peasant tradition and strict Catholic morality as the essence of Irishness. Cultural nationalists of Protestant descent, whose families had typically emigrated from England to acquire land and rule the country, also wanted eventual independence. Many of them, however, looked to Ireland's pagan past, before Catholic conversions and English invasions, as a tradition that might unite all Irish people.

Despite their historical and political differences, several groups of cultural nationalists helped to launch the Irish National Theatre Society (INTS) in Dublin. Under the management of actors Frank and W.G. Fay (1870–1931 and 1872–1947), the company opened with a 1902 performance of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* by William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and Lady Augusta Gregory (1852–1932). The National Theatre moved into a refurbished theatre (courtesy of an English heiress) on Abbey Street in Dublin in 1904. As the first President of the INTS, Yeats, whose family was Anglo-Irish, initially fostered plays that sought to bridge the differences among the cultural nationalists. *In the Shadow of the Glen*, a one-act play by John Millington Synge, however, riled the anger of many Catholic patriots in 1903. Synge's play features a peasant heroine who leaves a loveless marriage to gain freedom with a poetic tramp. From Synge's point of view, his protagonist, named Nora to point up her similarity to Ibsen's heroine in *A Doll House*, was justified in sacrificing bourgeois respectability and Catholic morality to embrace a Celtic spirit that will lead to her true liberation.

By the time the Abbey announced its upcoming production of *The Playboy of the Western World*, Yeats had already presented a second Synge play at the theatre, and Catholic nationalists were losing patience with the INTS. Backed by English money, Yeats had altered the governance of the INTS, making it less democratic and concentrating power in the hands of Anglo-Irish writer-directors. A few disaffected members had left the Abbey to form their own theatre, which sought to produce more Gaelic plays. Now Yeats, who was always suspect

among the Catholics for his Anglo-Irish roots, was trumpeting another play by Synge, a dramatist known by the nationalists to harbor anti-Catholic sympathies. Catholic nationalists who went to the opening of *The Playboy* at the Abbey Theatre in January of 1907 expected the worst.

The *Playboy* riots

The first two acts of Synge's comedy proceeded without incident, although the action probably aroused some nationalist anger. On stage Synge's protagonist, Christy Mahon, arrived at a "shebeen" (a small tavern) in County Mayo in western Ireland and told the group of villagers that he had hit his father over the head with a shovel and killed him. Instead of turning him in to the "peelers" (the English police), the villagers celebrated his act of rebellion against an oppressor and praised Christy as a hero. Their adoration transformed the young man, who changed from a shy and fearful peasant into "the playboy of the Western world" in the villagers' estimation. By the end of Act 2, Christy had won prizes at a local fair and the heart of Pegeen Mike, daughter of the local publican. In addition, however, Synge's two acts had revealed another male character, a pious Catholic peasant, as a coward. He also characterized an Irish peasant woman, the Widow Quinn, with a lustiness that affronted respectable nationalists. The comedy of the situation may have kept nationalist anger temporarily in check.

For some in the audience, comedy turned to grotesquerie at the start of Act 3. The elder Mahon, supposedly dead, wandered into the shebeen with a bloody bandage on his head. Christy's heroic killing of his father, his youthful rebellion against authoritarian tradition, abruptly lost its glamor. Synge rubbed salt in this nationalist wound by having Christy pursue his father and kill him "again" to win back Pegeen's affections. Several of the spectators groaned, hissed, or shouted. Then Synge exposed the hypocrisy of the peasants, who had initially praised the patricide. They turned on Christy, tied him up, and vengefully tortured him, which resulted in more hisses and jeers from the

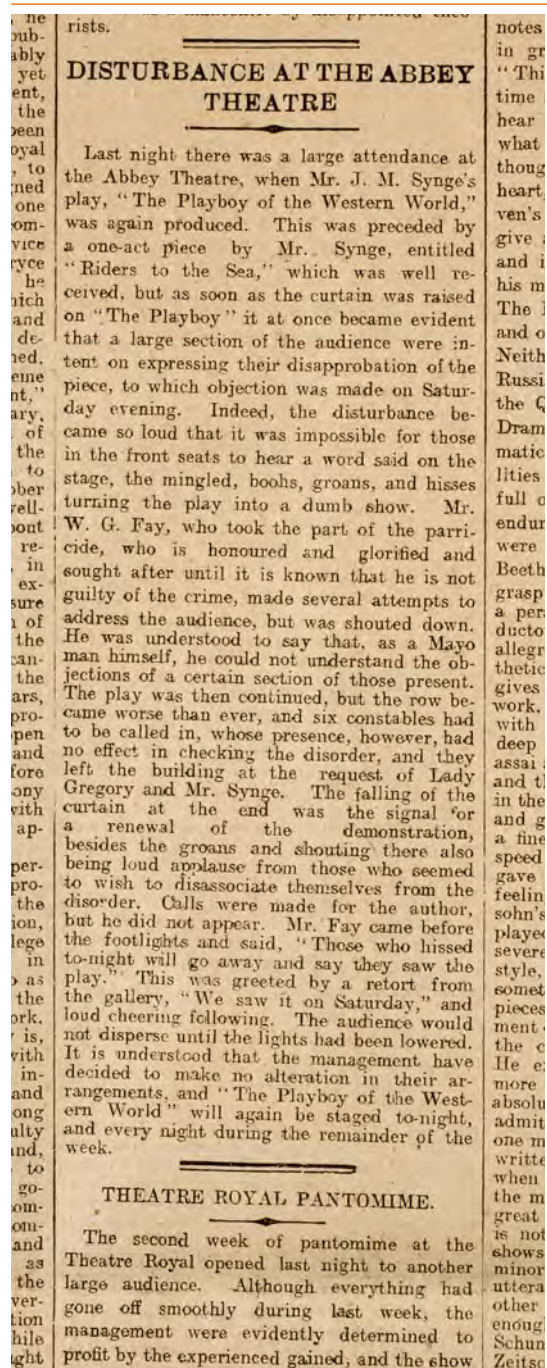


Figure 6.6

Newspaper article from the *Daily Express* of January 1907 describing audience response to Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*.

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nationalists. When Old Mahon returned “from the dead” a second time, bloodier than before, a full-scale riot broke out. Scattered audience members cheered for the play in order to counter the catcalls from the nationalist patriots. This led to more noise and occasional fights among the spectators. Although Synge’s play ended in a comic reconciliation between father and son, the ending was mostly lost on the patriotic spectators, who continued their tumult.

The *Playboy* riots, initially spontaneous, hardened into organized protests and continued for a week in the theatre. As one eyewitness later recalled, “The first-night demonstration had set up prejudices and currents of feeling.” In the course of the week, “Some, hearing that the peasant was maligned in the play, came to hiss; others came in order to support, to protect, as they thought, the challenged freedom of the theatre. Still others, hearing the peasant was maligned, came to applaud the maligners” (Levitas 2002:127). To quiet the house, co-manager W.G. Fay called in police protection, which eventually reached 50 English officers. Synge and Gregory dismissed them for fear of exacerbating the riot, and, although the uproar subsided, Irish patriots from several factions condemned the theatre for resorting to British imperial power to shield the INTS. Newspaper coverage of the nationalist rioters and the theatre’s response ran the gamut of political opinion, with a number of editorialists finding much to blame on both sides (Figure 6.6).

Explaining the riots

Any explanation for the riots and the responses they provoked must put these events in the context of British colonial power and Irish aspirations for independence. Historians agree that while Yeats, Synge, and the nationalist rioters at the Abbey all opposed imperialism, they and the groups they represented had had diverse experiences with British oppression and sought very different solutions to the problem of Irish nationhood. It is clear that conservative, Catholic patriots and their allies in the press initiated and sustained the rioting. But historians differ as to the relative importance of the factors in the performance that set them off.

In his book *The Politics of Irish Drama*, Nicholas Grene examines four causes of the rioting without taking a position on their relative importance. First, he notes that portions of Synge’s dialog (Acts 2 and 3) referring to a woman’s undergarment, known then as a “shift” (a chemise), scandalized conservative members of the audience. In tandem with the suspiciously loose sexual morality of some of the female characters in the play, this affront to the purity of Irish Catholic womanhood roused the anger of the patriots. Second, Grene points to Synge’s indictment of his peasants’ casual acceptance of crime. The English had long condemned the Irish as a lawless people, and Synge’s comedy, which showed peasants glorifying a patricide, seemed to confirm this negative stereotype. Third was the locale of the play. Synge had set *The Playboy* in western Ireland, an area celebrated by the nationalists for its pure Irish peasant culture, uncontaminated by British rule. Yet Synge’s western peasants seemed to be more immodest, murderous, and vengeful than the typical Irish lackey of English power. Finally, Grene notes that the comedy parodied and profaned Catholic belief. With sympathetic characters denouncing piety, deriding priests, and asking blessings for murderers, *The Playboy* seemed to turn Catholicism upside down.

Most critics agree that each of Grene’s four causal factors played some role in sparking the rioting that occurred. But historians are usually uncomfortable with a simple listing of several causes. They generally attempt to find one fundamental reason that can explain an event or at least an explanation that relates the chief causal factors to each other. What was the most important reason for the *Playboy* riots? Might this reason enable the historian to fold other causes, including the four mentioned by Grene, into a broader explanation?

The search for an overarching cause often sends the historian back to the primary documents of the event for clues. In this case, two comments from contemporaries offer suggestive evidence. According to W.G. Fay, the actor who played Christy at the Abbey in 1907, Synge’s play angered the nationalists because it mounted

“a deliberate attack on the national character” (Ayling 1992:144). In a letter to the editor of a newspaper in Dublin, a spectator who had attended *The Playboy* during the week of rioting wrote: “Sir, if Mr. Synge wishes to turn the ‘Sinn Fein’ howlers [that is, the Catholic nationalists] into an applauding claque, he need only write a play portraying the Irish peasant as a flawless demi-god . . .” (Kilroy 1971:54). Together, these comments imply that “the national character” of Ireland, an idealized image of a male Irish peasant, was at stake for the Catholic patriots who rioted. If these clues to the puzzle of causality are to yield an understanding of a fundamental cause of the rioting, however, the historian needs a valid approach to the abstraction, “national character.”

Recall that Grene noted four major causes of the riots. From the point of view of cognitive linguistics, each of these explanations may be linked to a prototype effect that would have annoyed, embarrassed, and/or angered nationalist spectators. Two of Grene’s causes are tied to *The Playboy’s* attack on Irish Catholicism. A close reading of the play reveals that Synge set up several male and female Catholic characters as typical examples of the Irish nation. All of them have character flaws arguably related to their Catholicism – cowardice and blaspheming for the men and confusion about healthy sexuality for the women. Christy’s love interest, Pegeen Mike, for example, first rejects Catholic strictures about romance and then furiously embraces them when torturing Christy. Grene also pointed to Synge’s satire on Irish peasant culture. While the nationalists glorified the prototype of the

heroic peasant of western Ireland, *The Playboy* revealed these paragons of Irishness as lawless avengers. If the peasants of Synge’s County Mayo were typical examples and submodels of a heroic, Catholic nation, the cognitive logic of the prototype effect reduced all of the nationalists in the audience to immoral, worthless fools.

The ripple effects of Christy Mahon’s unmasking as the ideal representative of young Ireland must have been especially galling for the nationalists. Having gradually inflated his heroic balloon over two acts, Synge pinched it to make it squeal for much of Act 3, and then popped it at the end. All that Christy’s slaying of his father had come to represent – righteous youth against repressive age, the present breaking free from the past, even Ireland refusing submission to English imperialism – all of this idealism petered away with the appearance of Old Mahon and Christy’s comic attempt to kill him “again.” When, toward the end of Act 3, Pegeen told Christy that “there’s a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed” (Synge 1964:129), few amid the increasingly boisterous audiences probably heard the words spoken by the actress. Nevertheless, Pegeen’s memorable line underscored the prototype effect that upset the Catholic patriots. Within *The Playboy*, the speech reduced Christy’s attempt on his father’s life from an adventurous tale to a murderous attack. On the national political scene, Synge had exposed the Catholics’ heroic image of themselves as a dangerous fraud. In the end, Christy and his father simply return to their narrow, repressive life together. Christy is neither a “playboy” nor a Christ figure (as his name implies) for the salvation of Ireland.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Cognitive linguistics

When writers, speakers, dramatists, and others use the term “national character,” they generally invoke social stereotypes, ideal cases, salient examples, and other kinds of prototypical categories. This occurred as well in *The Playboy*. Synge painted one male character negatively as a social stereotype of the pious Catholic, for instance. He carefully crafted Christy Mahon to emerge by the end of Act 2 as an ideal case of the young, rebellious Irishman. Synge also used Christy to suggest several salient examples – actual people who had performed similar deeds that were well known to the audience. In a widely publicized case in 1898, a son had murdered his father in a violent

rage, and Synge's dialog drew attention to this parallel with his protagonist. Each of these kinds of categories – social stereotypes, ideal cases, and salient examples – became possible prototypes of the Irish national character for the audience responding to the world of the play. Other categories with possible relationships to nationalism also abound in *The Playboy*: typical examples (such as the garrulous publican), paragons of morality (the strict village priest), and submodels of an ideal Ireland (all of the County Mayo peasants).

Cognitive linguists study such categories and their use in everyday discourse. This kind of linguistics is a part of the wider field of cognitive studies, which has already provided the basis for one of our previous interpretive approaches. In the case study on classical Greek theatre (see the end of Chapter 2, p. 88), we used an approach within cognitive studies to gain historical understanding of the spatial dynamics of the initial performance of *Oedipus the King*. Here, cognitive linguistics can help us to understand how Synge's mix of characters and categories helped to provoke the riots that greeted his play.

According to cognitive linguist George Lakoff, the mental processing of people, things, and events into categories is natural and inevitable. As humans evolved over thousands of years, they relied on categories to simplify information about the world, make quick judgments, and store knowledge. As a result, the need to categorize became a part of humankind's mental equipment. Humans invariably think in terms of typical examples, ideal cases, submodels, and stereotypes. This does not mean that some consequences of categorizing are inevitable, however. People have the ability to complicate and overturn initial racist and sexist stereotypes, for example, through other modes of categorizing.

Through experimentation, Lakoff and other cognitive linguists have found that some examples in all categories will appear to be more central to that category than others. People identify a robin, for instance, as closer than a penguin to the essence of the category "bird." Similarly, some versions of the color red will register in human experiments as more prototypical of "redness" than other shades. All categories, then, have their prototypes, those best examples that tend to be perceived as more typical of the category than others. As we have already seen, humans often use several kinds of prototypes to specify their categories – ideal cases, social stereotypes, salient examples, paragons, submodels, and typical examples.

Humans process the notion of "national character" through these same prototypical categories. In any performance that raises questions about the "national character" of a people, especially for an audience vitally concerned with defining who is "inside" and who is "outside" of that category, spectators will examine the cast of characters for those who exemplify one or another of its prototypes. Once spectators have been guided to select a character or group of characters as a social stereotype, a paragon, or any other prototype of the nation, they will make generalizations about other members of that nation on the basis of that best example. This is what Lakoff and others term a "prototype effect" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:40–45). If a play (or a novel, or a poem) presents an ignorant drunkard as a national stereotype, for example, others who identify as members of that nation will likely be outraged by the portrait because the "prototype effect" leads them to take it as an insult to themselves.

Because prototypical characters on stage exert immense power over the imaginations of their audience, historians can deploy these ideas about categorization to seek the cause of the *Playboy* riots. It is clear that Synge's characters represented several kinds of national prototypes for the Catholic cultural nationalists in the audience at the Abbey Theatre in 1907.

Questions about similar prototypes could be asked of many controversial theatrical events that engaged significant categories for their spectators.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 What were the major prototypical categories presented through the characters in a play performance?
- 2 What point of view did the dramatist and the actors take toward those categories?
- 3 Was it the same point of view understood and anticipated by most of the audience? What generalizations about other members of the category resulted from the prototype effects of this experience? Did most spectators welcome or condemn these prototype effects?

Key references

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com.

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PART III

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Edited by **Bruce McConachie**

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**PART III: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE IN MODERN
MEDIA CULTURES, 1850–1970**

THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

Melodrama
Minstrel shows
Variety shows,
revues
Circuses
Parsi, India
Beijing Opera – *jingxi*
World fairs,
exhibitions
British pantomime
George II, Duke of
Saxe-Meiningen
Emergence of
the director
Richard Wagner
Pictorial scenery
Henry Irving
Sarah Bernhardt
Plays: Boucicault
Robertson, Scribe,
Dumas *films*

1850 to 1874

Realism
Naturalism
Electric stage
lighting
André Antoine
Otto Brahm
Avant-garde
theatre (1st wave)
A. Lügne-Poë
Symbolism
K. Stanislavsky
Moscow Art
Theatre
Shimpa
Plays: Zola, Becque
Ibsen, Strindberg,
Maeterlinck, Pinero,
Hauptmann, Wilde,
Barry, Chekhov,
Jarry, Tagore

1875 to 1900

Aesthetic
Movement
Operettas, musicals
Takarazuka
Expressionism
Futurism
Constructivism
Surrealism
Dadaism
Blue Blouse troupes
Tsubouchi Shōyō
Shingeki
Gordon Craig
Max Reinhardt
Jacques Copeau
U.S. “little theatres”
Plays: Shaw,
Robbins, Wedekind,
Synge, Granville-
Barker, O’Neill
O’Casey

1901 to 1924

Realism dominant
Europe, U.S.
High modernism
Modernist scene
design
Musicals on B’way
Jacques Copeau
Antonin Artaud
Brecht, Berliner
Ensemble
Socialist realism,
Soviet Union
People’s Theatre,
Argentina
Federal Theatre
Project, U.S.
Yangge, China
Plays: Pirandello,
Brecht, Wilder
Sartre, Eliot,
Garcia-Lorca

1925 to 1949

Tyrone Guthrie
Laurence Olivier
Musicals, B’way,
West End
Kerala social drama
England ends stage
censorship
Radical theatres
in U.S., Japan
Latin America
Yangbanxi,
China
Plays: O’Neill, Miller,
Wilder, Williams,
Beckett, Mishima
Ionesco, Hansbury,
Baraka, Carballido,
Noer, Albee, Genet,
Mrozek, Rendra
Pinter, Friel, Shaffer,
Weiss

1950 to 1970

WORLD EVENTS, MEDIA

Queen Victoria’s
reign 1837–1901
British rule in India
French in Africa,
South Asia
European
revolutions of 1848
Railroads, telegraph
Charles Darwin
U.S. Civil War
Tokugawa era ends;
emperor restored
Japan open to
the West
German empire
U.S. expansion
Russian expansion
Photography
Verdi, Wagner,
Tchaikovsky

European
nations divide
up Africa
Indian National
Congress
Japan victor in 1st
China–Japan war
Spanish–American
War
Boer War
Telephone, radio
Phonograph
Light bulb
Linotype machine
Newspaper photos
Automobile
J. Strauss II,
Debussy, Ravel
Gilbert & Sullivan
Impressionism

Sigmund Freud
Mexican
Revolution
Japan in Korea
Republic of China
Uprising, Ireland
Great War
Vladimir Lenin
Russian
Revolution
League of Nations
Soviet
Communism
Airplanes
Motion pictures
Mahler, Bartok,
Schoenberg,
Williams, Stravinsky
Porter, Gershwin
Cubism, Picasso

Hirohito, Emperor
World economic
depression
Spanish Civil War
World War II
Mass slaughter
of Jews by Nazis
U.S. nuclear
weapons used
Europe, Japan
recovery
Independence
for India
China becomes
communist
Cold war
Radio as mass
medium
Weil, Barber,
Copland

Korean War
Soviet Sputnik
satellite
U.S. Civil Rights
Movement
Soviets in Hungary
Castro’s Cuba, 1959
African Independence
Movement
Berlin Wall up, 1961
Cuban missile crisis
Kennedy assassinated
Vietnam War
War protests, riots
China’s Cultural
Revolution
Television
1st Disneyland, U.S.
Presley, Beatles, Cage
Abstract expressionism

Timelines 3. The entries represent benchmarks relevant to themes in Part III. We encourage correlations between the World Events Media listings, and the Theatre and Performance listings. Entries are for reference, and some may not be explicitly discussed in Part III, given our thematic organization. For subject and name searches, see the index.

PART III

Theatre and performance in modern media cultures, 1850–1970

INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL CHANGES AFTER 1850

Between 1850 and 1970, immense economic, political, and cultural changes altered theatre-going for much of the world's population. These changes included the expansion of capitalism in the Industrial Revolution, the ravages of imperialism across the globe, the calamity of the Great War (1914–1918), the Russian Revolution in 1917, the rise of totalitarianism, World War II (1939–1945), the Holocaust, the invention and use of nuclear weapons, the emergence of new nations from imperial domination after 1945, and the cold war. These markers of major change only begin to sum up the alterations that rocked the world over these 120 years.

Slower changes transforming the everyday lives of millions of people compounded these crises. Improving technologies revolutionized transportation from wood-and-sail to steel-and-steam power, culminating in the petroleum-driven technologies of the automobile and airplane. Massive emigration and immigration, not only across nations and oceans but also from countrysides to cities, resulted in a sharp rise in urbanization. In 1800, only 17 cities in Europe had a population of 100,000 or more. By 1890, there were 103 cities with populations exceeding 600,000 and Paris, Berlin, London, and Vienna had already surpassed one million. So had Tokyo, which burgeoned as a result of Japanese imperial policies favoring urbanization and the rapid industrialization of the country after its opening to the West in 1868. The new technologies of the age – locomotives, steamships, steel mills, power plants – stood out sharply in these urban cityscapes.

New modes of communication – the telegraph, photograph, and telephone early on, plus film, radio, and television by 1950 – also proliferated. By 1920, the dominant medium of communication in the West had shifted from printing to photography and its many spin-offs in magazines, picture albums, slides, and films. For much of the rest of the world, however, where the printed word had barely altered customary forms of orality and writing, both print and photography revolutionized perceptions of reality for those people who had access to them. In India, for example, the widespread dissemination of photographs and printed material in English led to the popularity of Western forms of spoken drama that differed significantly from India's traditional dance-drama. While new modes of visual communication gradually altered the dominance of print, new audiophonic communication technologies (media meant for the ear, such as the telephone, the phonograph, and the radio) offered more inward and immaterial experiences.

Twentieth-century theatre to 1970 would have been very different without the perceptual realities for artists and spectators that were established by photography, radio, and film. This introduction focuses primarily on the ways in which the dominance of photography and early film transformed the theatre in Japan and the West between 1850 and 1930. Secondly, we will examine how the new audiophonic media shaped theatrical responses that conflicted with those of the dominant visual media. Subsequent chapters and case studies in Part III will discuss important ramifications and developments of this media context in four areas of theatre history during the 1850–1970 period: popular entertainment, the avant-garde, modernism, and political theatre.

Photography and audiophony in the theatre

Many of the tensions in modern theatrical practice after 1900 can be traced to conflicts between the kinds of realities induced by photographic and audiophonic modes of communication. Different media tend to privilege different elements of reality; they create different “reality effects” for those immersed in them. A person who experiences many visual media, for example, will tend to emphasize visual elements as the primary component of reality. In contrast, for those attuned to music and the radio who “think with their ears,” reality will primarily become a place of sounds.

Henry Fox Talbot invented photography in Britain in 1839 and, by the 1860s, photographic studios were flourishing in all the major cities of Western Europe and North America. According to historians of the medium, most Westerners believed that the photograph did not merely represent reality, as might a painting or a work of literature; the photo actually transcribed the real. Talbot, in fact, claimed to have “discovered” photography, much as a physicist might claim to have discovered a new process in nature. Indeed, the optics and chemistry of

photography clearly distinguish it from most other art forms. Although a human being must point the camera and develop the film, the material world plays a central role in photography because without physical objects and light, no photographic image is possible. For this reason, photography tends to validate a materialistic reality effect. People immersed in a world of orality, writing, or print could imagine spiritual and mental realities without material form. Viewers of a photograph, however, were induced to believe that the real world “out there” was limited to what they could see with their eyes or to what a camera might take a picture of.

Photographs were ubiquitous in Japan and the West by 1900. By the turn of the century, the police were taking mug shots, tourists used new Kodaks to snap their travels, war correspondents and junior officers photographed battles, and Queen Victoria had translated herself and the objects of her reign into thousands of photographic images. While photography validated the material solidity of these realities for contemporary witnesses, some tried to use photography to prove the existence of an immaterial, spiritual realm. So persuasive, objective, and “real” was the photographic image that many enthusiasts accepted the validity of “spirit photography,” images ostensibly produced on photographic plates by spirits from beyond the grave.

Most Japanese, Americans, and Europeans, however, simply accepted the material reality effects that photography seemed to validate. We are still living with the cultural consequences of this acceptance. In 1850, many still believed in transcendent and immanent realities that were not material, such as a Christian God or a Spirit dwelling inside every person, guiding them toward the Right and the True. Photography was not alone in undercutting such faith; new scientific developments, especially the theory of evolution advanced by Charles Darwin and others, also questioned the reality and effectiveness of immaterial forces. The social Darwinists, in fact, even twisted Darwin’s conclusions to argue that all of life was only a competition for material goods. For them, “the survival of the fittest” meant that only the ruthless and their progeny would survive. The rise of European socialism, based in Karl Marx’s materialist view of history, and the proliferation of products emanating from industrial capitalism also led Westerners to wonder about the existence of realities that could not be seen or photographed. Photography unsettled political loyalties as well. Suddenly a photo of a monarch or an emperor made it apparent that the ruler had a body just like everyone else. The materiality of photography, together with other historical forces, helped to level political hierarchies, erode religious faith, and advance capitalist consumerism. By 1930, most Westerners and many people across the globe perceived a much more material world than anyone imagined possible in 1850.

At the end of the nineteenth century, however, audiophonic media were challenging the implicit materialism of photography. The telephone and

phonograph, invented in 1876 and 1877, separated the human voice from the materiality of the body. Writing, print, and photography had made it possible for people to communicate across distances, but audiophonic inventions carried the intimacy and immediacy of the human voice on invisible sound waves that lacked the tangible concreteness of previous media. In the past, “hearing voices” had been a sign of religious possession or mental instability, and these traditional attributes clung to the affects of the new audiophonic media. Audiophonic modes of communication revived interest in religion, altered musical composition, and played on age-old fears of “others.” It also tended to validate belief in the new psychoanalytic techniques of Sigmund Freud and his followers. Freud, in fact, understood phonographic recording as a metaphor for part of the work of the analyst. Convinced that sound revealed the immaterial realities of the unconscious mind, Freud urged the accurate recording of patient vocalizations as the first step in a psychoanalytic session. He advised psychoanalysts to transcribe all of the vocal mistakes of the patient in order to understand her or his psychological problems.

The rapid rise of radio broadcasting throughout the West after 1920 ensured that notions of reality that could not be photographed would continue to entrance the public. On popular radio broadcasts in the United States, for example, listeners willingly suspended their disbelief to accept the reality of ghosts, immaterial visitors from outer space, and shadowy detectives who could see into the minds of villains through a kind of psychoanalytic X-ray vision. Disembodied voices worked their way into other media as well, especially after 1930, when authoritative voices related flashbacks in films and narrated major events in early television series. Although “the talkies” and television generally relied on visual codes deriving from photography for communicative coherence, audiophonic cues (musical, vocal, and special effects) continued to shape these media in significant ways. While most films and television programming effectively blended visual and audio codes, the conflict between the materiality of the photographic and the immateriality of the audiophonic continued beneath the surface of their signs and sounds.

Spectacular bodies on the popular stage

Photography and its materialist reality effects had an immense influence on popular entertainment from 1850 until the start of the Great War (1914). Popular audiences have always enjoyed spectacular bodies – bodies that are meant to be looked at – but the proliferation of photographic bodies after mid-century excited this interest even more so. At the same time that Western and Japanese imperialists, driven by the need for raw materials and new markets, were conquering native peoples around the world, their photographers were publishing images of “primitive” types ripe for exploitation. Photography was as much a tool of

imperialism as were print media, steam ships, high explosives, and machine guns. Numerous photographs depicting a corrupt and backward Korean people in need of Japanese civilization, for instance, preceded the Japanese annexation of Korea in 1910. A 1910 Japanese play, *Korean King*, represented all of Asia in the same way; the play suggested that other Asians would welcome Japanese imperial conquest as progress. In a related development, the American minstrel show involved white performers “blacking up” to embody childish images of African-Americans (see the case study following Chapter 7, p. 341). The minstrel show spread from the United States, where it originated in the 1840s, throughout the British Empire. In many instances, minstrelsy helped to confirm the racism that justified imperialist oppression.

Other spectacular bodies – strongmen, burlesque queens, contortionists, exotic dancers, and “freaks” of all kinds – peopled the variety stages, circuses, and festivals of all the major cities in Europe and North America (Figure III.1). While these types of entertainment were hardly new, they did draw new audiences, often a mix of working-class and bourgeois spectators, into huge auditoriums for vaudeville, burlesque, music hall, and other forms of variety theatre before the Great War. Likewise, musical comedy and revue flourished before the war, forms of entertainment that had developed from both popular and elite genres and relied on spectacular bodies as well as music for their success. Ever since the “burlesque



Figure III.1

U.S. vaudeville star Eva Tanguay, in a publicity photo for a 1908 performance in Kentucky.

© Special Collections, University of Iowa Library, Iowa City.



Figure III.2

An 1880 photograph of Bernhardt as Marguerite Gautier in *The Lady of the Camellias*, one of her greatest romantic roles.

© V&A Images, Victoria and Albert Museum.

extravaganzas” of the 1850s – concoctions of music, parody, dance, melodrama, and spectacle – the chorus girl had offered her own spectacular body as an element of sexual allure on the popular stage. Although Florenz Ziegfeld’s (1869–1932) musical revues, which began in 1907, sought to glorify the “American Girl,” the thousands of choristers that danced across Western stages before the Great War received more salacious looks than social esteem from male spectators. Photographs of chorus girls and other spectacular females of the theatre, in various states of undress, were popular pornographic items after 1850.

Photography also widened the public appeal of theatrical stars. By the 1860s, it was common for stars to arrange for the sale of small pictures of themselves, typically costumed in the roles of their favorite characters, at their performances. After 1900, photographic images splashed on posters and throughout newspapers told the public that a star had hit the town. Photos helped make possible the great era of international stars who toured from Tokyo to St. Petersburg between 1875 and 1914. National-turned-international stars Tommaso Salvini and Eleanora Duse (1858–1924) from Italy, Henry Irving (1838–1905) and Ellen Terry (1847–1928) from England, Kawakami Otojirō (1864–1911) and his wife Kawakami Sadayakko (1872–1946) from Japan, and Edwin Booth (1833–1893) and Richard Mansfield (1857–1907) from the United States performed (in their native languages) before millions of fans. International starring on this scale had not been possible before telegraphs, railroads, and steam ships allowed agents to schedule theatres, plan mass publicity campaigns, and transport their precious cargoes to the desired site on the right night with efficiency and economy. Photography, among several other technologies, helped make the international star a possible and very profitable commodity.

From among these luminaries, most critics around 1900 would likely have ranked Sarah Bernhardt (1844–1923) at the top of the firmament (Figure III.2). Following her success at the Comédie Française and elsewhere, Bernhardt quit the Comédie at the height of her popularity in 1880 to form her own company for a series of international tours, primarily to England and the U.S. During a career of more than 60 years, Bernhardt performed over 130 characters, nearly half of them written specifically for her. Twenty-five of her 130+ roles were male, Hamlet among them, her cross-gender role-playing facilitated by her thin body and flexible, yet powerful voice. Novelist Anatole France suggested some of the chief reasons for her magnetic attractiveness in male roles in a comment about her performance as a young poet in Alfred de Musset’s (1810–1857) *Lorenzaccio* (Figure III.3).

We know what a work of art this great actress can make of herself. All the same, in her latest transformation, she is astounding. She has formed her very substance into a melancholy youth, truthful and poetic. She has created a living



Figure III.3

Poster of Sarah Bernhardt in the title role of the young male poet in Alfred de Musset's *Lorenzaccio*. Bernhardt played 25 male roles during her career, including Hamlet and the Hamlet-like Lorenzaccio. The poster is by Alphonse Mucha, the Czech artist whose distinctive style became known as *Art Nouveau*. Bernhardt signed a six-year contract with Mucha for a now famous series of posters of her.

Courtesy of FulcrumGallery.com.

masterpiece by her sureness of gesture, the tragic beauty of her pose and glance, the increased power in the timbre of her voice, and the suppleness and breadth of her diction – through her gifts, in the end, for mystery and horror.

(Gold and Fizdale 1991:261)

Bernhardt, who played more male roles later in her career, once said that a woman was better suited to play roles like Hamlet or L'Aiglon than a young man who could not understand the philosophy or an older man who does not have the look of the boy. “The woman more readily looks the part, yet has the maturity of mind to grasp it” (Ockman 2005:41–42).

Her millions of devoted fans returned often to enjoy *la divine Sarah*, not only for her latest physical and vocal transformations, but also for her conscious sculpting of self and role into a “living masterpiece” of art. Further, Bernhardt found numerous ways of sharing her emotions with the audience, inducing them to feel the same “mystery and horror” experienced by herself as the character. Due to a backstage accident, Bernhardt had to have her right leg amputated in 1915, at the age of 70. Nonetheless, she continued to perform, often seated or completely static, still thrilling spectators with her vocal power, range, diction, and emotional expressiveness. Despite her many photogenic qualities, Bernhardt may be best remembered for her voice. 

The rise of realism in the West

The most important impact of photography on Western theatre after 1850 was the rise of stage realism. Since the 1830s, the romantic interest in history and exotic cultures had excited audience interest in authentic costuming and properties for historical melodramas, Shakespearean productions, and escapist spectacles. Photography focused a similar interest on more mundane realities, especially the ways in which contemporary dress and domestic lifestyles marked class, regional, and economic differences among various populations. This led to a greater demand for realistic costuming and stage properties. Early nineteenth-century managers in the West often required actors to purchase their own costumes, a costly expense for women actors especially, and a practice that defeated the possibility of uniformity in costuming style. By the 1880s, however, most producers purchased costumes for their entire casts to ensure a measure of authenticity for contemporary as well as historical and exotic productions.

Scenically, most romantic and melodramatic productions in the 1850s continued to rely on flats and backdrops, painted in perspective, to evoke the illusions of interior and exterior space. Their scenic artists occasionally deployed three-dimensional scenery, but stages rigged for chariot-and-pole or wing-in-groove changes were ill-equipped to handle such practical units on a regular basis.

Consequently, interior stage settings before mid-century rarely looked like real rooms. The flats did not enclose stage space and the actors could not use the two-dimensional furniture painted on the canvas walls. Although the “box set,” which offered the illusion of three walls with realist doors and windows, was introduced on the London stage in the 1830s, it, together with real furniture, was not in regular use until the 1890s.

The 50 years between 1870 and 1920 witnessed a revolution in Western stage technology. The demand for scenic spectacles put increasing pressure on the conventional means of changing scenery. Initially, many theatres added “cuts” in the stage floor through which flats could be raised and lowered and extra room in the “fly” space above the stage, all to accommodate more two-dimensional, changeable scenery for melodramatic and exotic spectacles. Electrical stage lighting, however, which began in the late 1870s and was mostly complete by 1900, made two-dimensional illusionism appear unreal. Further, electrical illumination heightened the differences between black-and-white photographs, the new measure of “the real,” and the conventions of painted scenery, which now looked quaintly superficial and immaterially flimsy by comparison. This led theatre architects and managers to abandon the older systems of scene changing, dominant in the West since the seventeenth century, for a flat stage with clear access from the wings. The elevator stage was one method of shifting three-dimensional units and real props and furniture. The 1879 Madison Square Theater in New York, for example, rigged elevators for two complete stages, one above the other, to allow one stage to be changed while the other stage served as the playing area. Scrapping the chariot-and-pole or wing-in-groove systems (see the Introduction to Part II) and increasing storage space offstage for furniture and three-dimensional units were more typical, however. Henry Irving, for instance, had his workers rip out the grooves for sliding flats to allow for the “free plantation” of scenic units at his Lyceum Theatre in London. Other innovations to set up and manipulate three-dimensional realities followed. Before the Great War, several German theatres had installed elaborate turntables to wheel on the cumbersome materiality of stage realism. Also by 1914, technicians lighted concave, plaster cycloramas in the upstage area to create a variety of outdoor realist illusions.

Playwrights after 1850 gradually adapted their techniques to the new interest in realism. Some, like Dion Boucicault, pasted realist effects over conventionally melodramatic contrivances, as in the *Octoroon* (1859), when a photograph taken by accident eventually reveals the murderer of a slave boy. On the English stage, productions of the plays of Thomas W. Robertson (1829–1871) set the standard for domestic realism in the late 1860s. Written to reveal character through the actors’ handling of realist stage properties, Robertson’s “cup and saucer plays” (as they were called), such as *Society* (1865) and *Caste* (1867), also pointed the way



Figure III.4

An 1879 print illustrating a scene from Thomas W. Robertson's *Caste*, at the Prince of Wales Theatre, 1879. Notice the stage properties on the central table.

© Enthoven Collection, V&A Images, Victoria and Albert Museum.

toward a less romantic style of acting (Figure III.4). In Vienna, Ludwig Anzengruber (1839–1889) turned the peasant play, formally a romantic piece meant to evoke nationalistic pieties, toward realist purposes in the 1870s. Alexander Ostrovsky (1823–1886) popularized realist playwriting in Moscow. His *The Thunderstorm* (1859) and *Enough Stupidity for Every Wise Man* (1868) demonstrate a realist handling of melodrama and comedy and keen attention to the details of middle-class life.

Realist producer-directors

Audience interest in photorealism led to a demand for specialists with the power to ensure realist illusion in all of the facets of a theatrical production. On the Anglo-American stage, several stars, such as William Gillette (1857–1937)

and Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1853–1917), made their fortunes by augmenting their star appeal with realist effects. Gillette's star vehicle, *Sherlock Holmes* (1899), set the famous detective in the midst of properties, costumes, and scenery that looked as though they had been whisked from Victorian London into the United States. In Tree's technologically advanced new theatre, his London production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1900 featured real flowers and mechanical birds in the forest scenes, together with fairies with battery-operated glow lamps. For its revival in 1911, Tree added live rabbits. Several playwrights, such as Victorien Sardou and George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), also played a major role in mounting realistic productions of their dramas. By 1900, however, a new figure had emerged as a specialist in staging realism, the producer-director. In Central and Eastern Europe, where subsidized theatrical institutions predominated, a few strong producers championed realism in the repertoires of several state- and city-supported theatres. In Western Europe and the United States, by contrast, some producers gradually wrested economic control of commercial theatrical production from the stars, which allowed them to shape both the economic and the artistic fortunes of their theatres.

Georg II (1826–1914), the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen (an independent duchy in Germany before 1871), was the first of several producer-directors to exercise near total control over his productions. The Duke himself designed all of the costumes, scenery, and props, even insisting on genuine materials and period furniture to ensure a look of historical authenticity. When the Meiningen company toured throughout Europe between 1874 and 1890, it set new standards for the aesthetic integration of realist productions. What chiefly astonished spectators was the unity of theatrical effects achieved by the company, especially in ensemble acting. Most members of Saxe-Meiningen's company played both leading roles and supernumeraries; there were no stars stealing the limelight or supernumeraries wandering through crowd scenes in awkward befuddlement. For the first time on a European stage, individuals with their own character traits who spoke intelligible lines made up a mob, and the mob itself was choreographed to move with a level of reality and power that audiences had never witnessed before (Figure III.5). The Duke achieved these effects by rehearsing his company for several months, frequently with full sets and costumes, until he believed his productions were ready for the public. By 1890, the Meiningen troupe had given over 2,500 performances of 41 plays and the Duke had demonstrated how an authoritarian producer-director could integrate realist productions.

Several realist producer-directors in the West followed in the wake of Saxe-Meiningen. Perhaps the most influential was André Antoine (1858–1943), who founded and directed an avant-garde company, the Théâtre Libre, in Paris in 1887. For his productions at the Théâtre Libre, Antoine directed his actors to observe



Figure III.5

A crowd scene in the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen's staging of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* at Drury Lane Theatre, 1881.

© V&A Images, Victoria and Albert Museum.

the realist convention of the “fourth wall,” an imaginary wall across the proscenium opening that enclosed an interior room in a box set in which actors performed and which spectators observed, ostensibly as if neither knew of the other’s presence. Within this convention, furniture along the line of this “wall” might face up-stage, and actors could occasionally deliver their lines with their backs to the audience. For several of his later productions of French classical plays at the state-subsidized Théâtre Odéon, Antoine used the conventions of realism in a metatheatrical mode to re-create the theatrical conditions of a typical seventeenth-century playhouse. He placed costumed actors playing spectators on the stage and hung chandeliers over them, for example, to frame historically accurate productions of Molière’s comedies, acted and designed to match the style of the period. Antoine’s productions toured widely in Western Europe and, like Saxe-Meiningen’s, shaped a generation of theatre artists.

Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) and Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko (1858–1943) brought high standards of realist production to Russia after the founding of the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) in 1898. Although Stanislavsky wielded less direct power than did similar producer-directors, he carried substantial authority in the company due to his membership in the Moscow business elite,

his connections to wealthy patrons, and his growing eminence as an actor and director. The MAT established its reputation for realism by producing the four major plays of Anton Chekhov (1860–1904), *The Seagull* (1896), *Uncle Vanya* (1899), *Three Sisters* (1901), and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). Stanislavsky staged these plays with scrupulous attention to the realities of Russian provincial life on which they are based, and worked toward ensemble playing and a “fourth wall” performance style with the MAT company (Figure III.6). After 1906, Stanislavsky began working on a “system” that would help actors toward a more complete commitment to the realities of their characters – work he would continue for the rest of his life. (For more on Stanislavsky and Chekhov, see the case study on acting in Chapter 8, p. 373; see also Chapter 9 on modernism.)



Figure III.6

V.S. Simov's 1898 naturalistic design for Act I of the Moscow Art Theatre's production of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull*. Note the painted backdrop.

© The Society for Cooperation in Russian and Soviet Studies, London.

The rise of realism in Japan

Samurai warlords had isolated Japan from nearly all Western influences for over two hundred years until 1868, when internal challenges to government authority forced renewed contact and commerce. In the 1870s, theatrical reformers eager to embrace Western ideas pushed stage realism as an antidote to what they saw as irrelevant traditions. As in the West, the photograph became the new measure of the real for Japanese modernizers. At first, a few reformers attempted to update *kabuki* by making it more contemporary in subject matter and characterization. Ichikawa Danjūrō (1839–1903), for example, appeared in white tie and tails instead of traditional Japanese dress in 1872 to inaugurate a new theatre that he promised would cleanse *kabuki* by presenting its historical plays with as much realism as possible. In a series of productions that paralleled antiquarian Shakespearean performances in the West, Danjūrō produced *kabuki* history plays with authentic-looking costumes, properties, and scenery.

Later reformers sidestepped these initial attempts at altering *kabuki* to push for Western models of playwriting and production. Kawakami Otojirō (1864–1911), for instance, produced *shimpa* – literally “new style” – dramas that adapted nineteenth-century Western dramatic forms to Japanese tastes in such plays as *The Sublime*, *The Delightful Sino-Japanese War* (1894). Like Sardou’s historical melodramas in Paris, Kawakami’s production of his play used photographically authentic military uniforms and make-up to depict realist battle scenes. When Kawakami produced *The Geisha and the Knight* (1900) while on tour in the United States, the desire of U.S. audiences to see females playing women’s roles prompted him to allow his wife, Sadayakko (1872–1946), a former geisha and thus a trained dancer, to perform the major female role. She continued to do so in subsequent tours of Europe, to great critical acclaim. Sadayakko’s presence on the international stage challenged the exclusion of women from female roles and professional actor training in Japan. Japanese traditionalists demanded that acting remain a male preserve; they were joined by some advocates of reform who believed that women could never attain the same level of artistry and reality on stage as men. Because Osanai Kaoru (1881–1928) believed it would be too difficult to train female amateurs for his new Free Theatre, for example, he suggested that the male *onnagata* actors (specialists in female roles) learn to play modern women in Western-style, realist plays.

Leading literary critic Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935), however, argued that the appearance of men in women’s roles could never match the expectations established by realist representation. Tsubouchi had translated all of Shakespeare’s plays and introduced the Western realist novel to Japan in his 1885 book, *Shōsetsu shinzui* (*The Essence of the Novel*). Like critics and theorists in the West influenced by the reality effects of photography, he believed that stage images and sounds,

including scenery and dialog as well as characterization, must represent material reality as accurately as possible. In 1906, Tsubouchi founded a Theatre Institute in his Literary Arts Society to train actors and mount private productions of *shingeki* – literally, “new theatre.” There, Tsubouchi experimented with modes of performance that both broke free from the traditions of *kabuki* and moved beyond the imitative qualities of *shimpa*. In Tsubouchi’s production of *Hamlet* in 1911, one of his students, Matsui Sumako (1886–1919), became the first professionally trained woman actor to perform in Japan. Later in that year, Matsui performed her most famous role, Nora in *A Doll House*, with another *shingeki* troupe. By 1930, *shingeki*, featuring women in female roles, had become the preferred style for the production of comedies and dramas based on contemporary life.

Theatre and politics in Europe and the U.S.

In the West, photography helped to reveal the triumph of the bourgeoisie and the wrenching social and economic transformations that had elevated this class to dominance. This led an increasing number of theatre artists after 1850 to urge moderate or even radical reform. On stage, the politics of liberalism and socialism offered significantly different answers to the problems posed by industrialization and urbanization. Many successful plays continued to espouse varieties of conservatism during these years and some were reactionary, but these orientations offered little insight into what most understood as modern life. Neither liberalism nor socialism, however, now means what most Westerners understood by these terms before 1914.

Regarding liberalism, the right of individuals to pursue their interests unrestrained by aristocratic privileges or state regulations had been the banner of liberal reformers since the French Revolution. As noted in Part II, these ideas derive from the premises of John Locke and the rationalism of several Enlightenment thinkers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The bourgeoisie throughout Europe had largely secured these rights by 1850, but continued to guard them against excessive state power from above and the clamor for more democracy and better living conditions from below. From the liberals’ point of view, the laws of the marketplace, if unimpeded, would guarantee economic progress and social justice. Classical liberalism was meritocratic rather than democratic; under liberalism, individuals must earn their social status and economic security through their talents and efforts, not by voting for them.

Nineteenth-century socialists, in contrast, argued that blindly following the laws of the capitalist market might produce some progress in the short term, but guaranteed occasional recessions and the long-term oppression of the working class. By 1890, socialist political parties with a base in the working class were electing representatives in all industrial countries with a modicum of democracy.

In Germany and the Scandinavian countries, the socialists claimed more voters than any other national party by 1914. Even in the United States, despite ethnic and racial animosities that fragmented working-class solidarity, socialist parties polled over a million votes in 1912. Socialists throughout the world drew on Marx's arguments about the inherent class conflict between workers and capitalists, but often differed on the question of revolution. Most argued that political and economic reform might alter the capitalist system to produce more economic justice, while a minority believed that only violent revolution could secure the rights of the proletariat. Although Marx had urged socialists to build an international movement, most socialists before the Great War worked within the politics of their nation-states, a shortcoming that disabled socialist pacifism in 1914.

Liberalism in the theatre before 1914

Liberalism was the underlying but often unacknowledged ideology of much European theatre after 1850, informing the materialist melodramas of Dion Boucicault and the realist comedies of Tom Robertson, among many other popular genres. In these plays, as in much of nineteenth-century culture, sympathetic figures rarely argued directly for liberalism; rather, liberal freedoms were simply taken for granted as the way things were or ought to be. Photographs of factory labor and slum housing, however, demonstrated that modern material conditions were overwhelming an individual's ability to act as a free agent in society. Many in the bourgeoisie recognized that this core liberal value was at risk. By the late nineteenth century, it was evident to many liberals that some reforms would be necessary to prevent social unrest or even rebellion from compromising the freedom of the bourgeoisie to remake the world for their own profits.

Assuming the possibility of substantial individual freedom, liberals often depicted unnecessary social constraint as its evil opposite. The individual-versus-society conflict was a common liberal theme in many dramas after 1880; a few plays even sparked some liberal reform measures. John Galsworthy's (1867–1933) *Justice* (1910), for example, which depicted the cruelty of solitary confinement, helped to rein in the use of that punishment in British prisons. In *Damaged Goods* (1902), Eugène Brieux (1858–1932) campaigned against the ignorance and fear that led to the spread of syphilis in France. His liberal sermonizing set the stage for health reform in France. More often, politically contentious liberal plays stirred up some discussion but did not change the status quo. In *A Man's World* (1910), by U.S. playwright Rachel Crothers (1878–1958), the protagonist struggles to find a place for herself and a child (not biologically her own) that she is raising, only to discover that the man who wants to marry her has fathered and abandoned that child. Crothers's play takes a strong stand against the double standard, which allowed society to wink at a man's promiscuity but condemned a woman for the

same social sin. Her liberal feminism, however, was too radical for most theatre-goers in the U.S., and she modified her position in later plays. The plays written by Galsworthy, Brieux, Crothers, and other liberal dramatists between 1880 and 1914 worked within the conventions of stage realism. Like all realists, these playwrights (and most of the directors, designers, and actors who staged their dramas) implicitly accepted the materialism of the world as a camera might photograph it.

Early socialism on stage

The socialists, too, generally limited their politics to the material realities evident in photographs. Socialism offered women playwrights in Europe a firmer orientation than liberalism for opposing bourgeois patriarchy. Many first-generation feminists became socialists, although this position rarely led to commercial success. Elizabeth Robbins (1862–1952), who premiered two of Ibsen’s female heroes on the London stage, however, won modest renown with *Votes for Women* (1907) and contributed to the eventual triumph of women’s suffrage in Great Britain. One of the earliest and most radical socialist feminists was Minna Canth (1844–1897), whose realist depictions of Finnish life shocked Helsinki audiences in the 1880s. Her *Children of Misfortune* (1888) depicted the diseases, drunkenness, crimes, and death that degraded the lives of unemployed workers, with special attention to unemployment’s effect on working-class women and children. Earlier, in *The Worker’s Wife* (1885), Canth portrayed the legal subjugation of working-class women by their husbands.

In Great Britain, George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) emerged as the most outspoken socialist playwright during the 1880–1914 period. Shaw became a socialist in 1882 and soon after joined the Fabian Society, a group of journalists, professionals, and others who campaigned to end capitalist oppression by gradualist, political means. Shaw’s first plays in the 1890s carried Fabianism into the theatre by attacking slum-landlordism, capitalist profits from prostitution, and the idiocy of armies and war. In *Man and Superman* and *Major Barbara* (both performed in 1905), Shaw dramatized a political philosophy that joined socialism to vitalism, the belief in a “life force” that could make it possible for people to control human evolution. Through *Major Barbara*, Shaw’s audience learned that social conscience without economic power is useless and, finally, unethical (Figure III:7). Further, *Man and Superman* demonstrated that all the political power in the world cannot alter material reality unless it works in conjunction with Darwinian evolution. Shaw’s Fabian vitalism, his conjuring of a life force that could animate individuals to push humanity toward evolutionary progress, trumped the pessimistic conclusions that many social Darwinists predicted for mankind. While this philosophy and the plays that embodied it may no longer seem politically

Figure III.7

Photograph from the 1905 production of George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* at the Royal Court Theatre, London. Louis Calvert played Undershaft and Granville Barker, who also directed, performed Cusins (with drum). The photo appeared with others from the production in the *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News* (20 January 1906), one of several news magazines in Europe and the U.S. after 1900 that regularly ran photographs of current events.

Source: *The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 20 January 1906.



relevant, Fabian vitalism did change political discourse in England before 1914. Shaw's efforts helped to lay the groundwork for the eventual triumph of democratic socialism in England. His comedies from this period continue to startle playgoers with their combative debates and acute social analyses.

The emergence of avant-garde theatre

In the West and Japan, realism had become the default mode of playwriting and production for contemporary theatre by the 1920s. Most artists and spectators expected representations of material, photographable reality when they created or witnessed a theatrical production. This did not mean that the entire stage had to look like a photograph, of course. Artists and spectators were already adjusting their sights and expectations to accommodate “stylized,” “minimalist,” and “psychological” realisms, in recognition that the stage was better suited to the depiction of partial material realities rather than an entire “slice of life.” With few exceptions on mainstream stages, however, these reality effects were entirely materialist in orientation. Individual characters under realism might profess a belief in an external god or in an immanent spirit, but these unphotographable realities were not represented on the realist stage. The transition to a secular, materialist stage had been especially rapid in Japan, where (with few exceptions) *shingeki* had forthrightly banished the traditional Japanese gods featured in productions of *nō* and *kabuki*.

Not surprisingly, the rise of realism led to several reactions. For some, the naturalists, the focus on external realities in stage realism did not go far enough. The naturalists of the 1880s and 1890s, led by Émile Zola (1840–1902), wanted the theatre to depict the material forces of biological evolution and social environment that they believed mostly determined human life. Many socialist

playwrights joined Zola's naturalist movement. Others, the symbolists, rejected the materialism of the realists and naturalists and urged that the theatre attempt to concretize spiritual realities that photographs generally overlooked. Partly influenced by the new audiophonic media of the telephone and the phonograph, symbolist playwrights and directors of the 1890s, such as Aurélien Lugné-Poë (1869–1940), looked to unseen, often aurally manifested forces that they believed shaped human fate. The conflict between the naturalists and the symbolists was the first of several clashes between 1880 and 1940 that animated the many movements of the international avant-garde.

Unlike most theatre artists and the purveyors of popular entertainment, those in the avant-garde objected to many aspects of the emerging modern world. The naturalists and symbolists, for example, found oppressive the noise, speed, and crowds of the modern city. These artists believed that the instrumental reasoning that had led to the success of bourgeois capitalism – its rationalism and efficiency – avoided or undermined other ways of knowing and experiencing reality. Above all, avant-garde artists scoffed at the hypocrisy of the bourgeoisie. The naturalists, especially, pointed out the lies told by the governing classes about sexuality, politics, and economics. Those like Oscar Wilde who championed aestheticism, another early avant-garde movement, sought to separate theatrical art from modern life, so that theatre pieces could be appreciated on their own terms, apart from ugly social realities.

The second generation of avant-garde theatre artists, which began around 1910, tried to use the stage to undermine and radically alter the bourgeois status quo. Unlike the early avant-gardists and the liberal and socialist reformers in the theatre, these radicals challenged the entire institution of Western theatre. Rather than separating art from life, they sought to use their experiments in the theatre as the basis for utopian transformation. By provoking and disturbing their audiences, the futurists, expressionists, constructivists, and surrealists of this second generation tried to shock them into becoming co-creators of their artistry; they worked to engage spectators in the process of making radically new meanings that might transform their lives. More so than the first avant-garde movements, this second generation urged the abolition of mainstream theatre and presented pieces that reveled in fragmentation, discontinuity, and collage.

Avant-garde theatre did not exist before 1880. Innovative artists in earlier decades and centuries might have rejected the prevailing norms of artistry, but they did not form movements, write manifestos, and attempt to set the terms by which their art should be understood. The rise of an international avant-garde in the late nineteenth century in all of the arts (including the theatre) has partly to do with artists being cut free from traditional obligations of patronage and a new struggle for economic survival, plus a bourgeoisie unsure of its own artistic values.

Technologies new to the period also empowered avant-garde theatre artists – not only photography and recent audiophonic inventions, but also electricity and the electrical illumination of theatres.

Modernism in the theatre

While the avant-garde movements typically looked to directors, designers, and actors to realize their ideas on stage, modernists urged that the theatre rely primarily on the vision of the dramatist to communicate meaning. Theatrical modernists drew their authority from the 400 years that dramatists in the West had struggled to gain legal protection, independence, and bourgeois status. As we saw in Chapter 5, international copyright laws, royalty rights, and market capitalism had elevated dramatic authors above other artists in the theatre. While most actors, designers, and directors after 1900 joined unions or guilds to seek mutual protection, dramatists could work as self-employed capitalists. They no longer had to write directly for theatrical companies or international stars, though many continued to do so. Like novelists and poets, dramatists could now make at least a part of their livelihood by writing for publication. Early modernist playwrights Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) and Anton Chekhov, for example, were making a good living with their pens near the end of their careers. By the 1920s, many dramatists, taking their cue from the aesthetic movement, considered their plays to be autonomous works of art. They primarily looked to the literary establishment, not to the theatre, for critical validity and institutional support.

Critics and historians have defined theatrical modernism in many ways. Here, we will begin our definition by limiting modernism to the period between 1880 and 1970 and those theatre artists who privileged the vision of the dramatist as the primary source of meaning in the theatre. Modernists could include directors, designers, and other artists, as well as dramatists. As we will see, modernist directors such as Jacques Copeau (1879–1949) and designers like Jo Mielzener (1901–1976) shared the same veneration for the dramatic script as did authors William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and Tennessee Williams (1911–1983). Like the avant-garde, modernism on the stage was a recent phenomenon. Throughout Western theatre history, spectators had looked to actors as well as to dramatists to provide significant experiences and meanings in the theatre. Even after 1880, stars like Bernhardt continued to draw worshipful fans into the theatre, as they do in most dramatic films today. For much of the twentieth century, however, successful authors writing plays for both the stage and the page enjoyed advantages that media writers today can only dream about. As we saw in Part II, new communication technologies often create niches for artists tied to older media. The new visual and audio technologies that proliferated after 1850 and shaped so much of the new theatre had also sidelined print culture. In response, many dramatists, now mostly

dependent on print, embraced modernism to emphasize the literary as well as the theatrical importance of authorship.

The modernists shared with most avant-garde movements a revulsion against many aspects of modern life. They, too, rejected the utilitarian reasoning, tasteless consumerism, blatant hypocrisies, and madding crowds that dominated modern urban living. In addition, however, they were also troubled by forms of theatricality that they believed inevitably pandered to the illusions that powered the modern world. With regard to theatrical illusionism, they rejected the kind of manipulation of audience sympathies and beliefs that Richard Wagner (1813–1883) tried to effect in performances of his operas. In brief, Wagner had attempted to weave together music, drama, singing, scenery, lighting, and all of the other theatrical arts into what he called a “*Gesamtkunstwerk*,” a totally integrated and unified production with the power to immerse the spectator in its fiction. Wagner designed a proscenium theatre in Bayreuth, Germany, that eliminated social distinctions in the seating and arranged all seats facing the stage. In his attempt to ensure that all spectators would sit in rapt attention to the stage illusion, Wagner even eliminated the sight of the pit orchestra, placing it well below the lip of the Bayreuth forestage. As we will see, several in the first generation of the avant-garde artists praised Wagner’s goals and attempted to mount similarly integrated works of art in their own productions.

The modernists, however, objected that this mode of theatricality – and perhaps theatricality itself – only reinforced the kind of delight in surfaces and sensations that the bourgeoisie was selling to modern consumers. Critic Martin Puchner writes that modernist drama and theatre was essentially “a theater at odds with the value of theatricality” (Puchner 2002:7). As we will see in greater detail in Chapter 9, modernists working before 1940 used several techniques to question theatrical representation and to distance spectators from all styles of theatrical illusion. After World War II, however, most of the next generation of theatrical modernists relaxed their assault on theatrical representation in an attempt to respond to and incorporate the new reality effects of film and radio. This led to a new historical period of modernism, which flourished between 1940 and 1970.

The Great War as a turning point in world theatre

Many Europeans have continued to call World War I the Great War because they have come to understand that the 1914–1918 conflict was a significant turning point in world history and not simply the first of two similar catastrophes for European culture. The Great War not only wreaked immediate devastation on lives, wealth, and established political power. It also sparked the Russian Revolution and civil war (1917–1921), precipitated the decline of Western imperialism, and was

an indirect cause of the rise of fascism and the worldwide economic Depression of the 1930s. In these and other ways, the Great War undermined Western bourgeois culture and introduced new realities and possibilities undreamed of before 1914. In contrast, as we will see, World War II continued many of the same military conflicts 25 years later and caused fewer major cultural shifts.

The Great War and its aftermath altered all of the major areas of theatrical activity in the West. Popular entertainment, never more popular than in the decade before 1914, now faced significant competition from silent films. All forms of live entertainment declined after the war, a trend accelerated by the arrival of the “talkies” in 1927. Before 1914, all of the significant avant-garde movements had been international, with artists freely trading ideas and performances across borders. After the war, the international characteristics of the avant-garde gradually disappeared, as revolutions and political differences heightened nationalistic animosities and fragmented avant-garde networks. Among the modernists, the early modernism of Ibsen and Chekhov, which rarely broke with the conventions of realism, gave way after the war to the high modernism of Pirandello, T.S. Eliot, Jean Cocteau, Thornton Wilder, and, eventually, to Samuel Beckett. These playwrights and their productions forthrightly challenged the premises of theatrical representation. In political theatre, the Russian Revolution abolished a major tenet of naturalism and sparked widespread theatrical activism. When it was evident that heredity and environment had not determined a dismal fate for the Russian masses, naturalistic pessimism about the possibility for change gave way to political radicalism for many European theatre artists. The initial success of the Revolution converted many avant-gardists in Russia, Germany, and elsewhere to communism and they began to experiment with a variety of forms and styles to move people to political action.

By 1930, then, there were three very different groups of artists in the Western theatre. Most were conventional writers, directors, and others who worked within the institutions of popular entertainment and middle-class, realist theatre. A much smaller group identified themselves as modernists. These dramatists and their allies despised the excesses of bourgeois culture and questioned the possibilities of theatrical representation, but generally worked within mainstream literary and theatrical institutions. The smallest group were the avant-garde radicals, much diminished in numbers from the heady days of the early 1920s. They continued to mount productions that challenged the basis of Western culture, hoping to inspire others with their vision of a utopian future.

Overview of Chapters 7–10

Chapter 7, “Popular entertainments, 1850–1920,” relates the rise and immense success of popular culture performances for urban spectators, then their gradual

decline after the Great War as film, radio, and eventually television captured the audience that had patronized these kinds of entertainments. The chapter includes sections on the circus, variety theatre, the English music hall, musical revues and comedies, and world fairs. It also features case studies on blackface performance in the United States and British pantomime. As we will see, these popular genres continued to offer their audiences traditionalist values couched in racism and sexism as well as newer materialist delights partly induced by the modern world's love of photography.

In Chapter 8, “Theatres of the avant-garde, 1880–1940,” we explore significant first-wave avant-garde movements. (The second-wave avant-garde from 1950 to 1970 in the U.S. will be examined in Chapter 10.) The chapter begins with naturalism, symbolism, and aestheticism, and then shifts to consider the more radical work of second-generation avant-gardists. We focus particular attention on the Russian avant-garde during the 1920s and question whether the United States harbored an avant-garde movement during that decade. The actor training programs of Stanislavsky and Meyerhold and the legacy of avant-garde thinking in a play by Eugene O'Neill are the subjects of case studies included in this chapter.

Chapter 9, “Modernism in drama and performance, 1880–1970,” examines three periods of modernist theatre. Before 1910, Ibsen, Chekhov, and a few other playwrights with little connection to the avant-garde movements of the period challenged realist forms and assumptions to explore ethical dilemmas and historical ironies. Between 1910 and 1940, high modernists like Pirandello and Wilder tested the limits of theatrical representation to validate their idealist and religious beliefs. Modernists Jean Anouilh, Harold Pinter and others flourished commercially between 1940 and 1970 – a modernist drama altered to accommodate the reality effects of film and radio. The first case study at the end of this chapter considers Ibsen's *A Doll House* from the vantage point of cultural materialism. We conclude with a case study that traces the spectrum of modernist vision in three very different modernist plays by Chekhov, Pirandello, and Beckett.

In Chapter 10, “Theatres for reform and revolution, 1920–1970,” we pick up the discussion of politics in the theatre after the Russian Revolution and the brief triumph of the radical avant-garde in the new Soviet Union. The chapter traces the dynamics of activist theatre in Europe and the U.S. during the 1920s and 1930s. It also examines some of the early theatres of anti-imperialism in China and India. As the cold war divided communist and liberal nation-states around the world after World War II, it also sparked a new wave of theatrical activism. The chapter concludes with the breakdown of liberalism and socialism in 1968, when students and workers worldwide rioted against their governments. Chapter 10 includes case studies on social drama in Kerala (India) and Bertolt Brecht's direction of his play *Mother Courage and Her Children*.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

For “The Sarah Bernhardt Pages” (2008) visit: www.templeresearch.eclipse.co.uk/sarah/Sarah.htm.

For a Pathé cylinder recording in 1902 of Sarah Bernhardt in the title role in Racine’s *Phèdre*, in which she delivers (in French) a portion of the speech on her illicit love for her stepson, visit: www.templeresearch.eclipse.co.uk/sarah/Sarah.htm.

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Popular entertainments, 1850–1920

By Bruce McConachie

Although scholars will not agree on a definition, the premise of this chapter is that “popular” entertainments are those that appeal to cross-class audiences in complex societies through commercial means. In this sense, popular entertainment reaches a broader audience than “elite” or “working-class” performance and relies on marketing strategies that “folk” theatre cannot deploy. Popular entertainments may draw on class-based or folk traditions, but these are typically transformed in the commercial move to generate as big an audience as possible. Because this kind of entertainment relies on live actors who cannot be distributed like the images of filmed, televised, and digitized performers, popular performances of the past never became “mass” entertainment of the kind we have today; even the most famous international stars could not be seen by an entire population. However, the media that advertised and shaped popular entertainments between 1850 and 1920 – principally print and photography – reached deep into the consciousness of many populations around the globe.

Further, in the days before radio and sound film, the popular stage had an impact similar to that of mass media today. After 1850, concentrations of urban populations drawn to cities by industrialization led to the

development of major businesses devoted to popular entertainments. As entrepreneurs professionalized and commercialized their entertainment operations, new forms of production, presentation, and publicity emerged that altered the cultures of Japan, India, China, and the West. Popular theatre reflects and shapes the beliefs of large populations, beliefs about nation, race, gender, and empire, for instance. For this reason, studying popular performance has become increasingly important for historians. In addition, the popular entertainment industries of the nineteenth century shaped the ways we produce and enjoy films, television, and digital diversions today.

The circus as popular culture

Circus performances had long been a part of many world cultures. Historians have discovered evidence of centuries-old performance traditions including juggling, acrobatics, and rope-walking in India, China, and Japan. The Romans elaborated many of the daring animal acts that remain a part of circuses today, also combining them with gladiatorial combat and chariot racing at the Circus Maximus in the imperial capital. Itinerant ring-jumpers, animal trainers, and clowns worked the

feudal courts of medieval Europe. Slack rope-walkers, aloft with their balancing poles on ropes strung precariously among buildings and poles, were immensely popular in European fairs during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These imperial and folk circus acts, however, were not yet popular culture, as we have defined it. Although such entertainments appealed to many groups and classes, the performers and their managers rarely used print or other media to commercialize their operations.

Historians usually credit Philip Astley (1742–1814) as the originator of the modern, commercial circus. In 1768, Astley, a former British cavalry officer, gathered a crowd of paying customers within a contained space to display his horsemanship skills. While Astley was hardly the first to perform acrobatic feats on horses galloping around a ring, he required pay-on-entry instead of hoping that spectators would drop money in a hat before they wandered away. And he advertised his skill. He and his wife dispersed handbills throughout London and paid for ads in the press to lure the crowds. Soon, Astley had added several more acts to his burgeoning circus, primarily rope-dancers, acrobats, and horse-riding clowns, and opened similar amphitheatres in Dublin and Paris. Recognizing that there was money to be made from transforming itinerant circus performances into a stable, established, and highly commercialized group of acts, rival managers opened similar one-ring circuses in Great Britain and across the continent. By the 1820s, Astley's Amphitheatre in London was mounting grand equestrian dramas such as *The Battle of Waterloo*, a nationalistic celebration of the British victory over Napoleon that enjoyed a run of 144 performances in 1824. The circus remained primarily an equestrian show through the 1850s. Circus amphitheatres at that time typically shared many characteristics with commercial theatres, including a stage as well as a ring for the presentation of “horse dramas” – melodramas, pantomimes, burlettas, and other genres that combined human and equine talents.

In the 1860s, variety acts began to compete with equestrian entertainments for popularity at the circus.

The combination of sexual allure, death-defying stunts, and athletic bodies made female acrobats especially appealing to Victorian spectators. When the rope carrying Selina Powell's swaying, balanced, blind-folded (and, as was discovered later, pregnant) body collapsed in Birmingham, England in 1863, her death horrified the crowd and led to heated public discussions about the propriety of exhibiting and endangering women in circus acts. Even the Queen spoke out against the idea that “one of her subjects – a female – should have been sacrificed to the gratification of the demoralizing taste, unfortunately prevalent, for exhibitions attended with the greatest degree of danger to the performers” (Assael 2005:109). Against the prevalent notion that respectable women should never appear in such dangerous exercises (nor in such revealing costumes), a few defended the angelic qualities of female acrobats while some of the women athletes themselves struck poses that emphasized their confident and well-muscled bodies (Figure 7.1). The controversies surrounding Powell's death revealed contradictions in Victorian society concerning class relations, sexual impropriety, cruelty to women, and economic exploitation that could not be settled. And these controversies, of course, only increased the popularity of female acrobats for several more decades.

While the European circus generally remained rooted to one place, U.S. circus entrepreneurs began experimenting with road shows under tents as early as the 1820s.  Performing under canvas and traveling in circus wagons allowed impresarios to take their shows past the Appalachian Mountains and into the growing cities of the West. This led to the tradition of the circus street parade, with its display of flamboyant wagons, performing acrobats and clowns, and a steam-powered calliope to herald the arrival of a circus into town. A one-ring circus at that time could accommodate about 5,000 people. To pack in more spectators, P.T. Barnum (1810–1891) and James Bailey adopted a three-ring model in 1881, made possible by their recent decision to move their combined circus by railroad. With rail transport, U.S. circuses grew larger and more complex,



Figure 7.1

Circus poster of female acrobat Zaeo, from *The Life of Zaeo* (1891).

Dramatic Museum Library, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

altering the nature of circus viewing. Now spectators could watch the act in front of them, scan the big top for an appealing spectacle, or float among several simultaneous performances to increase their excitement. With three rings, the relations among circus performers grew more hierarchical, as each act struggled with the others to gain access to the center ring.

By the 1890s the center rings of many European and U.S. circuses featured wild-animal acts. These African and Indian lions, tigers, and elephants – advertised as captured, transported, and trained by white men – became symbols of imperial control. One animal trainer of the period, Carl Hagenbeck, wrote that the natives that helped him to capture his lions and tigers were as “uncivilized . . . no less wild than the beasts” they caged. Circus historian Janet M. Davis comments that Hagenbeck’s “juxtaposition of the human and animal trade made the trope of the white man’s burden visually complete, as people of color and beasts were ‘trained’ together for profit and ostensible edification” (Davis 2002:160). Acts featuring African and Asian performers, whether under the big top or in one of the numerous side-shows that accompanied most circuses by the 1890s, also invested in racial stereotyping. To one of his circus ventures, P.T. Barnum added an “Ethnological Congress,” which boasted exhibits of “100 Uncivilized, Superstitious and Savage People” (Adams 1997:175). Building on popular, pseudoscientific notions of Darwinian evolution, Barnum racialized and stereotyped vast categories of non-white peoples for his “Congress,” including groups advertised as “cannibals, Nubians, Zulus, Mohammedans, pagans, Indians, [and] Wild Men” (Adams 1997:182).

Entrepreneurs and their circuses flourished in many countries by 1900. European companies had introduced the circus to Australia by 1850 and to India, China, and Japan by 1870. South American companies were touring their continent by 1914. After World War I, the huge circuses reliant on train transportation began to dwindle, as the public turned to other media for entertainment. Advocates for women’s and children’s rights, for animal welfare, labor unions, and racial justice gradually altered

the kinds of performances that were allowed and that the public wanted to applaud. Acts of danger, skill, and beauty, together with clowning, became more popular than animal and racialized entertainments after 1950. The continuing popularity of the circus, however, made it a potent metaphor for many plays and films; theatre artists V.S. Meyerhold, Eugene Ionesco, and Peter Brook, among many others, have used the circus to shape their productions. In the twenty-first century, the circus is now part of a global entertainment market, with performers of all ethnicities moving among different managements and companies crossing national borders.

Promoting popular entertainment

Philip Astley and his European imitators may have been the first showmen to attract mixed urban crowds through advertising to their circuses, but P.T. Barnum made popular entertainment respectable. Though now chiefly remembered as a circus impresario, Barnum was best known in the 1850s as a tireless promoter of his “museum,” the American Museum in New York City.

 Before museums were public institutions, private businessmen owned and operated them for a profit. In addition to featuring several exhibits of natural history, fine art, and mechanical wonders, Barnum also touted such “freaks” of nature as the “Feejee Mermaid” (supposedly half-fish, half-human) and the “What Is It?” (a black man presented as an evolutionary “missing link” between humans and animals) to his astonished customers (Figure 7.2). He outfitted the dwarf Charles Stratton in bourgeois elegance as the gentleman, “Tom Thumb,” and even arranged for Tom’s introduction to Queen Victoria. Barnum both challenged his spectators to see through his “humbugs” and also fed them with illusions of omnipotence; if a dwarf could meet the queen, anyone could.

Further, Barnum’s promotions made upper-class culture available to the millions and convinced them that they would enjoy it. In 1850, he organized and publicized the American tour of the Swedish soprano



Figure 7.2

Henry Johnson as Barnum’s “What Is It?” Photograph by Mathew Brady (c.1872).

Source: Robert Bogdan (1988) *Freak Show*, University of Chicago Press.

Jenny Lind, a renowned opera star, and pocketed huge profits. Barnum also recognized that the claim of moral instruction sold tickets to urbanites anxious about their respectability. In the Lecture Room of his Museum – actually a small theatre, but renamed so as not to offend the antitheatrical prejudices of the straightlaced – Barnum banned liquor and advertised his presentation of pleasing variety acts and moralistic melodramas, such as *The Drunkard*, for respectable families. Barnum’s reputation for moral probity carried over to his circus enterprises. Regardless of his racist and unscientific claims, most Victorian spectators believed that all of his entertainments promoted public morality. Later impresarios of popular entertainment learned many of the tricks of their trade from Barnum.

Variety theatre

One major form of popular entertainment that proliferated after 1850 was variety theatre. 📺 Variety is simply a series of light entertainments unconnected by any overriding theme, story, or major star. Since the renaissance, theatre in Western cultures had often incorporated singers, acrobats, performing animals, and other acts as a part of an afternoon or evening of entertainment, usually featuring such “turns” between the acts of a regular drama. As the demand for these diversions increased, however, showmen worked up formulas and found venues in which they could string together a series of such “numbers” without providing a regular play as the main attraction. Variety took numerous forms after 1850. One was the blackface

minstrel show, which began in the U.S. and quickly spread to Europe and to European colonies. The first case study in this chapter explores the pleasures for nineteenth-century audiences of racialized entertainment in afterpieces, minstrelsy, and musical comedies in the U.S.

Another form of variety was the burlesque show, which began with female performers doing a parody, or “burlesque,” of a popular play or work of literature. Eventually the parodic elements dropped out of the formula, and, by 1900, the typical burlesque show in England and the U.S. featured a male comic, several comic sketches, dance acts and musical pieces, plus scantily clad females in all of the numbers. The striptease, now identified as the central act of a burlesque show, did not make its appearance in the U.S. until the 1920s. Other kinds of variety theatre in the U.S. included dime museums (which continued the traditions of Barnum’s American Museum into the 1890s), medicine shows (variety acts used to sell patent medicines), and concert saloons (which peddled beer and food along with entertainment in New York and other large cities in the 1850s).

The concert saloon was actually a worldwide phenomenon in industrializing cities that led to the most resilient and significant form of popular variety theatre, the music hall. Although “music hall” is an English Victorian term, it may be used to designate any type of variety that features a series of unconnected entertainments on an indoor stage. Music hall entertainment, lacking the coherence of “blacked up” white performers or the presence throughout of a male comic and pretty girls, typically had even less aesthetic unity than a minstrel or burlesque show. In the U.S., this form of variety was called vaudeville. 🎤 In Germany such entertainments were known as *Singspielhalle* and in Russia, *myuzikkholl*. The French initially called them *café chantants* and eventually *café concerts*.

In France, as in most Western countries, *café chantants* began in taverns in the eighteenth century. These large taverns and their entertainers quickly gained mass popularity, especially in Paris after 1789, when the

National Assembly abolished the licensing of public amusements. In response to Napoleon’s reimposing theatrical regulations, however, the *café chantants* altered their formulas for performing in order to continue to operate. By the 1870s, the *café concerts* – long halls with a high stage at one end in which spectators could smoke and drink while enjoying the acts – had replaced them. By 1900, similar commercial venues for variety entertainment had emerged in Moscow, Berlin, Madrid, Sydney, Rio de Janeiro, and in hundreds of other cities where newly urbanized workers, their families, and some members of the middle class sought diversion and camaraderie.

English music hall

In England, the music hall lasted longer than similar forms of variety in other countries and probably had a more enduring effect on the national culture. Already by 1850, the Star Music Hall in Bolton, a textile-manufacturing center in the north of England, boasted a capacity of 1,500 and performances ranging from singers and acrobats to full-stage, patriotic spectacles. In 1866, London had over 30 large music halls and more than 200 smaller ones; a few of the larger halls seated over 3,000 spectators. Most English music halls in the 1870s provided entertainment, food, and drink to a predominately working- and lower-middle-class audience. During the 1880s, some music hall entrepreneurs, seeking higher profits through increased respectability, opened new halls in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. By the 1890s, many halls, even in working-class neighborhoods, no longer allowed patrons to eat and drink while watching the show. They also featured more homogenized acts that would not offend Victorian tastes. Over the next 20 years, several booking syndicates, which signed variety acts for tours of the entire British Isles, eliminated the last vestiges of local control and further standardized music hall entertainment. The halls reached their high point of popularity around 1910, when competition from silent films began to erode their numbers. In the 1930s and 1940s, the radio, which brought many former music hall entertainers into

English homes for free, cut even deeper into their popularity. The widespread enjoyment of television in the 1950s delivered a deathblow to the English music hall.

Until the 1890s, the English music hall provided an alternative, both in its environment and its entertainment, to the strictures of Victorian life for many working-class families. While many music hall songs sentimentalized romantic love, others delighted in sexual pleasure, a taboo subject for proper Victorians. Several songs also derided the entanglements of marriage, a major prop for Victorian respectability. In songs and comic sketches, policemen, government clerks, and other figures of authority provided frequent butts for music hall humor. Nonetheless, the music hall generally remained culturally conservative. Entertainers might

poke fun at factory discipline and lambaste politicians caught up in scandals, but they usually applauded English victories in war and the racism that accompanied English imperialism. A favorite comic character of the pre-1890 era, for example, was the *lion comique*, a loquacious, preening, and bibulous lower-class swell, who enjoyed relating his latest adventures in comic song and swagger (Figure 7.3). Amidst the acrobats, magicians, performing animals, and human “freaks,” early music hall variety preserved aspects of traditional English customs that provided workers and others with strategies for enduring and occasionally countering a culture that oppressed them.

Although gentrification and standardization drained the class-based vitality from music hall entertainment after 1890, its anti-Victorian legacy had wide ramifications

Figure 7.3

George Leybourne, a *lion comique* of the music hall stage, who wrote and sang “Champagne Charlie” (c.1867).

© V&A Images. Victoria and Albert Museum.



in the twentieth century – from satiric popular songs and a scandal-mongering penny press to the electoral success of socialism in English politics. The rhythms and pleasures of music hall entertainment also influenced the dramatic works of several significant playwrights, including Samuel Beckett, John Osborne, and Harold Pinter. Because prominent music hall entertainers often appeared in productions of Christmas pantomimes in England, music hall songs and humor also shaped changes in this traditional form of amusement. The popular form of British pantomime is discussed in a case study following this chapter.

Theatrical revues

Revues flourished on Western stages for mostly bourgeois audiences between 1900 and 1930. This genre of variety theatre featured many of the same kinds of turns as music hall, although revues usually excluded circus, animal, and freak acts, lavished more money on dance and design numbers, and often organized themselves around a unifying theme. As in many other forms of variety, Paris led the way with spectacular revues at the Folies-Bergère and elsewhere in the 1880s that involved dancing girls and glamorous tableaux. Florenz Ziegfeld (1869–1932) popularized revues in the United States with his lavish Follies, staged yearly between 1907 and 1931. The “follies,” “shows,” “scandals,” “vanities,” and “revues” of these years in U.S. entertainment typically featured top talent, from Eddie Cantor (1892–1964) to Bert Williams (1874–1922), and exciting music by the likes of George Gershwin (1898–1937) and Irving Berlin (1888–1989). The legacy of these spectacular revues may be seen in the films of Busby Berkeley and the night club acts at Las Vegas. Revues flourished on the London stage from 1912 into the 1960s, often on a more intimate scale than their U.S. models, with such performers as Noel Coward (1899–1973) and Beatrice Lillie (1895–1989). In Germany and Austria, high-priced variety shows often ended with spectacular revues. After the Russian Revolution, several playwrights and companies in many nations took up the revue form to push their politics.

The work of several of these groups is discussed in Chapter 10.

Because the revue has a long history as an international genre, it is not surprising that its formula continues to shape a wide variety of entertainments around the world. One contemporary example is the *Takarazuka Revue*, performed by all-female troupes in Japan. Begun in 1914 in the city of Takarazuka (near Osaka), this form of light entertainment, which takes its name from the famous company whose speciality it is, employs music, dance, and parody and appeals to many groups of Japanese, from conventional housewives to gay couples. Female *Takarazuka* actors play all of the roles, and their spectators enjoy the gender ambiguity and idealizations of masculinity embodied in their performances of men. *Takarazuka* scripts, which often foreground gender disguise, range from historical romances set at the time of the French king Louis XIV to spectacular productions of *Gone with the Wind*. With two major theatres and five permanent touring companies in Japan today, *Takarazuka* remains a successful form of revue entertainment.

Popular melodrama and comedy

Along with variety and revue entertainment, popular audiences in the industrialized world enjoyed genres of theatre long successful with urban audiences. By 1914, the theatre capitals of the West – preeminently London, Paris, New York, and Berlin, but also Milan, Vienna, Moscow, and Madrid – featured several theatres devoted to melodramas and comedies for cross-class, popular audiences. These centers also launched touring productions of popular shows that played in circuits around a country, a region, or – in the case of London, Paris, and Madrid – around the world to far-flung populations of English, French, and Spanish speakers in colonies and former colonies. In addition, by the Great War, several regional centers of popular theatrical activity had emerged in many countries that mixed local and touring productions. In Glasgow, for example, a local poll counted 29,000 theatre seats available in 1906, most of them in auditoriums dedicated to music hall,

pantomime, and touring troupes performing popular comedies and melodramas. After the unification of Germany in 1871 and its subsequent rapid industrialization, the population of Munich quadrupled by 1914, by which time the city hosted over forty theatres. A mix of privately owned and publicly supported theatres performed a wide variety of shows to mostly popular audiences in this southern German city. By World War I, Buenos Aires in Argentina boasted over 30 theatres, the majority booked by touring companies out of Madrid and elsewhere. The most popular form of entertainment in Buenos Aires, provided by both local and international companies, was the *género chico*, one-act skits written as comedies or melodramas presenting familiar characters, local color, and light satire.

In India, a form of melodramatic popular theatre emerged that combined English and South Asian conventions of production to present traditional Indian stories to different language groups. Called Parsi theatre, after the religion of its initial entrepreneurs, this type of touring entertainment used proscenium stages throughout India for lavish productions with declamatory acting, orchestral support, and spectacular costumes and scenery. Beginning in northern India in the 1860s, the first troupes performed in Gujarati or English and played to urban audiences of Parsis and Europeans. The companies broadened their appeal in the 1870s by introducing Urdu-language dramas that incorporated the romance of Urdu poetry and Hindustani music. Many Parsi companies were playing in Hindi and performing fairy romances and mythological material from traditional Hindu epics as well as occasional adaptations of Shakespearean plays by 1914. Although males initially played all women's parts, female actors began to appear in the 1870s, and many Parsi shows continued to feature both males and females in women's roles. Actors from several Indian ethnic groups, including many Anglo-Indians, had become Parsi stars by the 1920s, when hundreds of Parsi companies were touring India. The introduction of Indian sound films in 1931, which incorporated most of Parsi's spectacular romantic and melodramatic elements, led to the form's rapid decline.

Musical theatre

While film, radio, and later television were eliminating the audience for most forms of popular stage entertainments in India, Japan, and the West, in China, *jingxi* (or Beijing Opera) survived longer as a popular art form, in part because electricity and film were not widespread in China until the 1950s. *Jingxi* can be traced to 1790, when performers from several Chinese provinces gathered in Beijing and fused together their different theatrical traditions to celebrate the emperor's birthday. Since then, other regional forms were added until, by 1900, *jingxi* had synthesized the major traditions of Chinese musical theatre. In performance, *jingxi* relates mostly romantic and melodramatic stories through a mix of song, stylized speech, spectacular dance, pantomimed action, and sometimes acrobatics. The orchestra for *jingxi*, which introduces all major characters and often comments on the stage action, consists primarily of string and percussive instruments. *Jingxi* features lavish costumes, make-up, and hairpieces, but typically involves little scenery (Figure 7.4). Instead of scenic transformations, new locations are signaled by narration and through conventions of dance and pantomime, which can indicate such diverse places and activities as a throne room or traveling by boat.

Several dozen troupes were performing *jingxi* in the major cities of China by the 1920s. In that decade, *jingxi* star, Mei Lan-Fang (1894–1961), formed his own troupe, initiated a new category of *jingxi* entertainment, toured to Japan and the U.S., and later influenced Meyerhold and Brecht while appearing in the Soviet Union. *Jingxi* remained popular through the war against Japan and the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. During the 1950s, Chairman Mao Zedong infused *jingxi* with Communist propaganda.

In the West, where musical theatre traditionally meant opera, light operatic entertainment (operetta) emerged in the nineteenth century in Vienna, Paris, and London to amuse mostly bourgeois spectators. Out of that, with injections from the popular stage, came musical comedy. In London in the 1890s, musical comedies challenged and soon replaced operetta in



Figure 7.4

Photograph of actors from the Beijing Opera in full costume performing *Pop-Eye*, a *jingxi* play, in Berlin.

© AKG-Images. Ullstein Bild.

popularity – including the delightful, “topsy-turvy” concoctions of William S. Gilbert (1836–1911) and Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900). While there is no firm distinction between operetta and the musical, pre-1914 musicals typically featured a book with a girl-gets-boy love story, songs that could be marketed by the popular music industry, and a chorus line of beautiful women. Indeed, the first important impresario of musicals was George Edwardes (1852–1915), who made his initial reputation through shows highlighting the Gaiety Girls chorus at his theatre in London. At one time before the Great War, Edwardes had over a dozen companies touring in Great Britain, the U.S., India, and Australia.

A variety of musicals flourished with popular audiences on U.S. and English stages from 1895 to 1930. Several, such as Victor Herbert’s (1859–1924) *Babes in Toyland* and Franz Lehar’s (1870–1948) *The Merry Widow*, reminded spectators of the lightly satiric comedy or the soaring musical tones of operetta. Others, like George M. Cohan’s (1878–1942) *Little Johnny Jones*, made a splash with catchy tunes, wise-cracking humor, and polished dancing. Some, such as *A Chinese Honeymoon*, were close to revues. London saw a run of musicals with “girl” in the title – *The Earl and the Girl*, *The Girl in the Taxi*, *The Shop Girl*, and *The Quaker Girl*, for example. In New York, African-American artists

wrote and performed in several successful musicals, from *A Trip to Coontown* in 1898 to *Shuffle Along* in the 1920s. These London and New York musicals, as their titles suggest, had to accommodate contemporary beliefs about racial and gender roles to win popularity.

After 1920, innovation in musical theatre shifted from London to New York and several changes occurred in the years before 1970 that marked the growing sophistication of the form. By 1920, with the production of *Sally*, composer Jerome Kern (1885–1945) and librettist Guy Bolton (1884–1979) had perfected the small-cast musical, which relied on contemporary situations and fresh musical styles rather than elaborate production values. Kern also wrote the music for *Show Boat* (1927), the first musical to recognize some of the effects of American racism. George and Ira Gershwin, Cole Porter, Lorenz Hart, Marc Blitzstein, and others also broadened the scope of the musical stage by including political satire, adult sexuality, and capitalist oppression in some of their shows. After 1943 and the success of *Oklahoma*, the musical dramas of Richard Rodgers (1902–1979) and Oscar Hammerstein (1895–1960) set the formula for successful musicals – lush, often exotic melodies, challenging choreography, books with relatively complex characters and serious subjects, and less emphasis on pretty girls and snappy jokes. The postwar American theatre produced many hit musicals within this general formula, each of which ran for over two years on Broadway and toured to major cities throughout the English-speaking world: *South Pacific*, *The King and I*, *My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Gypsy*, and *Cabaret*, among others. By the 1950s, however, few working-class families in New York, London, Toronto, and Sydney were attending these shows or other professional productions. Musicals were no longer popular entertainment in the sense of the definition used in this chapter.

World fairs and exhibitions

Combining a wide variety of entertainments, the world fairs of the 1850–1920 period undoubtedly attracted more spectators than any single genre of popular

diversion, including the circus. Despite some French antecedents, the fair that began “the age of exhibitions” (so named by the *Illustrated Weekly News*) was the Great Crystal Palace Exhibition in London in 1851 (Hoffenberg 2001:xiii). Millions of visitors gawked and gasped at the architecture, machinery, produce, and performances brought to London from around the world and unrivaled in their scale and opulence. Featured exhibits included huge steam engines, Indian miniatures, giant lumps of coal, classical sculptures, and the interior of a palace identified as a “Nubian Court.” Housing many of these spectacles was the Crystal Palace itself, which covered almost 19 acres in Hyde Park. The success of the British exhibition led to similar fairs in France, which sponsored the Paris *Exposition Universelle* in 1855. The United States entered the competition for extravagant world fairs with the Philadelphia Centenary of 1876 to celebrate one hundred years of U.S. independence.

Although begun to glorify the progress and superiority of their nation-states, world fairs soon settled into promoting national empires. While the Crystal Palace had included exhibits from selected parts of the British Empire, the Paris Exposition of 1855 featured representations from every French imperial possession in the world. After the Germans annexed two French provinces in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), the French increasingly turned to imperial glory abroad and expositions at home to emphasize their greatness (Figure 7.5). Another Paris Exposition in 1889 built a tourist town of native huts and colonial palaces to represent the cultures of their far-flung empire. In addition, the promoters of the 1889 Exposition stocked their tidy vision of a peaceable empire with human subjects – native peoples from Africa, Asia, Indonesia, and the Pacific islands. According to one visitor:

A popular feature of the show is the street, not of an ancient civilised city, but of aboriginal savages. In the back settlements behind all the gorgeous finery of the pagodas and the palaces of

the further East, the ingenious French have established colonies of savages whom they are attempting to civilize. They are the genuine article and make no mistake, living and working and amusing themselves as they and their kinfolk do in their country. Someday an enthusiast promises us we shall have a great anthropological exhibition of living samples of all nations and tribes and peoples that on earth do dwell. That may be the next Universal Exhibition.

(Greenhalgh 1988:88)

Like P.T. Barnum's "Ethnological Congress" at the circus, the early world fairs encouraged a "scientific" view of non-Western peoples as savages in need of imperial civilizing. From a social Darwinist point of view, white Westerners had proven themselves to be the most "fit," but their morality also instructed them to save more "primitive" peoples from extinction.

The Paris Exposition of 1889 was the first of many world fairs to exhibit native peoples to the gaze of white visitors. The U.S. followed the trend in 1893 at the Chicago Columbian Exhibition, where seventeen tribes

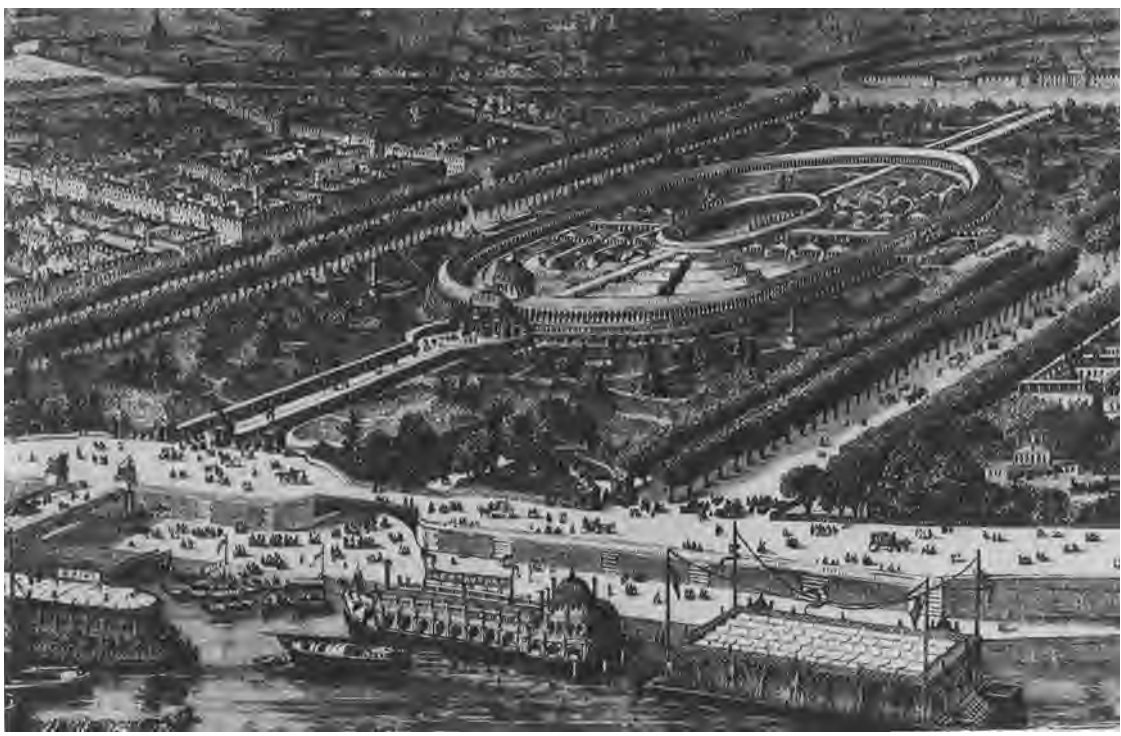


Figure 7.5

A view of the buildings and grounds for the Paris Exposition of 1867. Note the nearby barges in the Seine River for popular amusements. From the *Art Journal Illustrated Catalogue of the Universal Exhibition*.

Source: Paul Greenhalgh, *Ephemeral Vistas*, Manchester University Press, 1988, Figure 2.

and villagers from parts of the British and French empires were housed in their native settings near the *Midway Plaisance*, an area of the fair that also featured “freak” shows and other carnival acts. At the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo in 1901, the organizers exhibited Native and African-Americans along with other “primitive” peoples of the world. Most of the fairgoers apparently enjoyed the spectacle of Indians performing war dances in traditional attire and Black Americans hired to portray happy antebellum slaves in a popular exhibit called “The Old Plantation.” Similar spectacles continued at the St. Louis world fair in 1904, which also featured several tribes of Philippine villagers scientifically classified as representing different stages of civilization. Fresh from their victory in the Spanish-American War, U.S. imperialists could now boast that they had joined Great Britain and France to shoulder “the white man’s burden.” (No mention was made of the ongoing military campaign to suppress factions of rebellious Filipinos.) As noted in Chapter 6, the former settler colony, which built a nation through slavery and the acquisition of aboriginal lands, had made a seamless transition to imperialism by 1900. (See “Tourism and performance” in Chapter 13 for a contemporary performance art piece critiquing such habits of thinking that have remained embedded in Western culture.)

While the British, too, used world fair exhibitions to tout the superiority of their nation, race, and empire, they also deployed strategies that solidified their imperial hold around the globe. Between 1851 and 1914, the British organized 33 major exhibitions in India, Australia, and Great Britain that involved significant cooperation among sponsors and bureaucrats in all three countries. In general, India, the chief symbol of British subject colonies, provided traditional performers and craftspeople, together with models of ancient monuments, while Australia, the stand-in for other white settler societies, celebrated its progress under the Empire through its rising cities and manufactured goods. As the “mother country,” Great Britain displayed its noble traditions, royal munificence, ships and armaments,

and, of course, its imperial leadership. A wide range of performances available to visitors from around the world – opening ceremonies, impressive parades, and royal receptions in addition to folk performances, costumed pageants, and music hall turns – cemented the interconnections made possible through the Empire. As one historian notes, “Participation at the exhibitions as visiting tourists and actors in pageants was part of the process of building [national and imperial] communities. This was not fantasy as escapism, but the fantasy which integrated experience and imagination, thereby linking citizens and subjects together in a seemingly viable, tangible way” (Hoffenberg 2001:243). At the Festival of Empire in 1911, for example, over 15,000 costumed participants from London and every outpost of the Empire enacted events from English history to celebrate what the imperialists had scripted as their common heritage. This enormous pageant, several years in the making and performed as a series of tableaux by moving bodies on a huge stage, played to several thousand more spectators. It was the forerunner of the mass spectacles and rallies that would sweep millions into the political enthusiasms of the twentieth century.

France, the U.S., and Great Britain were the primary sponsors of world fairs before 1914, but other imperial powers also joined the parade. The Netherlands and Belgium sent colonial exhibits and performances to several of the major events, primarily to promote their “civilizing” efforts in Indonesia and the Congo. The Belgians also hosted several international exhibitions of their own. Despite the small size of its present empire, Portugal touted its glorious imperial past through several lavish displays in expositions at Paris and London. Japan had been exhibiting its success as a modernizing nation in U.S. and European fairs since the 1860s. After its takeover of Taiwan, its defeat of Russia, and its annexation of Korea, Japan mounted an impressive display of its imperial possessions at the Japan–British Exhibition of 1910.

Following the Great War and the rifts that it had exposed within most of the European empires, enthusiasm for mass exhibitions waned during the 1920s.

Extravagant world fairs gained business and government support again in the 1930s, now however, as a means of combating the worldwide Depression. Science and engineering replaced the glories of empire as the major theme of most international expositions, especially in the U.S. The Chicago and New York exhibitions of 1933 and 1939, for example, celebrated the latest inventions and painted a bright future for U.S. consumers. After World War II, the Brussels Universal and International Exhibition of 1958 turned into a competition between the United States and the Soviet Union, as each cold war power sought to outdo the other in architecture, technology, and innovative exhibits. Not surprisingly, subsequent world fairs have continued to reflect and shape international politics and planetary concerns.

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Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

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CASE STUDY: “Blacking up” on the U.S. stage

By Bruce McConachie

White people “blacking-up” to play street rowdies, circus clowns, and African-American characters – both on stage and off – is a long tradition in Western performance; it dates from at least the Middle Ages and perhaps before. Although often racist in intent and effect, the blackface mask served a variety of other purposes within popular entertainment in the U.S. during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At times, even African-American performers darkened their complexions to entertain commercial audiences. This case study examines instances of blackface performance in three related genres of popular entertainment on U.S.

stages: the comic afterpiece, the minstrel show, and early musical comedy.

“Jump Jim Crow”

Thomas Dartmouth Rice (1806–1860), a white actor, was performing minor roles in the frontier theatres of the Mississippi valley when he invented or stole from a slave – the historical record is unclear – the song and dance that would make him famous:

Come listen all you galls and boys,
I’m just from Tuc-ky hoe;
I’m goin’ to sing a leetle song,
My name’s Jim Crow.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Reification and utopia in popular culture

According to cultural historian Fredric Jameson, many forms of popular and mass entertainment, including films, music videos, and stand-up comedy today, pull the spectator in two contradictory directions. On the one hand, the performance offers a utopian vision of liberation and bliss to the spectator that would require a revolutionary change in the social order to be sustained. On the other hand, commercial productions also involve the audience member in reifying – that is, transforming into objects – the performers and the entertainment they provide. Popular performance, then, induces the hope for radical change and the desire to consume the “thing” that provides the entertainment. Much contemporary music, for example, both inspires hope for a utopia of satisfaction and manipulates the listener into making purchases that reinforce the status quo. Like other forms of popular culture, including blackface performance, its consumption induces revolutionary and reactionary desires simultaneously.

The theatre historian applying Jameson's understanding of popular culture to blackface performances in the U.S. would begin by asking the following.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 How did performances of blackface induce revolutionary utopian desires in their spectators?
- 2 How did blackface performances induce their spectators to settle for the repressive values of the status quo?

As we will see, each of the major genres of blackface entertainment persuaded its spectators to embrace very different notions of utopia and repression in the course of its popularity on U.S. stages between 1830 and 1910.

Weel about and turn about,
And do jis so;
Eb'ry time I weel about,
I jump Jim Crow.

(Lott 1994:23–24)

Dressed in rags with burnt cork covering his face and neck, Rice performed several verses of the song, jumping with agility and variety on each chorus (Figure 7.6).  When he performed his “Jim Crow” dance as a part of a comic afterpiece at the New York Bowery Theatre in 1832, the young, mostly male working-class audience gave him a tumultuous reception. Rice wrote several one-act plays that featured his Jim Crow character and his famous dance, and he performed them successfully at the end of a regular evening's entertainment for the next twenty years. Like similar mythic characters from the Southwest, Jim Crow boasted that he could out-fight, out-eat, out-lie, and out-sex anyone else. Rice's dance was a variation on the shuffle, a dance done by lower-class blacks and whites to lively fiddle music in the taverns, dancehalls, and brothels of northern cities.

Drawing on Jameson's understanding of utopia and reification, we may speculate that Rice's “Jim Crow” afterpieces animated his male spectators to dream of political and physical liberation. The verses of his song actually celebrated working-class victories over social and economic oppressors, and they were taken up by mobs destroying symbols of elite privilege during urban

rioting in the 1830s and 1840s. His rough-music and violent gyrations probably reminded Rice's spectators of their own raucous parades through town during holidays, when they blackened their faces to entertain and alarm friends and enemies with scurrilous antics and the noise of tin kettles and cow bells. This was a European tradition that dated from medieval mummers plays at Christmas time and continued into the nineteenth century. Like “Jump Jim Crow,” these cacophonous spectacles encouraged traditional male forms of merrymaking and celebrated the rights of the common man.

Applauding T.D. Rice, however, also meant cheering for the anarchy and aggressiveness of his performance. Blacking up, making noise, and dancing foolishly evoked traditional utopian notions of plebeian male solidarity. But in the 1830s, it also cut against progressive possibilities for workingmen. During this decade, when trade unions and workingmen's parties sought collective bargaining and the ten-hour day, “Jump Jim Crow” turned workers away from productive political action and towards revelry and riot. Jameson's theory and the historical evidence suggest that Rice's performance encouraged a utopian dream of traditional freedom but undercut practical, progressive reform.

Happy Uncle Tom

By the 1850s, blackface performance had grown from occasional afterpieces by Rice and others into full evenings of entertainment, presented by an all-male



Figure 7.6

Thomas Dartmouth Rice performing “Jim Crow,” at the Bowery Theatre, New York, 1833. Rice is center stage, surrounded by men and boys from the audience, who presumably pushed onto the stage to watch Rice sing and dance.

© The Museum of the City of New York.

minstrel troupe of four to ten performers. Dozens of minstrel companies played throughout the urban Northeast, paying top salaries to their headliners and composers, among them the popular songwriter Stephen Foster. 📺 White performers borrowed much of their material from slave festivities in the South, including musical instruments (the banjo and bones), slave dances (“patting juba”), and the comic exchanges typical of corn-shucking rituals on a

plantation. Minstrel shows usually featured jokes and musical numbers, specialty acts, and a concluding one-act comedy, parody, or farce. While some of the verses of Rice’s song in the “Jim Crow” afterpieces called for the abolition of slavery, most minstrel troupes of the 1850s pandered to groups of white urban males who needed to be assured of their racial superiority. In general, minstrels portrayed black characters as inept fools, grotesque animals, or sentimental victims.

The mythic Old South of the minstrel stage was peopled by kindly white masters, Earth Mother mammies, boastful Zip Coons, feminized old uncles, and “yaller gals” (played by a male in drag), light-skinned slaves whose beauty and allure motivated romantic songs and incidents of victimization. 

The racism of 1850s minstrelsy was especially apparent in the skits that parodied the contemporary success of performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Full-scale stage adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel appeared soon after its publication in 1852; some of them were nearly as abolitionist as her book. Minstrel one-acts based on the novel, however, derided or ignored Stowe's abolitionism. One typical version, titled “Happy Uncle Tom,” depicted Stowe's exemplar of self-sacrificing morality and vigorous spirituality as a decrepit old uncle, meant to be laughed at for his grotesque jigs and foolish dialog. Like many minstrel parodies of the 1850s, “Happy Uncle Tom” delivered its audience to a never-never land of domestic warmth, sentimental love, and easy power in which “whiteness” provided the ticket to fun. For the Irish immigrants and rural newcomers who constituted much of the audience for pre-Civil War minstrelsy, “Happy Uncle Tom” temporarily took them out of the dangerous cities of the 1850s to a plantation utopia in which they could indulge their nostalgia for a lost home.

At the same time, however, by assuring them that their “whiteness” made them superior to the fools on the minstrel stage, parodies like “Happy Uncle Tom” exacerbated the tensions between these spectators and the free blacks of northern cities. In the 1850s, the American business class exploited this split between Irish immigrants and African-American workers to the detriment of both “races.” (Most Americans racialized the Irish as well as blacks for much of the nineteenth century.) On the basis of Jameson's theory and the history of American racism, it might be argued that the racial fragmentation of the American working class derived in part from minstrel entertainment, contributing to riots, undermining working-class solidarity, and perpetuating race-based inequities and repressions for the next 100 years.

Abyssinia

Before the U.S. Civil War (1861–1865), black performers had occasionally appeared on the minstrel stage, but white minstrels, eager to distinguish their true “race” from the blackface they performed, had discriminated against free entertainers of color to avoid any confusion that might harm their reputations. After 1865, however, black minstrel troupes proliferated, as African-American performers sought entry into the flourishing entertainment industry. They needed the work, but minstrelsy was usually the only path open to them in the white-controlled business. This created a double bind for black performers. Once on the minstrel stage, African-American entertainers had to conform to white stereotypes of their “race” to please predominately white audiences. To increase their success in this highly competitive field, black troupes often advertised themselves as truthful delineators of authentic plantation life. The result was that an entire generation of black performers helped to perpetuate and confirm racist fantasies and stereotypes in mainstream American culture. Composer James Bland, for instance, elaborated the myth that African-Americans really longed to return to slavery in his song, “Carry Me Back to Old Virginny,” and Billy Kersands (c.1842–1915), a popular Jim Crow in minstrel skits, played on the belief that blacks were creatures of primitive appetites.

The rise of vaudeville in the U.S. gradually displaced minstrelsy as the dominant form of variety entertainment in the 1880s. As minstrel troupes splintered and dispersed, individual blackface acts, performed by entertainers of both “races,” enjoyed newfound popularity on the vaudeville stage. African-American Bert Williams (1874–1922) had begun in minstrelsy where he learned the necessity of blackening his light complexion to please white audiences. In vaudeville, Williams teamed up with George Walker (c.1873–1911), another American of color, who generally played a fast-talking, free-spending dandy to Williams's slow-moving, melancholy “Jonah man,” so-called because disaster always befell him. The success of the duo (aided by Walker's business acumen) propelled them into a series of all-black musical comedies produced in New York between 1900 and 1908.

Williams and Walker faced a social and cultural world more hostile to black equality and ambition than at any time since slavery. In New York, African Americans were excluded from most restaurants and hotels and rigidly segregated in theatres and other places of public amusement, if allowed in at all. While the traditional minstrel show had generally depicted blacks as primitive and foolish, the “coon acts” and razor songs popular in vaudeville around the turn of the century added the stereotype of the “dangerous nigger,” a marauder eager to stab and rape. Middle-class white fears of black potency and violence would soon reach their

dubious acme in 1915 with *The Birth of a Nation*, D.W. Griffith’s racist film celebrating the rise of the Ku Klux Klan as the protector of white womanhood in the South after the Civil War.

Williams and Walker had billed themselves as “Two Real Coons” in vaudeville, and their first musicals on Broadway stayed within the narrow range of American racist beliefs. With *In Dahomey* in 1903, however, Williams and Walker moved part of the setting of their comedy to Africa to poke gentle fun at white American ways and to locate a utopian space for black dreams (Figure 7.7). This idea was more fully realized in 1906



Figure 7.7

The cast of *In Dahomey*, 1903: Hattie McIntosh, George Walker, Ada Overton Walker, Bert Williams, and Lottie Williams.

© Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundation.

with *Abyssinia*, a lavish production capitalized by white businessmen, featuring music by Will Marion Cook and Alex Rogers. Their songs laughed at wealthy Americans and allowed the pair to protest their designation as “coons.” The plot for the musical has Rastus Johnson (Walker) winning the lottery and taking his family and friends, including Jasper Jenkins (Williams), to Europe and Africa. Thinking he is an American prince, the Emperor of Ethiopia invites Rastus and his friends to a feast. Comic misadventures, onstage camels and donkeys, and exotic dances and romances soon follow before the pair bid farewell to their African hosts.

Abyssinia kept Williams and Walker in their stock, minstrel-derived roles, but, by changing the locale of the show, the duo induced black spectators to imagine a place where people of color ruled and where African Americans might be treated (at least temporarily) with respect and even honor. Seated in the segregated second balcony of a Broadway theatre, black audience members might imagine a utopian space for their hopes. On the other hand, the musical did not seriously challenge white racist beliefs; to do so would have doomed it at the box office. The whites that predominated in the audience and controlled the space of the auditorium could dismiss the production’s utopian possibilities and laugh at the racial clowning. Seen through the lens of Jameson’s theory, it is likely that *Abyssinia* induced utopian desire for some blacks and confirmed racist beliefs for many whites.

Blackface acts continued to amuse white audiences into the 1950s, when African-American activism and cold war concerns gradually exposed the racism under the burnt cork. Until then, however, some of the premiere performers of popular entertainment on stage and screen paraded their talents in blackface – including Al Jolson, Eddie Cantor, Mickey Rooney, and Judy Garland.

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and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

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CASE STUDY: British pantomime: How “bad” theatre remains popular

By Phillip B. Zarrilli

An overview of “panto”

In early December of every year, commercial production companies, repertory theatres, and amateur dramatic societies in the United Kingdom are rehearsing their annual contributions to a unique British form of popular theatre – pantomime. “Pantos” account for up to 20 percent of all live performance in the United Kingdom annually. Pantomime has existed on the British stage since the early eighteenth century. During the 1870s, the basic content (fairy tales and folk legends) and the formulaic set of conventions that characterize today’s “pantos” crystallized. They have remained flexible enough to be quickly adapted to current public tastes, fashions, and events. Each Christmas season over 200 pantomimes run concurrently throughout the United Kingdom. In a given year you might attend commercial productions of *Jack and the Beanstalk* at the King’s Theatre (Edinburgh) or *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* at the Birmingham Hippodrome, repertory productions of *Mother Goose* at the Oldham Coliseum or *Peter Pan* at the Wimbledon Theatre (greater London), or an amateur cast in *Cinderella* at the village hall in New Quay, Wales.

Pantomime defies political correctness, good taste, literary merit, and critical disdain. Like the evil villain such as the wicked witch in *Snow White* or Captain Hook in *Peter Pan* who, by tradition, make the very first entrance of any character from the “dark” (evil) left side of the stage to the discordant tones of the orchestra and the resounding “boos” of the audience, pantomime productions return each year to “haunt” theatre critics who ignore, decry, or simply tolerate this annual national popular entertainment. Writing for the *Independent* in 1999, Dominic Cavendish admitted:

It’s hard for an adult – let alone a reviewer – to admit that they have actually enjoyed an example of this maligned art form. And not at the arm’s-length distance of ironic approval, or vicariously, through the gurgling delight of other people’s children . . . but closely involved, experiencing a state of wonder. It’s a shock to say it, but *Peter Pan* at Wimbledon Theatre induced such a state.

Pantomime thrives on caricature, “bad” jokes, slapstick comedy, and pratfalls. It includes cross-dressing, with a woman playing the heroic “principal boy” role and a male comedian in skirts playing the “dame.” Other conventions are its sentimental romance, easily recognizable popular songs, and incidental music supporting the visual action throughout the performance. Depending on the size of the budget, they often feature sumptuous costumes with spectacular scenic transformations and as large a dance chorus as possible. Pantomime embraces its diverse popular audience, occasionally retains its old satirical edge, and ignores the proscenium arch by using the entire theatre as its performance space. It engages the audience in occasional shouting matches and often takes time out from the dramatic story to bring some children on stage for a sing-along, cheap gags, and prizes of candy for them to take home as a Christmas treat.

To help convey some of the flavor of the “panto,” we offer the following excerpt from scene 5 of *Aladdin*, by Derek Dwyer and Merlin Price. The setting is Widow Twanky’s cottage. As the curtain opens, the Dame is washing the laundry while impersonating Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music*.

DAME: (*Sings*) The house is alive, with the piles of washing! The socks, vests and knickers, from a thousand homes! An’ I wish they’d



Figure 7.8

Dan Leno in *The Widow Twankey*, 1896.

© V&A Images. Victoria and Albert Museum.

stayed there. Oooh, I hate washing! Don't you just hate washing? (*Repartee with audience*) I tell you, working in a laundry is no job for someone with a delicate sense of smell (*sniffs armpits*). Ooooooh!

Enter Wishee and Washee [her sons].

DAME: Ah, there you are, you two. Now that you're unemployed, and your brother seems to be living on a different planet since he peeked at the princess, you'd better give me a hand with this laundry. If we finish early, I'll take you all to the park this afternoon for a picnic.

WISHEE AND WASHEE: Great, mum.

WASHEE : What do you want us to do then?

DAME: Well, you can take the washing off the spin drier.

WISHEE: But mum, we haven't got a spin drier.

DAME: Oh yes we have. Hold this. (*Dame hands ends of washing line to Wishee. Takes off cardigan to reveal bundles of clothes wrapped round her. She twirls round and all clothes come off pegged on to washing line. Hands other end to Washee.*) There you are. Hang that lot up.

There are two types of “pantos”: those produced by commercial companies; and those done by the subsidized theatres. Commercial pantomimes are mass-produced by large production companies, each running between five and fifteen pantomimes each season. Commercial pantomimes tend to stay with established, conventional practices, and are most likely to feature television and entertainment personalities in key roles to attract large audiences. In order to recoup the huge

initial costs of a production, a new production will be recycled for performances in different regional theatres – running up to ten years. To keep costs down, the rehearsal period is usually only one week, plus a production week. Given the minimal rehearsal period, actors, musicians, and dancers must rely on their experience with the received conventions of pantomime.

In contrast, repertory pantomimes are produced by subsidized companies, such as the Oldham Coliseum or Theatre Royal Stratford East (London). Depending for their success more on the strength of the actors, their scripts are specially written for their own local/regional audiences and therefore may have more satire relevant to current issues than commercial pantos. Because pantomime is so much a part of the Christmas holiday season, most regional theatres depend on their pantomime income to subsidize much of the remainder of their year's repertory season.

Whatever the critics think of pantomime, it is to popular entertainment what Shakespeare is to today's literary theatre – an inescapable part of the British national cultural landscape. It brings into the theatre a more inclusive audience than any other form of theatre today, with three generations of a family often attending a performance together. For the overwhelming majority of children, it is their first, and perhaps only experience of live theatre, and for the majority of people, it will be their only annual visit to the theatre.

The early history of British pantomime

Since its first introduction on the London stage as “night scenes” or “Italian night scenes” in the early eighteenth century, what came to be known as British pantomime has been a theatrical chameleon, its performers and producers constantly changing its form, content, and conventions as necessary for its survival and continued popularity. The word pantomime is derived from the Greek, meaning “an imitator of things.” During Roman imperial rule, troupes of mimes (*mimi*) presented variety performances including dance, music, acrobatics, and skits. Solo pantomime (*pantomimus*) also

emerged as a somewhat more refined performance in which a silent performer of great beauty and skill mimed all the characters of a drama using a series of costumes and masks to the accompaniment of an orchestra (see Chapter 3).

Pantomime reemerged in fifteenth-century Italy as part of the *commedia dell'arte* tradition. When illegal fairground performances of *commedia* were suppressed in Paris in 1702, a number of performers from the *commedia* tradition sought work in London. Thus some of *commedia's* non-verbal comic scenes were set to music and dance, and performed with a few of the key *commedia* characters in a transposed English context as “Italian night scenes” – one small part of a full evening's bill of theatre lasting late into the evening.

By 1716 the dance master at London's Drury Lane Theatre, John Weaver, created *The Loves of Mars and Venus* featuring dancers impersonating Roman gods. It was advertised as a “new Entertainment in Dancing after the manner of the Antient Pantomimes” (of Rome). To rival it, John Rich (1692–1761), dancer, actor, and manager at the rival Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre, created his own pantomime with characters from Roman mythology, magically transformed in the second part of the performance into characters in a knockabout comedy. Rich, known by his stage name, Lun, further developed and popularized this earliest form of British pantomime as “Harlequinades” – spectacular performances in which the *commedia* character, Harlequin, magically underwent self-transformation, or transformed the scenery with a touch of his magic sword or wand.

The success of Rich's productions led the eminent actor, David Garrick, to produce his own pantomimes at Drury Lane. It was in Garrick's productions that the hero, Harlequin, first began to speak. His multi-colored costume of various colored patches also became a literal map for portraying his emotions. Touching red meant love, blue was truth, yellow indicated jealousy, and, to become invisible, Harlequin pointed to a black patch and “disappeared” in order to work his magic.

By the 1780s and 1790s, the content of the Harlequinade began to change as folk and nursery tales

were enacted during the first part of the entertainment. In 1789, in a production of *Robinson Crusoe* loosely based on Daniel Defoe's novel, Harlequinade characters appeared, including the clown, Pantaloon, as well as Harlequin and Columbine. Whatever the tale, as it was concluding the Fairy would transform the characters, whether Robinson Crusoe or Jack the Giant Killer, into well-known Harlequinade characters. By 1800, a pantomime was part of an evening of theatre, and, by the mid-1800s, the elaborate and spectacular scenic changes and tableaux – such as the revelation of Cinderella's coach, often complete with a team of live ponies, became the most important part of these early pantomimes. Before photography and film were invented, pantomime's spectacles offered some in urban audiences their first glimpse of the countryside, Scottish moors, or foreign temples.

Beginning with his *Jack and the Beanstalk* (1844), E.L. Blanchard began to give increasing importance to the fairy tales and folk legends in pantomime. Between 1852 and 1888, Blanchard authored all of Drury Lane's pantomimes, establishing the style of rhyming verse and topical wit that came to characterize the genre in the late nineteenth century.

Other conventions still found in today's pantomime were also introduced. In 1852, Miss Ellington became one of the first “principal boys” playing the Prince in *The Good Woman in the Wood* at the Lyceum Theatre. By the 1860s, both the “principal boy” and “dame” roles were becoming well established, further eroding the appearance of Harlequin and the Clown.

By the 1870s the introduction of music hall stars on the pantomime stage brought changes to pantomime plots and dialogs as the music hall artists brought along their own material. One of the earliest music hall stars appearing on the pantomime stage was G.H. MacDermott in the 1870 production of *Herne the Hunter* at the Grecian Theatre. Female music hall stars began to monopolize the playing of “principal boy” roles as they titillated Victorian audiences with their displays of thigh as well as ankle, and the public wanted to see its favorite comedian playing the dame role.

Between 1879 and 1895, Augustus Harris (1851–1896) produced the most spectacular full-length pantomimes ever staged, making use of the newest scenic inventions, and discovering the great comic genius of the music hall stage, Dan Leno (Figure 7.8). The role of Mother Goose was created for Leno at Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1902.

With the demise of music hall, other variety stages produced pantomime stars, only to be replaced by the stars of new twentieth-century media as each developed – radio, television, and then film stars have all found their way onto the pantomime stage.

Pantomime and its audiences

In order to remain popular, British pantomime has been chameleon-like in changing to communicate with its audiences. Using phenomenology, we will explore how pantomime simultaneously communicates through several performance modes or registers in order to entertain its multiple audiences.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Phenomenology and history

Phenomenology as a European philosophical movement was inaugurated by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). In the first edition of his *Logical Investigations* (1900–1901), he announced the need for a method that would describe how we encounter, experience, think about, and come to “know” the world. As a way of doing philosophy by providing a close description of a particular phenomenon, Bert O. States applied the method to the essential materials of the theatrical event such as sound, sight, movement, and text in his *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (1985). In a subsequent essay (1995), States provided a

description of the three modes through which the audience encounters the actor in performance: self-expressive, collaborative, and representational modes.

1. In the “self-expressive mode,” we encounter the actor operating in the first person, speaking as an “I.” This is the actor operating at her most virtuosic, openly displaying her artistry, as in an operatic solo where the soprano does not “disappear” into her role, or when the superb mime artist, Marcel Marceau, ascends an invisible stairway. In dramatic theatre, the self-expressive mode is also evident when the artistry of the actor commands our attention, thereby providing part of our pleasure in appreciating a particular actor’s interpretation of a role, such as Laurence Olivier’s portrayal of Hamlet.
2. In the “collaborative mode,” we encounter the actor addressing the audience in the second person, as “you.” A variety of theatrical conventions, such as the comic aside, are employed to directly address the audience so that the distance between actor and audience becomes a collaborative “we,” engaging us directly in the world of the play.
3. In the “representational mode,” the actor speaks in the third person, conveying the dramatic narrative. Even if the actor does not tell a story, the performance is “about” something.

These three “pronominal modes” can serve as points of reference for analyzing how a particular theatrical event makes meaning and experience within a particular historical context or period. Within the conventions of contemporary realist dramatic theatre, the actor’s self-expressive artistry ideally “disappears” into the role, thereby serving the representational mode. In contrast, the *commedia dell’arte* operated primarily in the collaborative and self-expressive modes, communicating directly with its audience through the display of the actor’s improvisatory skills within a particular “mask,” or role. Pantomime remains popular by operating between and among all three modes.

Of any performance in the theatre then, whether in *kathakali*, Western opera, Shakespeare, *kabuki*, or a realistic play, we may ask the following questions.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 **Where are the moments of the self-expressive mode, when the artistry of the artist, overtly or otherwise, commands our attention?**
- 2 **Where are the moments when the actor directly addresses the audience, seeking its collaboration?**
- 3 **Where do we see the representational mode in which the actor is conveying the dramatic narrative?**

In pantomime, each actor plays a character in the unfolding drama of the adapted fairy tale so that the actor is always operating, at least nominally, within the representational mode through which the dramatic story is conveyed to the audience. For young children, the tale may be both dramatic and “magical.” Whoever

plays a character is usually accepted at face value as that character. The collaborative mode comes directly into the foreground when the entire audience is called upon to become part of the action by shouting, “he’s behind you” whenever the evil “baddie” is about to capture his innocent prey in a chase scene.

For adults in the audience, the well-known story is simply a pretext for the enjoyment of some of the self-expressive and collaborative modes of acting “invisible” to younger children. When popular stars of the entertainment world play a particular role, they are intentionally cast by the director, not to disappear into the role as would a dramatic actor, but to play the role as/through their public persona, underscoring the importance of the self-expressive mode. When fly-by-

night, untrained personalities from Britain’s many current television reality shows perform in a panto, they often do no more than re-present their public personalities in the panto role. Like a hungry fairy that must be satisfied each year, pantomime consumes popular cultural icons and fashions only to spit them out as soon as they are no longer the flavor of the month. In the years when the Spice Girls were the most popular girl band in the U.K., they were conspicuously present



Figure 7.9

Sid and Babs (Barbara Windsor) in *Carry on Abroad*.

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as the Ugly Sisters in productions of *Cinderella*, only to be jettisoned in favor of Britney Spears's Ugly Sister in another year.

But when a seasoned professional actress and entertainer such as Barbara Windsor appears in a panto, something much more complex can take place. Barbara Windsor is best known for playing highly sexualized, dumb-blonde roles in the hugely popular “Carry On” films of the 1960s and 1970s (Figure 7.9), and more recently was institutionalized as the pub-bar matron in the long-running U.K. television soap, *EastEnders*. But early in her career, she gained valuable onstage acting experience with Joan Littlewood's famous experimental Theatre Workshop. As a well-known star, when she appears in a version of *Cinderella* as the Fairy-godmother, at the level of representation for the children, she creates “magic” as she transforms the pumpkin into a coach or transforms her ashen-covered servant, “Cinders,” into the beautiful young girl with whom the Prince falls in love. But for the parents and grandparents in the audience, who are old enough to have experienced Windsor during her youthful film career, she is simultaneously debunking the myth of female beauty and youth represented by Cinderella by simply being herself—a gracefully aging, feisty woman with a sharp, self-deprecating, satirical sense of humor about her past as a sexualized object. The appearance of major and minor stars and personalities exemplifies the important role that the self-expressive mode plays among the three modes that we have examined as British pantomime constantly refashions itself.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Many pantos are posted on YouTube. For a major traditional panto with well-known British actors see: YouTube, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, Parts 1–8. Author: Simon Nye. Cast includes: Paul Merton, Julian Clary, Julie Walters, Neil Morrissey, and Griff Rhys Jones.

Books

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Theatres of the avant-garde, 1880–1940

By Bruce McConachie

“Avant-garde” was originally a French military term referring to the forward line of soldiers – those leading the charge into battle. Likewise, avant-garde artists thought of themselves as marching in the front ranks of artistic progress, fighting bourgeois propriety to expand the boundaries of the possible. As we saw in the Introduction to Part III, international avant-garde movements proliferated in the theatre between 1880 and 1930. Both first and second generation avant-garde movements began in small groups of artists and spectators who reinforced each other in their rebellion against established cultural institutions and their desire for change. They published manifestos to proclaim their ideology and elevate their work over that of conventional artists and rival avant-garde groups. While some of these movements flamed out within a few years, others burned for two decades or longer. Some were quickly forgotten, but several had a significant impact on twentieth-century theatre.

In addition to taking advantage of the new photographic and audiophonic media, avant-garde innovators after 1880 exploited a brand new technology to alter stage production – electricity. Electrical illumination allowed for the full dimming of house lights during

performances, which left audiences, for the first time in theatre history, in the dark. (Gas illumination, which preceded electricity, allowed for the partial dimming of houselights, and several actor-managers before 1880, including Henry Irving, dimmed the house to heighten stage effects.) When spectators could no longer communicate with each other during performances, theatre-going shifted from a generally social to a much more private experience. Increasingly, modern audiences after 1880 no longer interrupted the show to applaud the actors or start a riot if the production displeased them. Although diminished forms of audience participation continued during the variety acts of the popular stage, avant-garde artists could anticipate that most of their spectators came to the theatre for moments of emotion and insight that would be experienced more privately than socially.

As we will see, this mode of spectating suited the goals of the naturalists, symbolists, and aesthetes. For the second generation of the avant-garde, however, who hoped to transform the social basis of modern life through shocks and fragmented visions, dimmed house lights and private viewing were a mixed blessing. While the contrast between on stage lighting and

audience darkness facilitated a wider range of artistic experimentation, it also separated actors from spectators, thus weakening the potential bonds of social solidarity between them.

Despite significant differences between the two generations of the avant-garde, they shared a common cultural situation. With the decline of traditional religious faith and the rise of anthropological understanding came an unsettling relativism. As the philosopher Martin Heidegger noted, modern people were the first to realize that their worldview was only one of several ways of perceiving reality. Perhaps, as some linguists and philosophers were beginning to affirm after 1900, this relativism was absolute; maybe there was no position beyond human language and culture that allowed for objective truth. Complementing this cultural relativism was the recognition that human subjectivity was much more complex and irrational than people had realized. If human nature were chiefly sexual in orientation, bourgeois society was reduced to little more than a clanking, voracious, and ridiculous machine for sexual repression. This, in more scientific language, was the pessimistic conclusion of Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930).

To counter class oppression as well as sexual repression, the avant-gardists often looked to “primitive,” usually colonized peoples, for images of liberation. Many in the European avant-garde lived in nation-states that had colonized parts of Africa and Asia. Like most citizens benefiting from imperial power, they read the same pseudo-scientific and social Darwinist information about the “primitive” peoples of the world and attended the same circuses and world exhibitions, where these ideas were presented as curious and exotic facts. When they looked more closely, those in the avant-garde also realized that performance in traditional African and Asian societies usually served direct social functions; theatre was not a rarefied art form set apart from life and practiced in separate institutions. This feature of traditional cultures spoke directly to one of their main goals, which was to practice art and performance as the basis of their everyday lives. It is hardly surprising, then,

that many in the Western avant-garde romanticized and borrowed extensively from traditional world cultures. Artists whose work represented the movements known under the labels of dada and surrealism, for example, claimed that their techniques of non-realist representation, collage, and simultaneity were uniquely their own, when, in fact, they were common attributes of the artworks of several African tribes.

Most of the avant-garde movements could claim some legitimacy for their work within their national cultures. Since the eighteenth century, French culture had provided public forums for debates among the intelligentsia, a recognized elite of artists, academics, critics, philosophers and others, on topics ranging from the nature of art to the nature of being. This tradition spread to other national cultures strongly influenced by France or containing a significant level of public debate about the arts, notably Italy, Germany, Poland, and Russia. England and the U.S., in contrast, lacked a recognized intelligentsia, with the consequence that theatre artists did not have a public forum in which to discuss new work. Although avant-garde artists were active in all of the major cities of the West between 1880 and 1930, avant-garde movements tended to flourish best in cities that supported an influential intelligentsia.

On the European continent, the intelligentsia often gathered in cabarets. “Bohemians,” typically university-educated members of the urban youth culture, plus artists and other intelligentsia constituted the primary participants and spectators for cabaret entertainment, which emerged in Paris in the 1880s. After 1900, cabarets in several major European cities – *Le Mirliton* in Paris, *Motley Stage* in Berlin, *Kathi Kobus* in Munich, *The Cabaret Voltaire* in Zurich, *The Green Balloon* in Krakow, and *The Stray Dog* in St. Petersburg – hosted artists in many of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century. Performances at these venues might include puppet shows, poetry readings, political skits, art songs, satirical and literary tableaux, and occasionally one-act plays. Futurists and dadaists found cabarets especially inviting, in part because much of their early work did not involve the production of complex

theatrical illusions. In general, cabarets provided a hot-house environment where avant-gardists could explore new performance ideas with little risk before sympathetic audiences.

Naturalism on stage

The gradual shift toward realism in playwriting and production after 1850 reached its apogee in the West in the movement known as naturalism. While absolute distinctions between realism and naturalism are probably impossible, the former may be understood as a general style that remains pervasive today, while the latter can be seen as an avant-garde movement that

gained substantial influence in the theatre between 1880 and 1914 and then disbanded. Committed naturalists joined Émile Zola (1840–1902), their leader, in asserting that heredity and the environment were the primary causes of human behavior. Influenced by Darwinian notions of evolution and an approach to reality that claimed scientific objectivity, Zola argued in *Naturalism in the Theatre* (1881) that play productions must demonstrate the effects of these materialist causes (Figure 8.1). Like the general shift toward realism, naturalism was influenced by photography. “You cannot claim to have really seen something until you have photographed it,” wrote Zola (Sontag 1977:87), with



Figure 8.1

Émile Zola's naturalistic *The Earth*, directed by André Antoine at the Théâtre Antoine in Paris, 1902.

© Biliothèque Nationale, Paris.

characteristic overstatement, in 1901. Where realist playwrights, directors, and designers relied on photo-like stage effects for a variety of reasons, however, the naturalists believed that an accurate rendition of external realities was only the necessary starting point for an exploration of materialist causation.

Although Zola strove to meet his announced goals for the movement by dramatizing his novels, the plays of Henri Becque (1837–1899) were more successful on the stage. Becque's *The Crows* (1882) and *La Parisienne* (1885) nearly abandon conventional plotting to present everyday situations in which rapacious characters prey on the weak and a “respectable” wife sleeps with other men to advance her husband's career. German theatre-goers interested in the socialist side of naturalism

applauded the early plays of Gerhart Hauptmann (1862–1946). Especially influential was *The Weavers* (1892), a play with a group protagonist about the exploitation and rioting of Silesian workers in 1844 (Figure 8.2). In Russia, Maxim Gorky, who participated in the political revolutions of 1905 and 1917, wrote several naturalist plays. *The Lower Depths* (1902), which centered on tramps and impoverished workers living in a flophouse in Moscow, was perhaps his most famous. Like most naturalist plays, *The Lower Depths* dramatized a photographic “slice of life,” with all of its banality, cynicism, sentimentality, and violence.

State censorship throughout much of Europe before 1914, however, made it difficult for most naturalist playwrights to get their plays produced. The authorities

Figure 8.2

André Antoine as old Hilse next to his loom in the *Théâtre Libre*'s 1892 production of Hauptmann's *The Weavers*. Color lithograph by Henri-Gabriel Ibels, 1893, on the cover of a portfolio for Antoine's *Théâtre Libre* programs, all of which featured prints by Parisian avant-garde artists.

© Gary Jay and Josephine S. Williams.



objected to the offensive language of much naturalist dialog and feared the political implications of the dramas. To avoid censorship, producers in several countries interested in naturalism (and in other censored plays) organized independent theatres on a subscription basis for members only. In Paris, for instance, André Antoine began the Théâtre Libre in 1887 when the censors refused him permission to produce a short season of new plays, which included an adaptation of a Zola novel. One of his early productions was Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881), which many believed to be the epitome of stage naturalism. The Théâtre Libre also produced several of Becque's plays, *The Power of Darkness* (1888) by Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), and *Miss Julie* in 1893, by the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg (1849–1912).

Antoine's theatre provided a model for other free theatres in Europe. Also organized as a private club to escape censorship, the *Freie Bühne* (Free Stage) in Berlin produced predominately naturalist plays by Ibsen, Becque, Tolstoy, and others, and created the first audience for Hauptmann's dramas. The Independent Theatre, modeled on the other "free" theatres on the continent, opened in London in 1891 with a production of *Ghosts*. It continued until 1897, mostly showcasing naturalist plays. Because the free theatres of Berlin and London employed actors who rehearsed and performed in the midst of their other professional commitments, neither the *Freie Bühne* nor the Independent Theatre could mount the kind of fully integrated productions that marked the success of the *Théâtre Libre*, where Antoine relied on trained amateurs. Nonetheless, all three theatres played a significant role in introducing Europe to the possibilities of stage naturalism.

Symbolism and aestheticism

After 1900, many theatre artists moved away from naturalism; some, like Hauptmann, openly rejected it for symbolism. The symbolists urged viewers to look through the photo-like surface of appearances to discover more significant realities within – spiritual realities that they believed the naturalists had ignored. Seeking to

advance a theatre of immanent spirituality, Gustave Kahn wrote the first manifesto of theatrical symbolism in 1889. The early symbolists, who also included the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898) and Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949), drew inspiration from the myth-laden music dramas of Richard Wagner, the gothic mysteries of Edgar Allan Poe, German idealist philosophy, and the imagistic poetry of Charles-Pierre Baudelaire.

The *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre*, begun in Paris in 1893 and run by Aurélien Lugné-Poë (1869–1940) became the center of symbolist performance in Western Europe (Lugné-Poë added the "Poë" to his name in honor of the American author). Lugné-Poë opened his theatre with Maeterlinck's *Pelléas and Mélisande*, written in 1892. Like other of his early plays, *Pelléas and Mélisande* evokes a mood of mystery through multiple symbols, eerie sound effects, and ominous silences. With little overt action, *Pelléas and Mélisande* relies as much on sound as sight. Lugné-Poë produced Maeterlinck's play on a semi-dark stage with gray backdrops and gauze curtains separating performers and spectators. In accord with the symbolists' desire to foreground the aurality of language, the actors chanted or whispered many of their lines, and they moved with ritual-like solemnity. Maeterlinck's symbolist plays mystified and irritated some spectators, but they also fascinated others. In his theatre, Lugné-Poë also experimented with synesthesia in an attempt to engage all of the senses (including taste and smell) in the theatrical experience. Although the *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre* produced plays in many styles and from many periods (including translations of Sanskrit dramas from India) until its demise in 1929, it continued to be known for its symbolist works.

The Parisian symbolists influenced two centers of symbolist production in Russia. In Moscow, Valery Briusov (1873–1924) argued that the naive lyricism of Russian folk drama made it appropriate for the symbolist stage. Vyacheslav Ivanov (1866–1949) led the St. Petersburg symbolists with manifestos calling for a theatre in which actor-priests would facilitate the creation of mythic dramas with audience-congregants,

primarily through the chanting of archaic language. Although Stanislavsky produced several symbolist pieces at the Moscow Art Theatre, Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940) had more success with symbolism in St. Petersburg. Meyerhold's production of *Hedda Gabler*, for example, ignored Ibsen's realist stage directions and deployed bold colors and sculpted, repetitious movements to evoke the claustrophobia of Hedda's world.

Two theatrical visionaries, Adolphe Appia (1862–1928) and Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966), borrowed many of their ideas from the symbolists. Both urged a radical break with the pictorial illusionism of the past through the innovations made possible by electricity. They understood that the new lighting could

add dynamism to the image of the actor moving within sculpted scenery rather than pasted against stage flats. Eager to perfect a scenic equivalent to the soaring music of Wagner's operas, Appia published *The Staging of Wagner's Musical Dramas* in 1895 and *Music and Stage Setting* in 1899. In these and later works, Appia argued that the aesthetic unity of opera depended on synthesizing all of the stage elements – crucially the music, scenery, lighting, and the performers. This led him to recommend steps, platforms, vertical columns, and other non-realist, three-dimensional units for scenery (Figure 8.3). Influenced by the “eurhythmics” movement after 1906, Appia emphasized musical rhythm as the key to aesthetic coherence. Eurhythmics, begun by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1960), trained

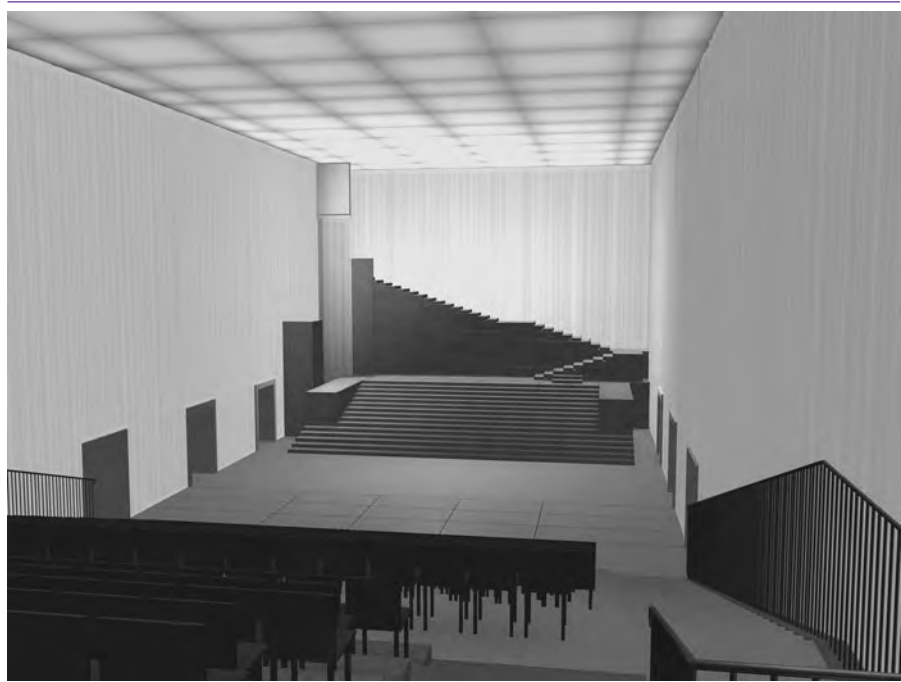


Figure 8.3

Adolphe Appia's design for Christoph Willibald Gluck's opera, *Orpheus and Eurydice*, 1913, at Hellerau, as realized through computer-assisted design.

© 3D Visualization Group, School of Theatre Studies, University of Warwick.

students to exercise their bodies by moving to a variety of musical rhythms.

For Appia, audiophonic communication was the proper basis for artistic unity and the key to true reality. Most theatre practitioners ignored Appia's ideas before 1914, but his precepts exerted significant influence after the war when German expressionist experiments with sound, scenery, and light gave his ideas new cogency.

Gordon Craig's visionary statements about the need to revolutionize the stage were harder to ignore than Appia's because Craig never ceased to publicize them. In a series of books beginning in 1905 and in a periodical, *The Mask*, which he edited sporadically between 1908 and 1929, Craig argued for aesthetic and atmospheric coherence through designs that integrated the actor with three-dimensional, abstract set pieces through the bold use of light and sound. Unlike Appia, Craig favored a single setting for an entire performance to evoke the spirit of the play, with minor changes effected through the movement and dynamic lighting of towering, vertical screens. Craig also urged that the theatre – which he believed was an individual, not a collective art – must bow to the control of a master-artist. Influenced by Wagner's call for stage production as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a total art work in which all elements are unified in contributing to the whole effect) and by Friedrich Nietzsche's desire for a superman who could bear the burden of life's contradictions, Craig sought a total artist of the theatre who could combine playwriting, designing, and directing. At one point, Craig proposed that this directorial superman might even control the acting during performances. Despairing of the intransigence of stars and the materiality of actors' bodies, he suggested that live performers should be replaced by large puppets – *Übermarionettes* – that could more easily evoke spiritual realities and would be easier to control. Like Appia, Craig prefigured the film era of theatrical art. Both advocated abstract scenery and flexibility in lighting, and pushed the stage director toward the role of an *auteur*, a figure (like some film directors) who takes author-like control of all the elements of a production.

Appia and Craig shared some commonalities with the aesthetic movement, which also praised the artistic unity achieved by Wagner in his music-dramas. In general, though, the aesthetics turned their backs on the spiritual proclivities of the symbolists in their attempt to realize stage productions that allowed spectators to escape the workaday world and revel in heightened aesthetic sensations. In his aesthetic drama *Salomé* (1893), for example, Oscar Wilde hoped that his imagistically charged dialogue and tension-filled stage tableaux would move his audience to experience the anger, lust, cruelty, and revenge of his major characters. Aestheticism also shaped the neo-romanticism of Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1874–1929) in Germany. The playwright and poet invited a meditative response from audiences with a group of short plays in the 1890s, including *Death and the Fool* (1893) in which allegorical characters speak a highly imagistic language. Edmund Rostand (1868–1918), best known for the soaring poetry of his *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1898), also embraced the goals of the aesthetics.

In Russia, aestheticism traveled under the name of cultural retrospectivism. Aleksandr Blok (1880–1921), earlier hailed as a major symbolist poet and dramatist, now rejected symbolism for what he took to be its empty mysticism. Meyerhold, too, moved beyond symbolism after 1905. His 1906 production of Blok's tragic farce, *The Puppet Show*, combined *commedia dell'arte* comic techniques with grotesque effects to underline Blok's poetic and absurdist vision. In addition to its satirical intent, the aim of this production, and of cultural retrospectivism in general, was to recover older forms of theatre as a means of transporting audiences into heightened aesthetic experiences. The retrospectivists, like the aesthetics, believed in “art for art's sake.” Nikolai Evreinov (1879–1953) became the major proponent of retrospectivism in Russia. He drew on Nietzsche's praise of the aesthetic life and Henri Bergson's vitalism (explained in the case study on Plautus at the end of Chapter 3, p. 126) to propose that the artist-hero transform his own life into a work of art. In a series of manifestos, essays, and plays, Evreinov urged the production of monodramas to

externalize the consciousness of the protagonist. He co-founded a theatre in St. Petersburg to explore his ideas and later served as artistic director at the Maly Theatre in Moscow, where he directed harlequinades, pantomimes, and monodramas.

Futurists and dadaists

This brief summary of the aesthetic movement indicates the limitations of the first generation of the European avant-garde. While opposed to many aspects of bourgeois culture, the aesthetics, like the naturalists and symbolists, did not fully reject the theatrical institutions of the bourgeoisie. Indeed, like Evreinov, several early avant-gardists moved between their own theatres and mainstream playhouses, usually in the expectation that they could bring their innovations with them. But as Peter Burger, a noted theorist of the avant-garde, insists, avant-garde artists could not break their ties to the dominant culture until they attacked “the status of art in bourgeois society” (Burger 1984:49). Accordingly, avant-garde movements after 1910 stopped treating “the arts” as a separate arena of practice within bourgeois society and began to reconfigure their artistic work as the genuine basis of a utopian society. Instead of producing individual works that might or might not have some limited effects on the dominant culture, as the aesthetics and symbolists had done, avant-gardists started to use their own theatres to explore the possibilities of new modes of experience and social organization. The futurists and dadaists took the first tentative steps toward realizing this challenge.

Futurism began in Italy with the publication of “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” by F.T. Marinetti (1876–1944) in 1909. The manifesto damned the art of the past, including museums, concert halls, and conventional theatre, and, contrary to symbolism, called for artistic forms that would exalt the speed and dynamism of the machine age. 📺 Earlier than other avant-garde artists, Marinetti embraced the revolutionary potential of film to transform the theatre. More manifestos followed, and soon Marinetti was producing “Futurist evenings” in large auditoriums that

included lectures, poetry readings, art displays, and theatrical skits. Some skits were little more than conventional variety sketches, but others explored themes and conflicts that were anti-realist, alogical, and abstract, as well as thrilling and visionary. Marinetti also experimented with performer-spectator dynamics, usually in an attempt to outrage bourgeois audiences. Because Marinetti glorified warfare as a necessary source of modern dynamism, futurism declined in Italy with the mounting devastations of World War I.

Interest in the potential of futurism to inspire a machine-age utopia blossomed in Russia, however, perhaps because the Russian empire, one of the most backward areas of Europe, was in need of vast transformations. The Russian futurists, like their Italian counterparts, scoffed at the idealizing mysticism of the symbolists and looked to the machine and to film as engines for utopian change. Soon after the 1917 Revolution, Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), leader of futurism in Russia, aligned the movement with Bolshevism and went to work to create effective propaganda for the struggling regime. With Meyerhold, Mayakovsky co-directed his play *Mystery-Bouffe* (1918), which depicts the establishment of a futurist paradise on earth. As we will see, this production helped to move Meyerhold away from aestheticism and toward his eventual embrace of constructivism, the major avant-garde movement to emerge from the Russian Revolution.

Artist-refugees, most of them French, initiated dadaism in a cabaret in neutral Zurich in Switzerland during World War I. The dadaists (who apparently chose their name randomly by opening a dictionary) rejected the rationality that they believed had led to war. 📺 They were partly inspired by Alfred Jarry’s (1873–1907) *Ubu Roi*, a scandalous success in 1896 at the *Théâtre de l’Oeuvre*, which satirized a decadent bourgeois anti-hero as a war-mongering boob. In a sense, *Ubu* was the first dadaist piece of theatre; it presaged many of the dadaist strategies to come. Jarry borrowed characters and situations from rural French puppet theatre (where he had worked), put them on a stage with deliberately

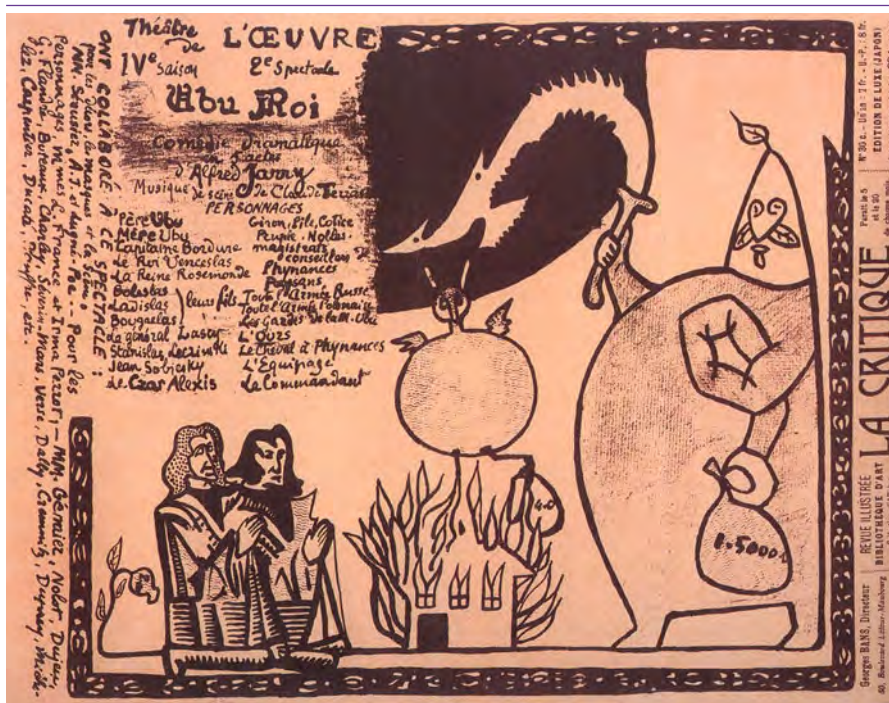


Figure 8.4

Alfred Jarry's lithographed program for the 1896 Paris premiere of his play, *Ubu Roi* (*King Ubu*), at the *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre*, staged by Aurélien Lugné-Poë. It was published by the journal, *La Critique*, with other programs for the theatre's season. The corrupt Ubu carries the "pshitt sword" he refers to in the play and a bag of money. The burning house is that of one of Ubu's subjects who did not pay his taxes.

Source: The Spencer Museum of Art, Museum purchase: Letha Churchill Walker Memorial Art Fund, 1990.0085.

crude and highly stylized scenery, and instructed his actors to perform like marionettes, mechanically and with broad physicality (Figure 8.4). A similar satirical anarchy ran through many of the dada public performances in Zurich. Like the futurists, however, the dadaists leavened their oppositional anger against bourgeois art with utopian vision and experimentation. Several dadaist composers attempted to widen the kinds of sounds that might be acceptable as music, for example. Moving beyond the futurists, the dadaists also questioned the kinds of causal connections between sensations and

behaviors that most futurists had taken for granted. During and after the war, some of the Zurich dadaists attempted to live according to the notions of chance, fragmentation, and simultaneity that they were exploring in their art.

German expressionism

The term “expressionism” was initially used by François Delsartre (1811–1871), who attempted to systematize the actor’s physical and vocal expression of ideas and emotions related to what he conceived to be the

physical, mental, and spiritual parts of the performer's body. By the end of the nineteenth century, Delsartre's system had become the basis for many programs of actor training. As we will see, the theatre artists in Germany who began calling themselves expressionists around 1910 were especially interested in the spiritual dynamics of Delsartre's system. After 1900, art critics also used the term to denote a non-realist painting suffused with the subjective emotions of the artist; this general connotation also applied to the new theatrical movement.

The late plays of August Strindberg provided several significant models for expressionism as well. Following his naturalistic dramas and a difficult period of mental instability the dramatist called his "Inferno," Strindberg strove for a theatre that he hoped might synthesize the materialism of naturalism with the spirituality of the symbolists. His post-Inferno plays, notably *To Damascus*, a trilogy (1898–1901), *A Dream Play* (1902), and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907), attempted to embody the experience of mythical journeys and spiritual dreams. Perhaps *Ghost Sonata*, written to be produced at his Intimate Theater in Stockholm, was Strindberg's most successful attempt to find visual metaphors for his notion of matter infused with spirit. Vision is a central motif of the play, which involves the piercing, removal, and reversal of scenic surfaces to reveal the psychological tricks and inevitable shortcomings of human perception. As in many symbolist dramas, *Ghost Sonata* also makes significant use of sound to suggest spiritual presences – a singing milkmaid and a transformed figure in a closet who squawks like a parrot, for example. Unlike the symbolists, though, Strindberg never posited the superior reality of idealist abstraction or spiritual transcendence over the concreteness of the material world. Instead, like the later expressionists, Strindberg sought the realm of the spiritual through the material. Strindberg's interests in spirituality, strong emotions, the tricks of perception, and grotesque sounds and images were given fuller rein in theatrical expressionism.

German expressionist plays called for such anti-realist techniques as grotesquely painted scenery, exaggerated movement, and "telegraphic" dialog, so named because

it copied the abbreviated, mechanistic quality of a telegraph message. These features were evident in several early expressionist plays, including Walter Hasenclever's (1890–1940) *The Son* (1914) and *From Morn to Midnight* (1916), by Georg Kaiser (1878–1945).  While both plays invite spectators to view the distorted dramatic action through the fevered eyes of the protagonist (who also represents much of the author's point of view), neither drama ignores the very real material factors that constrain the protagonist's spiritual longings. The younger generation's revolt against the restraints of bourgeois society in *The Son*, in fact, acknowledges that the title character cannot realize his ecstatic utopian hopes without killing his father, a symbol of conventional order and repression. Like Strindberg, the early expressionists explored the tensions between spiritual desires and material constraints.

Although censorship before and during World War I prevented most expressionist plays from reaching the stage, expressionism flourished in Germany immediately after the war. Optimism about the imminent overthrow of conventional German society in the wake of German defeat and the 1917 revolution in Russia turned expressionism toward utopian socialism. When *The Son* finally reached the stage in 1918, the director's statements about the production summed up the goals of the movement for the public. Expressionism, he said, was "the exteriorization of innermost feelings," a "volcanic eruption of the motions of the soul" and involved "the boundless ecstasy of heightened expression" (Berghaus 2005:85). Georg Kaiser's vision now embraced pacifism in his anti-war play *Gas* (1918), which took the poison gas used by troops in the Great War as a metaphor for the spread of social corruption. In the same year, Ernst Toller (1893–1939) advocated a Soviet-like revolution in Germany in *Transfiguration* (1918) (Figure 8.5). Other expressionists joined the generational rage that had fueled several pre-war plays to a more general call for the spiritual and material regeneration of German society. To model their hoped for utopia, several productions sought to forge a spiritual union between actors and spectators by abolishing the proscenium arch, eliminating

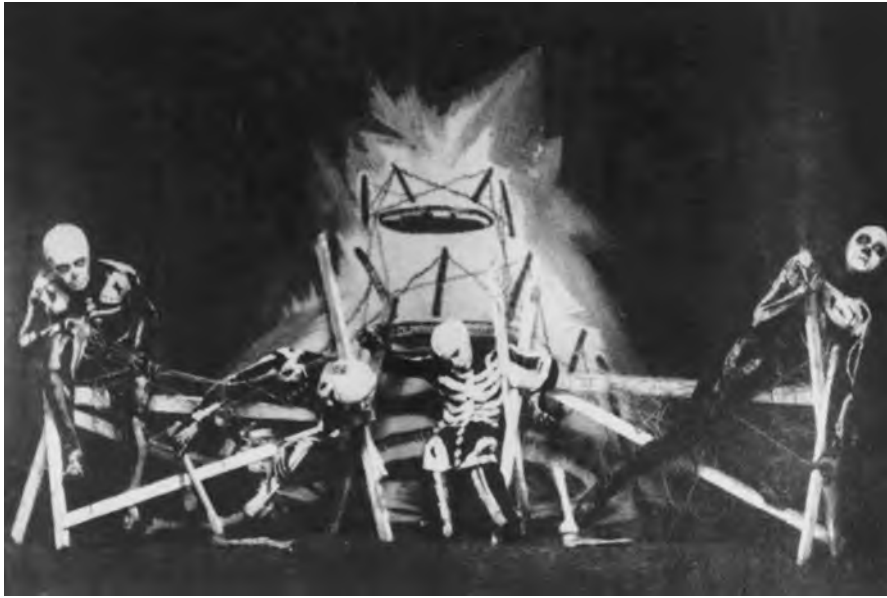


Figure 8.5

Contemporary print of a scene from the 1919 expressionist production of *Transfiguration* (*Die Wandlung*), by Ernst Toller (1918).

© Oskar Fischel, *Bildnerische der Scene* (1931), Abb. 125.

illusionistic scenery, and mounting direct calls for a new world. Ecstatic acting often powered expressionist performance. According to one review praising actor Fritz Kortner, for example: “Words coagulate and dissolve in a rhythmic fashion. Screams erupt and vanish again. Movements surge back and forth. . . . Kortner’s playing pushed himself beyond the limits of the stage and made him burst into the auditorium” (Berghaus 2005:87).

Revolutionary fervor was short-lived in German expressionism, however. Kaiser ended *Gas II* (1920), his sequel to the 1918 play, with the apocalyptic destruction of the world to indicate his growing despair with politics. Toller, a more overtly socialist writer than Kaiser, ironized his disillusionment with socialism in *Hurrah, We Live!* (1927). The uneasy fusion of subjective vision and revolutionary politics in post-war German expressionism faded in the theatre after 1924. Expressionism continued to

shape German film, however, as well as a style of modern dance that had wide international influence. Expressionist dance can be traced to 1913, when Rudolph Laban (1879–1958) and Mary Wigman (1886–1973) presented their original dances in Munich. Both continued to work in Germany and elsewhere during the 1920s and 1930s to make dance a medium for the embodiment of inner emotions and conflicts. They also expanded dance productions to include the spoken word and choral chanting, as well as music and scenery.

Film and the avant-garde

The possibilities of film both altered and helped to constitute several avant-garde movements after World War I. Cinema shaped the futurism of Mayakovsky, who wrote several film scenarios during the 1920s in addition to his plays. It extended the life of German

expressionism, where the films of Fritz Lang (*Dr. Mabuse*, 1922; *The Nibelungen*, 1924; and *Metropolis*, 1927) and other directors kept expressionist acting and design before the public even while the theatrical side of the movement was in decline. As we will see, film also had a formative effect on two major avant-garde movements that began after the war, Russian constructivism and French surrealism. As well, it influenced some of the plays that came out of theatrical experimentation in the U.S.

Even before the sound era of the movies, theatre and film artists borrowed extensively from each other, a mutual give-and-take that shaped both media. Until about 1915, most of the borrowings ran from theatre to the cinema, as the early movies took variety acts, scenic conventions, modes of story-telling, acting styles, and musical underscoring (played by musicians during the screening) from the popular stage. In those days, most theatre artists looked down on film as a lower-class entertainment of little artistic worth. By the end of the Great War, however, when better technology had led to a much wider range of shots, locations, and editing possibilities, and when mass distribution was attracting the middle classes for feature-length films, the balance had shifted. From the 1920s onward, the reality effects of film had more of an influence on the stage than the other way around.

One result of the ubiquity of film after the war was to popularize some of the innovations that the theatrical avant-garde had been pushing since the 1890s. Many of the symbolists, expressionists, and futurists had explored a wide variety of locales in their productions, a fluid use of space impossible to achieve in realist and naturalist productions. Film, through its jump-cuts, pans, and tracking shots, could easily take spectators into numerous places, and audiences began to expect the same kinds of flexibility while watching a play on stage. Appia, Craig, and others anticipated filmic effects in their suggestions that lighting instruments could be used to heighten an actor's presence, gain design flexibility, and speed playing time. Some avant-garde designs, taking advantage of darkened house lights, effectively turned follow-spots into cameras. Before film scripts demonstrated the power of short scenes with little dialog and heightened action, Strindberg,

Kaiser, and Blok had explored these possibilities. Several avant-garde playwrights and directors like Meyerhold were already demonstrating the theatrical possibilities of what would later be called filmic "montage," the revelation of dramatic meaning through a rapid sequence of thematically related scenes or images. In cities where artists could work easily in both media, such as Berlin, Paris and Moscow, the crossover effects of film on the theatre were especially pronounced. Avant-garde theatre and film artists watched each other's productions and enjoyed collaborative discussions. Plus, some artists worked in both media. After 1920, nearly all avant-garde movements shifted toward a filmic orientation to the theatre.

Meyerhold and constructivism

Like many in his generation of theatrical artists, Vsevolod Meyerhold had journeyed from naturalism to symbolism and into retrospectivism and futurism in the years before 1918. Meyerhold welcomed the Revolution and led members from most factions of the Russian avant-garde into active collaboration with the Bolsheviks. While holding several leadership positions in the new government, Meyerhold also continued his theatrical experiments, which included a system of actor training known as biomechanics. In the first case study of this chapter, Meyerhold's biomechanics is contrasted with Stanislavsky's program of actor training. Biomechanics became the basis for Meyerhold's constructivism, the final avant-garde movement of his career. Constructivism would also end the phenomenal success of the Russian avant-garde in the 1905–1940 era.

Partly a synthesis of retrospectivism and futurism, constructivism sought to energize audiences with actors and designs that demonstrated how human beings could use their emotions and machines to produce engaging art and a more productive life. Meyerhold collaborated with Lyubov Popova (1889–1924) on a constructivist set for *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922), for instance, that used platforms, ramps, slides, ladders, and three moving wheels to suggest a mill that had been transformed into a huge mechanical toy (Figure 8.6).  As the actors performed in biomechanical rhythms, the wheels of the mill turned to complement their timing. The production



Figure 8.6

Lyubov Popova's constructivist setting for Vsevolod Meyerhold's production of *The Magnanimous Cuckold*, 1922, by Fernand Crommelynck. The ramps and machinery provided a practical playground for biomechanical acting.

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fused the clowning of retrospectivism with the mechanical rhythms of futurism. During the 1920s, Meyerhold applied his constructivist style to several plays that advocated communist propaganda, to Mayakovsky's grotesque futurist dramas, and to a range of Russian classics. In one scene of his constructivist production of Gogol's *The Inspector General* in 1926, 15 officials popped out of 15 doors around the stage to offer a bribe to the man they took for an inspector (Gorelik 1962:315). 📺

As these examples suggest, Meyerhold drew direct inspiration from filmic techniques. "Let us carry through the 'cinefication' of the theatre, let us equip the theatre with all the technical refinements of the cinema," he wrote in 1930 (Meyerhold 1969:254). His work also influenced the great Russian film director Sergei Eisenstein, best known for his *Battleship Potemkin* (1925)

and *Ivan the Terrible* (1944). Eisenstein, a student of Meyerhold's, claimed that he learned the filmic technique of montage from Meyerhold's inventive sequencing of stage actions for his productions.

Increasingly out of favor with Joseph Stalin and tethered by the dictates of socialist realism, an official policy that required artists to celebrate the victories of the communist state in a mode of heroic realism, Meyerhold lost his theatre in 1938. In 1939, he was arrested and by the end of 1940 he was probably dead. With him died the last hope of the Russian avant-garde during the Stalinist era. After Stalin's death in 1953 and the 1956 "thaw" in the cold war, however, the ideas and images of Meyerhold's constructivist theatre began to emerge. They influenced theatrical practice throughout the world, especially in England, Germany, and Eastern Europe.

Constructivism also flourished in Germany after the decline of expressionism. At the Bauhaus, a school established in Weimar to explore innovations in modern architecture, design, and the arts, Oskar Schlemmer (1888–1943) and others mounted a series of experiments staging what they understood as the basic elements of the theatre, abstracted for the modern age. For example, Schlemmer's *Form Dance* in 1926 used three dancers with props and geometrical objects to explore the fundamental principles of theatrical form. Like Meyerhold, Schlemmer was attracted to the circus; his *Musical Clown* involved a professional dancer costumed with geometrical forms and enacting comic and grotesque actions derived from the circus and variety theatre. Similar to Meyerhold's goals for biomechanics, Schlemmer tried to reduce the body-in-motion to basic behavioral patterns and formal characteristics. Although few shared Schlemmer's metaphysical principles and utopian hopes, spectators often enjoyed his sophisticated play of rhythms, forms, and colors.

Surrealism and Artaud

After World War I, André Breton (1896–1966) and others began experimenting with “automatic writing.” Breton believed that chance, spontaneity, and the unconscious might lead a writer into a dreamlike state in which he or she could discover the source of aesthetic truth. For a short time, a group of French dadaists returning from Zurich joined Breton and his circle, but in 1924 Breton issued a manifesto proclaiming his allegiance to “surrealism,” which isolated the dada anarchists from the psychoanalytic aims of his followers. Breton took the new name from Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), who had subtitled his 1903 play, *The Breasts of Tiresias*, a “*drame surréaliste*.”  Although the 1924 manifesto was heavily indebted to Freud and mostly apolitical, Breton's next manifesto in 1929 embraced communism. Suspicious of theatre and eager to make surrealism more militant, Breton denounced many former colleagues after this manifesto, including all of those who wished to use surrealism on stage.

Breton had appointed Antonin Artaud (1896–1949) his first director of research for surrealism in 1924, but

then kicked him out of his coterie two years later. In response, Artaud, together with playwright Roger Vitrac and Robert Aron, founded the *Théâtre Alfred Jarry*, which staged surrealistic productions for two seasons. Artaud struggled to start other theatres and wrote manifestos for most of the 1930s. Psychiatrists declared him insane in 1937, and Artaud spent much of the rest of his life in mental hospitals until his death in 1949.

Artaud's substantial reputation and influence on world theatre rest not on his few productions or psychological difficulties, however, but on his manifestos, published in 1938 under the title *The Theatre and Its Double*. Writing in the tradition of Rousseau, who believed that civilization had corrupted mankind, Artaud argued for a theatre that would return modern humans to primitive mysteries through their bodies. Artaud urged theatre artists to reject the dramatic masterpieces of the Western tradition – in fact, to throw out all text-based theatre – and embrace instead performance involving music, dance, and spectacle. He had witnessed a Balinese dance troupe performing at a Paris exposition in 1931 and believed that their “primitive” rhythms and chants held the key to transformative theatre. In the mystical and impassioned essays of *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud conjured a kind of production that could unite actors and audiences to purge them of their rational restraints and individual freedoms. He proposed what he called a “theatre of cruelty,” which would evoke extreme emotions, working viscerally through the bodies of its spectators. Like other second-generation avant-gardists, Artaud believed that his ideas for actor–spectator communion could provide the basis for a utopian society, free from violence, conformity, and anxiety. *The Theatre and Its Double* had little influence on theatrical practice during Artaud's life. In the English, American, and Japanese theatre of the 1960s and 1970s, however, Artaud's visions inspired a generation of artists. (His theory and influence are discussed extensively in Chapter 12 and one of its case studies – see p. 531.)

During the 1920s and early 1930s, the Paris surrealists in literature and theatre spoke often with surrealist film artists.  Breton and his followers understood that the dream-like experience of watching a film could

help them to accomplish their psychoanalytic goals. The most successful surrealist film, with wide influence on subsequent surrealists in all media, was *Un chien andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, 1928), directed by Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel. One unforgettable sequence early in the film juxtaposes the apparent slicing of a human eyeball by a razor together with the similar “slicing” of an image of a round moon by a cloud passing in front of it. Artaud, who acted in and frequently wrote about the cinema, theorized that surrealist film could have much the same effect as “cruel” theatre. He argued for what he called “raw cinema,” which would confront people with images stripped of their referential meanings in order to trigger a primitive emotional response. How this might work in practice remained vague, however. When Germaine Dulac, a celebrated film director allied with the surrealists, directed a screenplay by Artaud, which was shown in 1928, Artaud started a riot in the theatre, claiming she had misrepresented his work. Despite these kinds of disagreements, other surrealists worked effectively in both media. Jean Cocteau (1892–1963), for example, directed seven feature films in addition to his copious work as a director and playwright for the stage.

A United States avant-garde?

If avant-garde theatre is understood as a movement-based alternative to bourgeois theatre that explodes with utopian manifestos and shocking, emotionally extreme productions, it is difficult to make a case that any theatre in the United States before 1940 could legitimately claim to be avant-garde. The Provincetown Players, founded in 1916 by George Cram Cook (1873–1924) and Susan Glaspell (1876–1948), came the closest to this definition, however. Drawing on ideas of spontaneity, collectivity, and primitive Dionysian energy that derived mostly from American pragmatism, the politics of anarchism, and the philosophy of Nietzsche, Cook and Glaspell pulled together some like-minded rebels in what they hoped would be a utopian community of artists in Provincetown, Massachusetts. By 1922, when the group disbanded, they had produced nearly a hundred plays (many of them in New York) and had helped to launch the experimental playwriting

careers of Glaspell and Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953). Glaspell wrote *The Verge* (1921), for example, in an expressionist style that merges feminism with a Nietzschean will to power in order to explore the limits of a female artist who attempts to push beyond convention to true innovation. Although the Provincetowners set loose significant artistic energies, they lacked a unifying ideology, produced mostly conventional realist theatre, and compromised their goals to gain commercial success. On the whole, their problems had less to do with specific artistic failures, however, than with the individualism at the heart of many of their beliefs and the lack of a recognized intelligentsia in the United States that could sustain any avant-garde alternative to mainstream theatre.

By 1922, O’Neill had moved from the realism of his early plays to expressionism, a form that a few Provincetown playwrights would try and that found some commercial viability in the U.S. during the 1920s. O’Neill wrote *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1921), the first a peeling-away of the layers of civilization in the mind of a black man, and the second about a working-class loner struggling to find a group where he feels he “belongs.” U.S. expressionism in the early 1920s was mostly a home-grown style (though not an avant-garde movement). Before American artists and audiences had seen much of it from Germany, playwrights O’Neill and Elmer Rice (1892–1967) apparently used the term expressionism to refer to the expressive culture movement, a broad-based program in the U.S. that sought to counter anxieties about the modern world by drawing on the performing arts. Rice’s best-known play, *The Adding Machine* (1923), depicts the recycling of an alienated office worker, Mr. Zero. In this Nietzschean grotesque comedy, Zero refuses possible freedom and floats from a pointless job adding up figures, through death and finally to an eventual reincarnation as another cowardly office worker. The short scenes of the play tend to work cinematically, partly a result of Rice’s earlier work as a screenwriter in Hollywood. Sophie Treadwell (1885–1970), another U.S. expressionist, demonstrates the need for a middle-class woman to rebel against her robotic life in *Machinal* (1928). Treadwell’s protagonist

murders her husband, an act that eventually sends her to the electric chair.

O'Neill left expressionism behind in the mid-1920s to experiment with other dramatic forms. More than any other U.S. dramatist, O'Neill studied many of the ideas that shaped the European avant-garde movements, as well as their plays, and these informed his later dramas. In addition to reading Maeterlink and Strindberg, O'Neill had devoured the work of Nietzsche and knew some of Freud's theories. Strindbergian views about the pitfalls of marriage recur in *Welded* (1922–1923) and *Desire Under the Elms* (1924). Nietzschean despair grounds the desperation of the drunks who inhabit Harry Hope's bar in *The Iceman Cometh* (1946). In *The Great God Brown* (1926), O'Neill borrows from Freud to put his actors' faces behind masks in order to depict the social masks that hide the "true" psychological self.

While he experimented with several avant-garde modes and styles, O'Neill is best known for psychologically realist plays that appealed to middle-class American audiences. The second case study in this chapter examines O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) as a part of the discourse of popular psychology during the 1920s.

Institutionalizing the avant-garde

A few directors involved in avant-garde groups, such as Antoine and Meyerhold, worked in both avant-garde and mainstream theatres. Others, like Stanislavsky, who produced several symbolist as well as naturalist works at the MAT, temporarily embraced one or another of the avant-garde movements. Nearly all second-generation avant-garde directors, however, refused to work in bourgeois institutions and rejected the compromises that the institutionalization of their innovations often required. Of course this did not stop those directors committed to mainstream theatres from borrowing extensively from the avant-garde to shape their own productions. These successful directors and their institutions helped to popularize avant-garde styles with a wider audience.

German director Max Reinhardt (1873–1943) was one of the most influential mediators between the avant-garde and the bourgeoisie during the first third of

the twentieth century. Believing that no single style suited all plays and theatrical occasions, Reinhardt directed naturalist, symbolist, and expressionist plays in Germany and Austria in a variety of spaces, often to wide public acclaim. He incorporated the innovations of Appia, Craig, and others in lighting and design and sought out new training techniques for his actors. Reinhardt was able to embrace such eclecticism because he worked closely with his collaborators while insisting on final artistic control. He also maintained a significant degree of stage realism in his productions; his actors generally used realist props and costumes and typically did not acknowledge the presence of the audience. Reinhardt's production of Wedekind's *Spring's Awakening* in 1906, for example, featured frilly transparent curtains (of the kind that proper bourgeoisie used to dress their windows) over much of the stage opening and created innovative lighting effects, but kept his actors behind the proscenium (Figure 8.7). After the Great War, Reinhardt staged many of his productions in churches and extra-theatrical settings, such as public squares. Reinhardt's success exerted an immense influence in German-speaking theatre between 1910 and 1925.

Several other pre-1940 directors followed Reinhardt's lead, adapting avant-garde techniques to mainstream productions. As Director of the Odéon, Firmin Gémier (1869–1933), an early proponent of bringing theatre to all of the French people through tent productions, produced and directed an eclectic mix of conventional and avant-garde styles in the 1920s. In Germany, Leopold Jessner (1878–1945), Director of the Berlin State Theatre from 1919 until 1933, incorporated several expressionist design principles into many of his productions. These often featured Appia-inspired flights of stairs, non-realist lighting, and symbolic costuming. In the U.S., the Theatre Guild, which enjoyed a broad subscription base of spectators, brought a few avant-garde productions to audiences from 1919 into the 1930s. Phillip Moeller (1880–1958), who generally worked in a style of modified realism, was the Guild's chief director. Several directors of international renown followed in the wake of Meyerhold's avant-garde experiments in the 1920s and early 1930s in Russia.



Figure 8.7

Karl Walser's rendering of his design for a scene from Reinhardt's production of Wedekind's *Spring's Awakening*, 1906. Wedekind's play about adolescent sexuality and the repressiveness of German culture created a scandal when it was published.

© Max Reinhardt Archive, State University of New York, Binghamton.

After Nikolai Okhlopkov (1900–1966) was appointed Director of the Realistic Theatre in Moscow in 1932, he ignored the proscenium stage and began to mount scenes for his productions throughout the auditorium, in the aisles and on a raised bridge above the audience. Not surprisingly, the emerging conventions of film influenced many of these directors. Okhlopkov, for instance, moved his productions around the auditorium to achieve a kind of filmic montage and Moeller eventually left New York to work in Hollywood. Through the influence of these directors and their institutions, plus the adoption of similar innovative practices elsewhere, the avant-garde gradually altered the expectations of mainstream audiences throughout the West.

Like Reinhardt, however, these directors were generally careful not to push their mostly middle-class spectators too far or too fast into the worlds of the avant-garde. In this conservative approach to change, the directors were actually helped by the general orientation of all first-generation avant-garde movements to their artistry. Taking their cue from Wagner's commitment to a total work of art, a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the early avant-gardists sought to reconstitute theatrical representation on the basis of their own beliefs, but did not question theatrical representation itself. The symbolists, for example, sought to immerse spectators in a sound-surround of mythic belief and fate, but their images generally remained behind the proscenium and their actors never violated the representational basis of an

actor/character on the stage. Among the avant-garde movements, only the constructivists consistently played games with the representational realities of the stage. Meyerhold sometimes staged chase scenes through the auditorium and worked with his actors to shift masks and/or roles for the same dramatic character during the course of a performance. This generally shared acceptance of the representational nature of theatre, which modernist productions would openly question (see Chapter 9), provided an unspoken common ground between much of the avant-garde and the bourgeois theatres they were loudly rejecting. It also provided an aesthetic basis for Reinhardt and other directors to graft avant-garde innovations onto their own, more mainstream productions.

The end of the first-wave avant-garde

Surrealism was the last of the major international avant-garde movements before 1940. The political problems that fragmented European culture into a series of narrower national cultures after the Great War eventually killed the international thrust of the avant-garde as well. Before the war, the plays of Maeterlink and Strindberg and the ideas of Craig and Stanislavsky had traveled easily throughout the West; emerging theatre artists had often looked to international figures as their models.

After the war and the 1917 revolution, the international utopian ambitions of Russian communism fueled avant-garde movements within the Soviet Union and Germany in the 1920s and animated the French surrealists to link their Freudianism with communism. But the worldwide economic depression of the 1930s turned many citizens toward their own nations and away from the international scene. Most of the avant-gardists were utopians of one stripe or another, but Stalinism, Nazism, and fascism had already deadened most international utopian hopes in Europe by the outbreak of World War II in 1939. As we will see in Chapter 10, utopian hopes revived in the 1960s, but the radical theatre artists of that era rarely shaped their disparate aesthetics into international movements. The political

realities of the cold war, both worldwide and within national cultures, would undermine the international aspirations of second-wave avant-gardists until the 1990s.

Nonetheless, the first-wave avant-garde left a substantial legacy. Although few artists after 1940 had seen their productions, they left behind published plays, reviews, and photographs. Significantly, those avant-garde movements that made the biggest impact on artistic work after 1940 – the expressionists, constructivists, and surrealists – also left behind their films. The expressionists influenced post-World War II German theatre as well as some of the plays of Arthur Miller in the U.S., and those of Roberto Arlt and Nelson Rodrigues, who introduced expressionism to Argentina and Brazil, respectively. As noted, Meyerhold's constructivism re-emerged in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death to influence a new generation of theatre artists in Russia and Eastern Europe, including Tadeusz Kantor in Poland. Bertolt Brecht based some of his ideas for epic theatre on Meyerhold's work and Brechtian theatre enjoyed enormous success in Germany and around the world after 1950. Arguably, the Freudian and visionary aspects of surrealism have had the most lasting influence. Major playwrights taken with one or another aspect of surrealism include: Jean Cocteau, Eugene Ionesco, and Jean Genet in France; Federico Garcia Lorca in Spain; Tennessee Williams and Sam Shepard in the U.S.; and Elena Garro and Emilio Carballido in Mexico.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Artaud (2006). DVD-video. Two-disc set of film footage originally put on video in 1995.

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Dadaism website, with good bibliography (2009): www.tranquileye.com/theatre/dada_html.

Futurism website (2009), including Marinetti's manifesto and other documents: www.unknown.nu/futurism/.

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CASE STUDY: Psychological and sociological training for the actor

By Bruce McConachie

Stanislavsky and Meyerhold

Two primary modes of training actors, the psychological and the sociological, dominated Western theatre between 1920 and 1970. The psychological mode, which emphasized the actor's immersion in a stage character, began in the Moscow Art Theatre (MAT) under Konstantin Stanislavsky, and later flourished in the U.S. (Figure 8.8). Deriving primarily from Stanislavsky's interest in naturalism, the psychological approach to actor training continues to inform most training methods for film and television acting in Hollywood. Vsevolod Meyerhold initiated a modern version of the sociological mode, which involves the actor demonstrating the character to the audience. The sociological mode underlay Meyerhold's constructivist experiments with actors, and it later provided the basis for Brechtian performance. Both approaches have deep roots in Western culture but also similarities to many non-Western modes.

Stanislavsky began experimenting with the possibilities of a systematic approach to actor training in 1906 when he experienced difficulties with his own acting work at the MAT. In 1912, he set up the First Studio at the MAT to test his ideas and gradually convinced his reluctant acting company to try them. Stanislavsky

continued to modify and improve his "system," as he called it, until his death in 1938. This system, however, varied widely over his professional life and, despite its name, was not systematized at his death. By 1938, Stanislavsky had approved the final drafts for only two of the books that would bear his authorship: *My Life in Art* and *An Actor's Work on Himself*. The translation of the latter book into English as *An Actor Prepares* omitted and misrepresented many of Stanislavsky's precepts, leading later practitioners of the American "method" to misunderstand some of Stanislavsky's ideas. Despite these difficulties, the Stanislavsky system and its U.S. spin-off as the method became the dominant model for the psychological mode of actor training.

Meyerhold joined the MAT as a young actor, but left in 1906 to explore movement-oriented methods for staging symbolist dramas. Before the Revolution, Meyerhold worked in several theatres and in cabaret in St. Petersburg, exploring and developing his ideas for the actor-puppet – a performer who could combine the arts of characterization, singing, dancing, and acrobatics with precise physical and vocal expression. In 1921, he named these concepts and practices "biomechanics," to denote their fusion of biology and machinery, and began teaching them systematically to his students in a new Soviet school for actors. Like Stanislavsky,



Figure 8.8

The Moscow Art Theatre production of Maxim Gorky's *The Lower Depths*, 1902, with Stanislavsky as Satin (center).

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Meyerhold extended and perfected his approach to acting through practice and writing; by 1930 his ideas and exercises were virtually complete. The Russian Blue Blouse troupes first demonstrated simplified versions of some of Meyerhold's performance ideas to other theatre artists in the West. Gradually, as directors from Germany, France, and the United States made their way to Moscow to witness Meyerhold's bold productions in the 1920s and early 1930s, his ideas for actor training began to attain an international following. His sociological mode of actor training had a major impact on Brechtian aesthetics.

Comparing actor training programs

Comparing different modes of actor training is not an easy task. Because most training programs teach actors

how to work on themselves and how to engage with a stage role, a description of the exercises for both kinds of preparation, noting similarities and differences, might appear to be a straightforward means of comparison. But assumptions about the self and about the process of characterization may be unstated or elusive. After all, ideas of the self vary, even within the same culture, and actors' notions of what constitutes a stage role have shifted from one historical period to another. Finally, acting programs always assume that actors have certain responsibilities to the audience. These assumptions, too, are culturally and historically situated. For these reasons, it is helpful to adopt a scholarly language that approaches neutrality when comparing two training programs and then use this relatively neutral terminology to pose the same questions of both practices.

One scholarly approach distinct from any of the conventional orientations to actor training is conceptual integration, a branch of cognitive science. Conceptual integration can help theatre scholars answer the following questions.

- 1 What notion of the actor's self is embedded in a particular program of training? What are the distinctive aspects of this self for the actor and what
- 2 kinds of exercises help the actor to prepare her/himself to perform on stage?
- 3 What is the definition of character in this program of training? How is the self of the actor to become the character on stage? Which exercises prepare the actor for this transformation?
- 4 How does a particular training program understand the actor–audience relationship? What should actors attempt to do to and for their spectators?

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Conceptual integration

The theory of conceptual integration is a part of the larger field of cognitive studies, which has already provided us with interpretive approaches for the case studies on classical Greek theatre and the *Playboy* riots. While all acting involves physical, vocal, and emotional proficiency and commitment, the cognitive engagement of the actor with herself, her role, and her relation to the audience has been the most difficult area of performance to discuss. It is also the part of acting that has varied the most over time.

In their book, *The Way We Think* (2002), cognitive scientists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (F&T) note that actors can embody their characters by mentally “blending” themselves and their roles together to form a new identity, which may be called an actor/character. To create an actor/character, performers select knowledge from three different mental concepts of identity – certain live qualities from their self-concept (that I can move, speak, gesture, etc.), their concept of the dramatist's written character (that he/she has a certain past, faces specific situations in the present, desires certain goals, etc.), and the general concept of identity, which is a cognitive universal accessible to everyone. When actors integrate themselves and the author's character into a new, blended identity, they select only certain attributes about themselves and the role. As F&T explain, in the actor's blend “his motor patterns and power of speech come directly into play, but not his free will or his foreknowledge of the [dramatic] situation. In the blend, he says just what the character says and is surprised night after night by the same events” (Fauconnier and Turner 2002:267). What spectators see on the stage is the actor/character, a blend made possible by the ability of the actor to fuse two concepts of identity into a third.

By “concept,” F&T do not mean an abstract idea or proposition, such as a philosopher might debate. Rather, they use the term in the same way as neuroscientists Gerald Edelman and Giulio Tononi, who write that mental concepts derive from “the ability to combine different perceptual categorizations related to a scene or an object and to construct a ‘universal’ reflecting the abstraction of some common feature across a variety of percepts.” Edelman and Tononi give the concept “face” as an example: “Different faces have many different details, but the brain somehow manages to recognize that they all have similar general features” (Edelman and Tononi 2000:104). This combination of similar features in the same place on a human body leads people in all cultures to understand the same mental concept, regardless of language differences. Humans begin creating cognitive concepts as soon as they are born. In addition to the human face, concepts include such basics as the color “red,” a notion of “forward,” and “identity,” the concept that includes self, character, and actor/character. We create and blend concepts all of the time, mostly below the level of consciousness. Actors may choose to make

some of their work conscious, but its cognitive fundamentals are basically no different from children adopting temporary roles to play “house” or “cops and robbers.”

According to F&T, actors use conceptual integration with surprising flexibility. When playing a character they believe to be close to themselves, actors can blend much more of their self concept of identity into the integrated mix than if they are performing a role that is very different from themselves. A twenty-year-old woman playing a romantic lead may choose to accent much of her own personality as well as her usual mode of moving and speaking in creating her actor/character blend, for example. The same actor, though, will likely rely much more on her (and the director’s) concept of the character if she is playing one of the witches in *Macbeth*. In principle, actors have wide latitude in choosing whether to blend more of the concept of themselves or of their character in creating an actor/character identity for performance. Generally, however, the culture within which actors are working will shape their identity choices. If a star actor with a strong, well-known public persona is playing a role, the actor, knowing what his public expects, will normally blend in much more of his concept of himself as an “actor” than of his concept of the “character” to create a particular actor/character identity. While the creation of normative actor/characters by Hollywood producers and stars is a good example of the restrictions imposed by culture on a performer’s creativity, all cultures inevitably shape the identities of popular actor/characters.

In *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), George Lakoff and Mark Johnson point out that people actually use several sub-concepts of identity, which the authors call “selves.” One is the “physical-object self” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999:270–274). When people say, “I’ve got to get myself moving,” or think that they have “lost control” of themselves, they are treating the self as a physical object. Another is the “locational self” (1999:274–277), as in “I was beside myself,” which understands the self as a place one can be in or out of. “She’s a Kentuckian,” “He’s down to earth,” and “I’m all over the place today” are other examples of the locational self. One significant variation on the locational self is the contained self (1999:282–284); people who speak of a “true self” within the shell of an “outer self,” for example, locate the self as a container with an inside and outside. In “the social self” (1999:277–280), we treat the self as another person; “she takes care of herself” and “I disappointed myself” are examples. In all of these cases, people conceive of their identity as a metaphorical concept for their inner life.

When performers create actor/characters, then, they are integrating two kinds of identities, themselves and the role, into a third identity, an actor/character. In the abstract, actors may conceptualize any or all of these three identities in terms of the subconcepts of selves noted by Lakoff and Johnson, the physical-object self, the locational self, or the social self. In practice, however, each actor training regimen tends to emphasize one metaphorical concept of the self that will predominate at each stage of the actor’s transformation from self and character concepts into actor/character concept. If the culture in which the actor works primarily understands identity as socially created, the actor will likely understand himself, the roles he performs in plays, and the actor/characters he creates for the stage as social selves.

In fact, the idea of social roles was the traditional way in which most people comprehended their identities before 1700. If most people named your identity in terms of your social role – if you were a mother, an aristocrat, or a slave in the culture – it was a logical step to see your primary identity as a social self. The plays of Shakespeare and Molière are full of characters who understand themselves mostly in terms of their social roles. Actors in traditional, oral cultures tended to hold concepts of themselves, of their roles in plays, and of the actor/characters they created whose identities were mainly social. After 1700, however, various European cultures began to redefine identity in locational or physical terms and actors had to work with new concepts of identity – for selves, roles, and actor/characters – to accommodate the change.

Conceptual integration and Stanislavsky's system

Reading Stanislavsky's system through the lens of F&T's understanding of conceptual integration and Lakoff and Johnson's metaphorical concepts of different selves will give us a basis for comparing it to Meyerhold's biomechanics. A review of Stanislavsky's language in his exercises for the actor's development of his/her concentration, imagination, and communication reveals that his system primarily depends on a locational conception of the self. From a cognitive point of view, the Stanislavskian performer relies on a concept of identity that is a container – for herself, her role in the play, and her actor/character. Simply put, the actor/character contains the intentions of this blended identity, plus specific physical, emotional, and interpersonal attributes. Actors playing characters attempt to fulfill their roles' intentions and overcome their obstacles within the “given circumstances,” as Stanislavsky termed them, of their characters' situations. Performers must learn through analysis, concentration, and imagination how to contain the world of their characters within themselves.

Metaphors of containment are also apparent in Stanislavsky's “rays of energy” and “circles of attention” exercises. Influenced by yoga, which he practiced most of his adult life, Stanislavsky believed that people communicate both verbally and non-verbally through rays of energy that can be controlled by the self. In one exercise, he urged actors to absorb energy from their surroundings and send it out again, through the fingers of their extended hands, to others in the room. According to Stanislavsky, actors in performance can sharpen their concentration by imaginatively dividing the stage and the auditorium into concentric circles of increasingly larger circumference that ripple out from the self. Inside the first circle are usually other characters of great significance to the actor's role. The next circle might include the setting and the other actor/characters on stage. The largest circle takes in the audience and the entire auditorium. Stanislavsky taught that actors must restrict themselves to the smallest possible circles necessary for the moment-to-moment performance of

their roles in order to retain a sense of themselves as private people, despite their public exposure on the stage. In both of these acting exercises, Stanislavsky placed the self of the actor at the center of rays of energy and concentric circles. As in the actor's self, each of the circles is a container with an inside, an outside, and a boundary between them.

In terms of the actor's work on the character, Stanislavsky recommended that the actor primarily engage with the role in the play through empathetic projection. That is, the actor must understand the feelings and values of the character and empathize with this imagined identity to such an extent that the actor sees the circumstances and actions of the character through that character's eyes and responds accordingly. For example, in an exercise Stanislavsky termed “affective cognition,” he recommended that actors visualize distinct moments in the lives of their characters so that these images would trigger affective, empathetic responses to the characters they were playing. In general, Stanislavsky's understanding of characterization was similar to that of many nineteenth-century novelists. Like them, he saw characters as complex human beings with many attributes, feelings, and unconscious desires with whom readers could be invited to empathize. Stanislavsky's famous “magic if” – which might be paraphrased as, “if I were this character in the midst of the circumstances of this scene, what would I do?” – depends on empathy. Once the actor began to understand her/his character from the character's point of view, Stanislavsky required actors to analyze the script for the character's intentions and physical actions and to “score” them as a composer might develop a melody. Rehearsing the intentions and actions of the character ensured that the actor in performance would not depart from his/her empathetic involvement with his role to play directly for applause or become distracted by off-stage circumstances.

As an artist of the theatre, Stanislavsky understood that spectators could engage with actors playing roles in a number of ways. In cognitive terms, spectators could distance themselves from actor-characters, objectify

and laugh at them, brand them as villains or sympathize with them. Several of Stanislavsky's best productions, however, established an empathetic bond between actors and spectators. For the 1909 MAT production of *A Month in the Country* by Ivan Turgenev (1818–1883), Stanislavsky was able to direct actors trained in the techniques of his First Studio to empathize with their characters through close attention to the conflicts between their inner lives and their social facades. In one scene in which a young mother is attracted to the tutor of her son, Stanislavsky directed the actor to heighten the contrast between her inner desires and her outward distraction. By playing the identity of the character in this way, the actor pulled the audience into the problems of her contained character and induced them to empathize with her plight.

A cognitive approach to biomechanics

Meyerhold's understanding of acting and his program for actor training differed substantially from Stanislavsky's. Regarding his conception of the actor's self, Meyerhold primarily held to a notion of the physical object self, not the locational self. Most of Meyerhold's biomechanical exercises to prepare the actor's sense of him/herself for the stage involved the performer consciously moving his or her physical body. Meyerhold's syllabus for his new acting school in 1921, for example, required his students to learn gymnastics, fencing, juggling, a variety of dances, and several other physical skills, plus anatomy and physiology so that the students would understand the potential of their bodies. During the 1920s, Meyerhold frequently compared his biomechanics to the industrial time-and-motion studies of Frederick W. Taylor, who recommended changes in the routines of assembly-line work in the U.S. to increase efficiency. Both Taylor and Meyerhold (the capitalist and the communist) experimented to understand how a given task might be accomplished by a worker or actor as quickly and easily as possible.

Meyerhold also perfected more complex movement exercises that he called *études*. In his "Shooting from the

Bow" *étude*, for example, the actor pantomimes a series of rhythmic movements that suggest running toward a quarry, shooting an imaginary arrow, and celebrating the kill. The exercise involves a thorough workout of the muscular tension and release appropriate for each movement. The actor's ability to manipulate him/herself, understood as a physical object, is fundamental to all of this training (see Figure 8.9).

After an intense regimen of this program, the Meyerholdian performer is ready for characterization. Stanislavsky thought of the identity of characters in much the same way as he thought of actors: both were contained, complex selves. Meyerhold, in contrast, considered actors as physical selves but thought of characters as social selves. As Meyerhold saw it, a character in a drama was not a fully rounded, complex individual who had a kind of existence apart from the actor's body and imagination, as might a character in a novel. Rather, for Meyerhold, a playwright's characters were little more than traditional social types. In one of his syllabi for an acting workshop, Meyerhold listed 17 set roles for men and women, such as the fop, the heroine, the moralist, the young girl in love, the clown, the matchmaker, and the guardian – all traditional type characters played by actors since medieval times.

Like the great French actor Constant-Benoît Coquelin (1841–1909), Meyerhold believed that it was the actor's responsibility to flesh out these types, to embody them with actions and emotions appropriate to their social roles and their situations in the play. He gave his actors mask exercises in which they froze their faces into social masks and explored movements appropriate to their expressions. Meyerhold went beyond Coquelin and other traditionalists, however, and emphasized that an actor could play several types within the same actor/character and even momentarily break from one of these types by throwing in an action that contradicted and commented upon the social role he was playing, for example. At one point, the actor might empathize with his/her character and attempt to see and respond to the world of the play from the identity of the blended actor/character. At another point, however, the actor



Figure 8.9

The “meat mincer” setting, designed by Varvara Stepanova, in Vsevolod Meyerhold’s 1922 production of *The Death of Tarelkin*, by Alexander Sukhova Kobylin. Stepanova referred to her set pieces as “acting instruments,” designed to enable vigorous physical limitation.

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could step back from the integrated actor/character to comment directly on the figure she/he had just portrayed. From Meyerhold’s point of view, a successful production presented a series of discrete, self-contained units of action and the role played by an actor within these units need not add up to a consistent characterization. In the end, the characters had to serve the purposes of the actor’s performance and the director’s production, not the other way around.

How this worked is best seen in one of Meyerhold’s most famous productions, *The Magnanimous Cuckold* (1922). In Fernand Crommelynck’s tragifarce, a village miller, Bruno, is infatuated with his lovely young wife, Stella, but so doubtful of his own sexual appeal that he believes Stella must have a lover. So he forces her to sleep with every man in the village to discover the identity of

the lover. As previously noted in Chapter 8 (in the section on Meyerhold and constructivism), the constructivist setting for the production by Lyubov Popova suggested the machinery of a miller’s windmill, but also created a series of movement possibilities for the performers in the production (Figure 8.6). Maria Babanova, a small, radiant, energetic actor, played Stella as a series of related types. According to one eyewitness report:

[Babanova’s] performance is based on rhythms, precise and economical like a construction. . . . The role develops, strengthens, matures without restraint – violently, yet according to plan. One moment, she is talking innocently to a little bird, the next she is a grown-up woman, delighting in the return of her husband; in her passion and

devotions, she is tortured by his jealousy. And now she is being attacked by a mob of blue-clad men, furiously fending them off with a hurricane of resounding blows.

(Braun 1995:182)

Although this report is not precisely worded, it is clear that Babanova moved quickly among several social types, dropping one to embody another, often without transition. Igor Ilinsky also deployed several character types to depict Bruno. He even undercut his most prominent characterization of the miller with clowning. As a fellow actor stated:

Bruno . . . stood before the audience, his face pale and motionless, and with unvarying intonation, a monotonous declamatory style, and identical sweeping gestures he uttered his grandiloquent monologues. But at the same time this Bruno was being ridiculed by the actor performing acrobatic stunts at the most impassioned moments of his speeches, belching, and comically rolling his eyes whilst enduring the most dramatic anguish.

(Braun 1995:183–184)

Where Stanislavsky primarily taught his actors how to induce a psychological response from an audience, Meyerhold mostly wanted spectators to engage with actors on physical and social levels. In the earlier example from the *Magnanimous Cuckold*, Babanova/Stella's physical presence excited affection, desire, and admiration, by turns, from the audience. Meyerhold apparently allowed some psychological identification with her: when she fought off the advances of other men, the audience probably took her values as their own, for example. But he mostly encouraged spectators to see her as a physical object. In the action noted above for Ilinsky/Bruno, the actor's belching no doubt undercut the pontificating of his character's speech. Such a situation encourages the audience to unblend the actor/character integration and to identify with the actor at the expense of the character.

Spectators could empathize with both actor/characters at the physical-social level of their embodiment, but also occasionally distance themselves from the actors' representations of both types. Meyerhold always wanted his audience to understand that theatre was a game. That actors could jump in and out of representing actor/characters was part of the fun.

Although these are complicated responses to describe from a cognitive linguistic point of view, it is important to keep in mind that they happened quickly and mostly unconsciously in the theatre. Where a Stanislavsky-trained actor might need several scenes to involve an audience in the complexities of her or his character, the Meyerhold-trained performer could deftly sketch a type for the audience with a few rhythmic movements, quickly draw them in to the character's situation, and provoke the desired response within the action unit.

By the end of a production, the ideal ensemble of Meyerholdian actors will have created a series of actions that challenge the spectators to make use of what they have learned through their responses. While Stanislavsky thought of audiences as similar to novel readers, bringing individual, psychological responses to what they saw and heard, Meyerhold conceived of spectators as a group of filmgoers whose social responses would help to transform the new Soviet nation. For Meyerhold, these were not Hollywood filmgoer-consumers, as movie audiences would later become, but self-conscious viewers aware of the construction of film montage and meaning. Rather than creating an illusion on the stage, Meyerhold sought to create a kind of carnival in the entire auditorium, and often had his actors breaking the illusion of the fourth wall or even running through the playhouse to engage spectators directly. By training his actors to physicalize social types for the stage, Meyerhold wanted to call attention to the kinds of physical and social transformations necessary for the welfare of the new Soviet Union. In the 1920s, Meyerhold believed that his theatre could help to move Russia toward a Communist utopia by providing new social models trained and energized with physical efficiency.

Conclusion

Can an actor use training methods from both Stanislavsky and Meyerhold to join the psychological and sociological modes together in performance? From the point of view of cognitive science, there is no reason these methods cannot be fused. When integrating actor and character into an actor/character for dramatic representation, human beings can choose from among a variety of identity concepts. Even though our history and culture will edge us toward one choice or another, we have the natural capacity to understand ourselves as containers, social types, and as physical objects. When contemporary actors perform traditional plays, the kinds of characters they are playing will likely involve them in choosing identity concepts that are out of their comfort zone. Performing the part of a prince or a gravedigger in *Hamlet*, for example, requires actors to conceptualize these figures, at least partly, as social types. Taking on any role in a *commedia dell'arte* scenario will require even a Stanislavskian-based performer to think about the identity of her/his character and the eventual identity of the actor/character as both a social type and a physical object.

Given the possibility of combining the training programs of Stanislavsky and Meyerhold, it is not surprising that many programs since the 1960s have moved toward the integration of both of these modes. These include the movement-based work of Jacques LeCoq (1921–1999) in Paris, Suzuki Tadashi's (1939–) psychophysical regimen for actors in Japan, and the actor-as-facilitator model developed and applied by Brazilian Augusto Boal (1931–2009).

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CASE STUDY: Discoursing on desire: *Desire Under the Elms* in the 1920s

By Bruce McConachie

"Amazing New Discoveries About Love," trumpeted a magazine advertisement for a 1922 book, *Psychoanalysis*

and *Love*, by André Tridon. According to the ad, "[Tridon] shows part of what love is, why there are so many different kinds of love; just what characteristics about certain types of people attract others and why;

why love sometimes expresses itself in abnormal ways; what is behind the mask of modesty.” As a bonus, Tridon’s book supposedly explained “why love often drives people to the most extreme acts, why it sometimes leads to sensational crimes” (Pfister 1995:91). To underline the primitive nature of sexual desire, the ad printed an illustration of a bare-chested cave man with a club approaching a frightened but aroused cave woman. Popular culture had discovered Freud! Tridon’s titillating book was one of thousands of films, articles, photographs, stories, novels, and purported explanations that circulated the new revelations of pop psychology in American culture during the 1920s.

Two years later, the Experimental Theater in New York produced a play with striking affinities to Tridon’s book. Like *Psychoanalysis and Love*, Eugene O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms* explored “why certain types of people attract others,” why this love often expresses itself “in abnormal ways,” and how such love might lead “to

sensational crimes” (Figure 8.10). In O’Neill’s play, a son is attracted to his father’s young wife, the two of them begin an affair in a room haunted by the memory of the son’s mother, and the young wife ends up killing the child produced by their love. Although the play is not set among cave dwellers, O’Neill does suggest that primitive sexual passions on a New England farm in the 1850s drew the two lovers together – desires just as natural, potent, and irresistible as in prehistoric times. In retrospect, *Psychoanalysis and Love* might have been written as an advertisement for *Desire Under the Elms*.

How is the theatre historian to explain the many similarities between this piece of pop psychology and one of the best plays of a celebrated American playwright? Did O’Neill read *Psychoanalysis and Love* before writing *Desire*? This is unlikely, and there is no evidence that he did. Was he influenced directly by Freud or one of his several disciples? Here the



Figure 8.10

Old Cabot (Walter Huston) looks down on Abbie (Mary Morris), who is comforting Eben (Charles Ellis) in the 1924 production of Eugene O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms*.

© Museum of the City of New York.

evidence is stronger, but not conclusive. On the one hand, O'Neill had personal contact with three psychoanalysts, he professed adherence to Carl Jung's notion of a "collective unconscious," and admitted to reading two of Freud's books, *Totem and Taboo* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In a 1926 interview about the success of *Desire Under the Elms*, O'Neill stated that he wanted the play's dialog "to express what [the characters] felt subconsciously" (Pfister 1995:61). On the other hand, O'Neill always objected when his contemporaries suggested that he had simply transferred the findings of psychoanalysis to the stage. Subsequent critics have rightly noted that many factors may have influenced the playwright. Greek mythology, the works of Nietzsche, and O'Neill's family history as well as psychoanalysis are likely influences on *Desire*, for example. But such personal influences will not fully account for the form and content of any drama. Further, the influences on an author's product probably play a very small role (if any) in shaping the effect of a drama among audiences when it is staged. Most of the thousands of spectators who applauded *Desire* in New

York and on tour in the 1920s knew no psychoanalysts and had not read Freud.

Rather than chasing down the evidence of various influences on a playwright's work, some critics and historians have turned to discourse theory to understand the relationship between a popular play and the culture of its time. As we will see, discourse theory understands historical causality differently than conventional notions of influence allow. Instead of trying to explain the text of *Desire* as the end product of many personal experiences in the background of the author, discourse theory places all cultural texts on the same level of analysis and inquires into the larger historical reasons for their creation and success. To answer why Tridion's *Psychoanalysis and Love* and O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* gained popularity in the 1920s, the critic-historian using discourse theory must look for the *common* assumptions about truth and knowledge embedded in both of these texts. In explaining popular texts, discourse theory privileges the assumptions and rules that generate *shared* knowledge in a specific historical era, not the individual experiences or beliefs of an author.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Discourse theory

Linguists and literary critics have used the term "discourse" for many years. What contemporary critics and historians usually mean by the term derives from the theoretical and historical work of Michel Foucault (1926–1984). In books such as *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), and *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction* (1976), Foucault explored the relationships among discourse, knowledge, history, and power. A discourse, for Foucault, is simply the means by which knowledge is represented. Foucault usually wrote about the discourse of printed texts, but films, illustrations, and play performances are all types of discourse.

According to Foucault, each historical era regulates the form and content of discourses that will count as truthful knowledge. Typically, a powerful historical institution gathers together several types of discourse to produce a "discursive formation." In *Discipline and Punish*, for instance, Foucault related much of the discursive formation of the European Enlightenment to the institution of the prison. This institution and the kinds of knowledge it helped to produce and maintain reinforced the power of French and English monarchs in the eighteenth century. For Foucault, truth is always relative; it is embedded in historical discourses and linked to power.

Dominant discursive formations, which Foucault termed *epistemes*, regulate a wide range of social practices in their historical culture. By shaping what is thinkable in a given society, *epistemes* set mental boundaries in matters

of status, gender roles, racial definitions, and even sexual relations. Sexuality, for Foucault, is less a matter of biology than discourse. Like other discourses, the discursive construction of sexuality has become a resource for the control of populations living within its terms and rules. Psychiatry, advertising, and rock stars, for example, have gained power from the modern discourse on sexuality. Not all discursive formations current in a culture, however, work within the dominant *episteme*. Modern medicine, psychoanalysis, and educational practices may have produced what is understood as knowledge about sexuality for the last eighty years, but older discourses, such as the texts of Christian and Judaic tradition, have not disappeared. Their definitions and prohibitions continue to influence cultural conversations about sexuality.

Nevertheless, Foucault emphasizes that *epistemes* tend to undermine and take over the older discourses of a culture. In his *History of Sexuality, Volume One*, for instance, Foucault notes that confession has become a mode of truth telling in the modern era that links the traditional Christian act of confession to the kinds of confessions patients are expected to make to their psychiatrists. This discourse also operates to give credibility to the “confessions” appearing in such mundane discourses as newspaper advice columns and soap operas. “Confession,” in all of its forms, is now a part of the dominant discourse of sexuality and works within the contemporary *episteme*. At both the popular and elite levels of culture, confession is considered a path to truth.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 In a given institution – religious or educational, for example – where do we find special vocabularies, special terms of hierarchy perhaps, that help the institution maintain its power?
- 2 How would you characterize the discourse about a particular racial and/or religious group in our time – Western discourse about the Muslim world, for example?
- 3 How did this come about? Who controls this? (You will find some help on Western views of the “Orient” in the Chapter 3 case study on *kathakali* dance-drama and in the Chapter 12 case study, “Global Shakespeare.”)

Following from these key questions, the historian adopting discourse theory to understand the success of O’Neill’s *Desire Under the Elms* might raise more specific queries. What operations govern the primary discourse of O’Neill’s play, for example? And, how is this discourse expressed in the plot, characters, and themes of *Desire*? Further, the historian would want to know how the play’s primary discourse fits within one of the discourse formations at work in the U.S. in the 1920s. Was this primary discourse formation in the play dominant in the 1920s – a part of the culture’s *episteme*? If not, what other discourses in the culture of the time impacted on the production and reception of *Desire*?

Psychoanalysis and *Desire*

From what has been discussed so far, it is evident that a generally Freudian orientation to human identity and sexuality is the major discourse of *Desire Under the Elms*. Psychoanalysis understands human identity as

divided into a conscious mind and the more powerful realm of the unconscious, where primitive drives and desires can overcome conscious control. This discourse maintains that culture and civilization impose restraints and taboos that encourage individuals to repress their

unconscious desires and stifle their emotional fulfillment. To counter repression and attain mental health, popular advocates of these Freudian notions urge people to delve into their past to reveal unconscious motives, confess their past problems and deep desires, and find ways to act with greater freedom in the future. From a Foucauldian point of view, it does not matter whether psychoanalytic ideas are true or not. Freud's notions of the unconscious, of the cultural demand for repression, and of the possible benefits of therapy may actually be invalid. What matters for Foucault, a relativist when it comes to truth, is that people in the 1920s believed this Freudian discourse and acted on the basis of this orientation. Further, if this discourse prompted belief and action at the time, Foucault would insist that it was a controlling factor in the production and reception of *Desire*.

As in many advice columns, popular films, and other examples of psychoanalytic discourse in the 1920s, *Desire Under the Elms* suggests that unconscious passions and complexes can easily overtake conscious control. What Freud termed an Oedipal complex – in popular terms, the desire to kill the father and sleep with the mother – stalks the younger male characters in *Desire*. All three of old Cabot's sons hate their father and play out variations on copulating with their "mother." In an early scene, his two older sons, who have visited the same prostitute in town as their father, plot to get out from under Cabot's repressive control. When they finally gain their psychological release from the power of the father, they dance around him like wild Indians, performing a symbolic killing of the old farmer. From the start, Abbie, Cabot's new wife, is attracted to Eben, the youngest son, but he scorns her for taking the place of his mother, whose loss continues to obsess him. Abbie meets Eben in the front parlor of the farmhouse, where the ghost of his mother continues to haunt him. There, Abbie effectively takes the place of Eben's "Maw," and the two of them consummate their passion.

Popular Freudianism also shapes the gender roles of *Desire*. The males of *Desire* are the prime movers of the plot, and this accords with Freud's own generally

Victorian understanding of men being naturally more active and aggressive than women. Old Cabot brings home a new wife, the two older sons rebel and leave, Eben impregnates Abbie, and Cabot throws a party to celebrate the birth of what he believes is his son. But Abbie is far from passive; she takes an active role in seducing Eben and eventually kills their baby when she (wrongly) believes that he is planning to abandon her. In the Freudian discourse of the play, however, Abbie, because she is a woman, is closer to nature and less aware of her actions than the men in the play. Abbie, in fact, is much like the elms that "bend their trailing branches down over the roof" of the Cabot farmhouse, as O'Neill states in his stage directions. "[The elms] appear to protect and at the same time subdue. There is a sinister maternity in their aspect, a crushing jealous absorption" (O'Neill 1973:2) (Figure 8.11). When she first appears, Abbie's "sinister" qualities are paramount; her possessiveness about the farm and "absorption" with her sexuality drive her initial intentions. From a popular psychoanalytic point of view, her id (unconscious desire) dominates her superego (conscience). Only after she experiences the mutuality of love with Eben does she begin to break free from what O'Neill understands as her natural, unconscious impulses.

Abbie and Eben effect this cure in good psychoanalytic fashion through mutual confession. Despite their fears and anxieties, Abbie and Eben play patient and therapist for each other, gradually building a relationship of trust and love out of their initial lust. Abbie temporarily relapses into unconscious jealousy when she kills their baby without asking Eben, but she confesses her act and Eben forgives her. By the end of the play, both are more conscious of their past lives and have accepted responsibility for their actions. They know they are going to jail and determine to wait for each other until their release. In contrast, *Desire* pities those who refuse to confess, to let go of past repressions. Even at the end of the play, Old Cabot takes pride in the repressive life he has led and the possessions, especially the farm, that his repressions have helped him to acquire. And Cabot suffers – justly, according to the



Figure 8.11

Mordecai Gorelik's design for the revival of *Desire Under the Elms* at the ANTA playhouse, New York, 1952.

Source: In *From Script to Stage: Eight Modern Plays*, Ralph Goodman (ed.) (1972), R&W Holt.

discourse of the play – for the repressions that drive this possessiveness. For Abbie and Eben, however, *Desire* ends on a note of affirmation, despite a past of adultery and murder. They have worked through their psychological problems and found love through confession. For them, the play acts like a long therapeutic session: complexes, repressions, and neuroses are recognized and exorcised through a dramatic version of the “talking cure,” as Freudian psychoanalysis has been called.

Competing discursive formations

The historian using Foucauldian discourse theory, then, may conclude that *Desire Under the Elms* operates within the discursive formation of popular psychoanalysis common in the U.S. during the 1920s. That accounts for the similarities among the play and such pop psychology treatises as *Psychoanalysis and Love*. But was this discursive formation dominant in the 1920s? Was it part of the culture's *episteme*? In this regard, the historical evidence of the censorship of the play suggests that the Freudian construction of sexuality evident in the play was not yet dominant in the national culture.

O'Neill, Kenneth Macgowan (1888–1963), and Robert Edmund Jones produced *Desire* in 1924 as a part

of their Experimental Theater, Inc., which had evolved out of the Provincetown Players. Under Jones's direction and design, the play scored an initial success with audiences and critics. When the producers moved the show from the Greenwich Village Theater to a Broadway playhouse in 1925, however, a local district attorney, responding to spectator complaints, found the play obscene and ordered it closed. Opposing voices in the press and from prominent citizens, however, helped to convince a grand jury that there was nothing objectionable in O'Neill's drama, and the production continued. *Desire* had less luck in Boston. There, a censor's demand for numerous revisions led to the banning of the play and the closing of the production. In Los Angeles, the police initially arrested the entire cast of the road company production, but soon allowed them to continue performing while the trial took place. The production eventually closed before the completion of the court case.

In contrast, productions of the play in New York in the 1950s and 1960s met with no calls for censorship. Harold Clurman (1901–1980) directed the 1952 revival, which starred Karl Malden as Old Cabot. George C. Scott and Colleen Dewhurst riveted audiences in the 1963 production, directed at the Circle-in-the-Square

Playhouse by Jose Quintero (1924–1999). Why was *Desire* banned in Boston and attacked elsewhere in the 1920s, but met with respect and enthusiasm by audiences after mid-century? Part of the answer to this complex question has to do with anxieties about respectability in Boston and elsewhere, with different productions with different actors that emphasized different aspects of the play, and with the weakening of local censorship in the U.S. during the twentieth century.

Discourse theory also suggests another response to this question about audience reception. It may be that the discursive formation that gave knowledge and power to O'Neill's reliance on a Freudian construction of sexuality was not yet a dominant formation in the U.S. in the 1920s. Artists, critics, and bohemians in Greenwich Village might embrace Freudian ideas for the freedom they seemed to give them over Victorian strictures. Advertisers and others could use Freudian notions to suggest that consumption of the right products provided a ticket to sexual excitement and emotional fulfillment. But when the apparent license of Freudian sexuality ran directly into Christian tradition and Victorian respectability, many Americans in the 1920s may have balked.

There is little doubt that the discourse of *Desire* privileges psychoanalytic release over traditional morality. While it is true that Abbie and Eben will pay for their crimes at the end of the play, O'Neill arranges the rhetoric of his drama to induce the audience to pity the old father for his continuing repressions and to rejoice in the emotional release that confession has brought to the lovers. The ending reverses the conventional rhetoric of poetic justice, in which audiences could feel good when some characters were rewarded for upholding morality and others were damned for committing crimes. No wonder some spectators in the 1920s were confused and a few called for censorship.

Why, then, did the play succeed with audiences in the 1950s and 1960s? Again, several explanations are possible, but Foucauldian theory suggests another

approach to this question. Perhaps the Freudian construction of sexuality, a significant but not yet dominant discourse in U.S. culture in the 1920s, increased in power to become part of the culture's *episteme* by the 1950s. To explore this hunch, the historian would need to investigate many more primary and secondary sources in cultural history than this case study can accommodate. However, there is suggestive evidence to support this explanation. In the 1950s and 1960s, more Freudian psychoanalysts were practicing in the U.S. than ever before (or since), and Freudian explanations for human behavior were embedded in a range of powerful discourses and institutions, from business management to the operations of the CIA. Given the dominance of this discursive formation, U.S. audiences during the early cold war may have had little difficulty embracing the truths that O'Neill's dramatic Freudianism had to offer.

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Modernism in drama and performance, 1880–1970

By Bruce McConachie

This chapter examines three generations of modernist theatre, which succeeded each other at roughly 30-year intervals: 1880–1910, 1910–1940, and 1940–1970. In the first period, Ibsen, Chekhov, and a few other playwrights worked within the conventions of realism to question the realist theatre's ability to represent the many dimensions of real experience. The high modernists of the 1910–1940 period, which included W. B. Yeats and Luigi Pirandello, mostly abandoned realism to constitute separate aesthetic realms through which they could transcend the problems of modern life. The last generation of modernists in the West, under pressure to accommodate the reality effects of film and radio, infused modernism with new modes of theatricality that were grounded in a modified realism. Between 1940 and 1970, modernist directors worked with such dramatists as Jean Anouilh and Harold Pinter to craft productions that continued to embrace many of the aesthetic views of the high modernists. Post-war modernism also had a significant impact on theatrical criticism and theory. A final section of this chapter examines early Japanese modernism, which was heavily influenced by the dramas of Ibsen and Chekhov. As this overview suggests, Chapter 9 will focus primarily

on significant playwrights and their plays. Although we can discuss only a few of them, we have chosen dramas that were widely influential between 1880 and 1970.

Our emphasis on published plays follows from the first of a three-part definition of theatrical modernism. As noted before, modernism was a general orientation to the stage that emphasized the vision of the dramatist as the primary carrier of meaning in the theatre. While modernist theatre artists generally believed in this principle, modernism was not a movement, in the sense that avant-garde artists consciously organized themselves into exclusive groups that attempted to agree on a unified ideology. Modernists usually worked alone and did not proclaim their goals in manifestos. Second, modernism questioned the representational basis of theatre; it turned theatre against itself. Here again, this anti-theatrical bias did not result in a single style, as often occurred within each avant-garde movement; there was little stylistic similarity among modernist productions. Finally, the modernists (despite their name) rejected many aspects of the modern industrial world. In this, they shared many similarities with avant-garde artists, but also some differences.

Perhaps the primary difference between the modernists and most avant-gardists was their interest in crafting productions that could provide relief from the excesses of the modern world. In general, the avant-garde sought to confront and change the oppressions and obsessions of bourgeois culture. Instead of trying to alter the status quo, however, the modernists (especially those in the middle period of modernism) looked to new modes of aesthetic order that could help people to transcend the chaos of the industrial city. In their drive to constitute a formal aesthetic sphere, separate from commerce, politics, and other areas of practical life, the modernists revived the aesthetic ideas of Immanuel Kant. This idealist Enlightenment philosopher had distinguished aesthetic experience and judgment from the separate realms of science and morality. Kant limited aesthetics to bodily feeling and further rarefied it by insisting that feeling was subjective and private, with no connection to conceptual thought. With Kant, the modernists insisted that the activities of producing and responding to a work of art had to be understood on their own autonomous terms. In judging works of art, including theatrical productions, the modernists instructed critics to look for those aspects in the work itself that gave it meaning and aesthetic unity. From this formalist point of view, questions about a production's relations to its audience or to its social and cultural context were mostly irrelevant.

Keeping in mind these three elements of modernist theatre, it is clear that some avant-garde artists, especially some playwrights, also shared in modernist concerns and beliefs. For much of their careers, Frank Wedekind, August Strindberg, and Eugene O'Neill, for example, occupied a place roughly midway between the avant-garde and the modernists. These three blasted bourgeois proprieties and hoped to change them, but also, like the modernists, often stretched and occasionally questioned the representational basis of the theatre. In retrospect, it is clear that the goals of the aesthetic movement were close to those of early modernism. As we will see, the symbolist desire to substitute large puppets for actors, which originated with Edward Gordon Craig, also

influenced several modernists. What this means is that modernism and the avant-garde (treated extensively in Chapter 8) cannot be completely separated, despite our best attempts at distinguishing them through definitions. All historical writing depends on clearly defined categories, but history is always messier than any system of categories can contain.

Early modernism in Ibsen and Chekhov

Following the publication of his first play in 1850, Henrik Ibsen remained active in the theatre until his death in 1906. He wrote most of his early dramas in verse and set them in the Scandinavian past. With *Pillars of Society* in 1877, Ibsen altered the form and style of his plays from romanticism to realism, although he retained strong philosophical ties to romantic idealism. Anton Chekhov, while studying to become a medical doctor, wrote sketches, short stories, and one-act plays – several of which were performed in the popular variety theatres of Russian cities. Despite a growing reputation as a dramatist, Chekhov almost abandoned the theatre after the failure of his *The Seagull* in 1896. But Stanislavsky convinced him to allow the Moscow Art Theatre to mount a revival of the play and, following its success, Chekhov went on to write three more full-length pieces for the MAT. In addition to the popularity of the plays of Ibsen and Chekhov during their lives, many subsequent productions of them in the first half of the twentieth century and numerous published translations of them have contributed to the enormous influence of their work. Next to the plays of Shakespeare, Chekhov's remain among the most often produced in the world (works of Ibsen and Chekhov are discussed in case studies following this chapter). 📺

Both Ibsen and Chekhov believed that photography, the basis of realist theatre, had little to reveal about human experience. Chekhov sets up photography for ridicule in the first act of his tragedy, *The Three Sisters* (1901), when a minor character, Fedotik, asks the assembled guests in the Prozorov parlor to pose for a photograph. Knowing that photos freeze the flow of life

in a static pose, Chekhov arranges his plot to play against the happy, expectant faces of his major characters in the Act 1 photograph. A fire burns up all of Fedotik's photos in Act 3, and by Act 4, the snapping of photos has become a sour joke. Similarly, Ibsen sets much of his play, *The Wild Duck* (1884), in a photographer's studio, but his photographer, Hjalmar Ekdal, is a fool who cannot see beyond the surfaces that reality presents to him. Further, Ekdal, like many of his profession in the 1880s who photographed the middle class, must retouch his photos so that they conform to the sentimental images desired by his clients. Alarming, Ekdal gives much of this retouching work to his adolescent daughter, even though the strain on her eyes is gradually blinding her. The implications are clear: those who believe that photographs are truthful may lead themselves and others into sentimentality and moral blindness. Although many of the plays of both dramatists worked within the conventions of realism, both questioned the reality effects of realist theatre by attacking the psychological effects and social uses of photography.

During the 1870s and 1880s, many critics stereotyped Ibsen as a realist critic of contemporary society or even as a naturalist, intent on revealing the ways in which heredity and environment determined human fate. Many independent theatres, including Antoine's *Théâtre Libre*, produced his *Ghosts* (1881) as a demonstration of naturalism, for instance. But Ibsen's theatre consistently

moved beyond the limitations of realism and the ideology of naturalism. Rather, Ibsen was drawn to romantic idealism, a worldview directly influenced by the philosophical idealism that G.W.F. Hegel had articulated earlier in the nineteenth century.

Two romantic plays of Ibsen's mid-career, *Brand* (1865) and *Peer Gynt* (1867) validate Hegel's commitment to the individual's search for transformational self-fulfillment. Brand is a symbolic Everyman who struggles to transcend earthly fragmentation and live up to the idealist claims of his imagination. Peer Gynt is the comic opposite of Brand, a figure who prefers indirection and compromise to Brand's direct pursuit of perfection. In effect, Peer's foolish and futile life confirms the superiority of Brand's flaming idealism (Figure 9.1). In both plays, Ibsen recognized that the pursuit of self-fulfillment through transcendence was both necessary to strive for and impossible to achieve. As we will see in the first case study of this chapter, which examines Ibsen's *A Doll House* (1879), many in the nineteenth century merged Hegel's idealism with a notion of liberal tragedy.

Despite the surface realism of Ibsen's later plays, they continued to attack the limitations of photographic realism and to affirm Hegelian idealism. In doing so, they also questioned the representational basis of the theatre and affirmed Kantian aesthetic principles. *Hedda Gabler* (1890), for example, questions the representational



Figure 9.1

A scene from an Indian adaptation of Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* called *Gundegowdana chaitre*, directed at the Rangayana Theatre in Mysore in 1995 by Rustom Bharucha. Hulugappa Kattimani as Peer, in the white suit, and Manjuatha Belakere, as an Indian folk version of the Button Moulder. The Button Moulder, a messenger of Yama, god of death, in the adaptation, warns Peer of his approaching mortality. Partly because of its universal implications, *Peer Gynt* continues to be performed around the world.

Source: Dennis Kennedy (ed.) *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Theatre and Performance*, Vol. 1, Oxford University Press, 2003, p.615.

validity of the well-made play, a suspenseful form of drama that had proven its believability for bourgeois audiences since the 1820s, when Eugene Scribe synthesized its major elements. The plot of *Hedda* rests on several clichés that had come to be associated with melodramatic versions of the well-made play: a *femme fatale* (Hedda herself, who threatens to lure two good men to their doom), a pair of sensational pistols (which spectators know will be fired), a Mephistophelean figure (who attempts sexual blackmail on Hedda) and the evils of drink, leading to a misplaced manuscript (which nearly drives one man to suicide). Ibsen invites his spectators both to enjoy the operation of these mechanical contrivances of character and plot and to look through them to his language for the more essential action of the play. Mostly through its imagery, *Hedda Gabler* suggests an idealist battle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness.

Arguably, Ibsen's reliance on language reaches its acme in *The Master Builder* (1892). The tragedy traces the spiritual regeneration of Halvard Solness, a middle-aged architect-builder who gradually awakens from a spiritual torpor to ascend a tower that he has designed and constructed, a symbol of his quest for transcendence. Urging him on this quest is Hilde Wangel, a girl in her twenties who shares in his drive for self-perfection. In the end, Solness reaches the top, then falls to his death. Ibsen was interested in dramatizing the conflict between imaginative vision and practical reality, the spiritual needs that drive individuals and the limitations of material possibility that constrain and can finally kill them.

The problem with staging this conflict in the 1890s (and a problem that remains today), however, is the impossibility of realizing purely spiritual realities on a materialist stage. During the era of classical Greece or baroque opera, writers could lower gods onto the stage to represent spiritual needs and possibilities. But Ibsen, writing for a theatre limited by the reality effects of photography, can only arrange for his characters to talk about their spiritual yearnings. In the course of the action of *The Master Builder*, Solness and Hilde try to

validate a spiritual realm in which “helpers and servers” come to the aid of those on a quest, recall a mythopoeic dream they somehow both share about an earlier encounter between them, and create “castles in the air” which become real in their minds. When Solness climbs his offstage tower at the end and falls from it, the audience must listen to Hilde and others as they report the spiritual and material consequences of what is happening out of their sight. Because language is the only means that can create the realm of the spirit and Ibsen must validate this reality for his spectators in order for his tragedy to succeed, *The Master Builder* is necessarily dense with dialogue.

Chekhov, trained as a medical doctor, generally looked with amusement or compassion on people who professed to believe in spiritual realities. Interested in the material realities of psychology and history, Chekhov, unlike Ibsen, did not infuse his characters and situations with Hegelian idealism. Rather, he relied on dramatic language to reveal characterization and to undermine the usual genres of the nineteenth-century theatre. In the third act of *Uncle Vanya* (1899), for example, Chekhov has his middle-aged protagonist enter a room intending to present a bouquet of flowers to a married woman he is desperately in love with, only to find her in the arms of his best friend. Later in the same act, Vanya chases her husband (an ailing, selfish professor) around the house with a pistol, finally corners him, then shoots at him and misses, twice. Earlier in the play, though, Chekhov takes several scenes to paint a sympathetic portrait of Vanya as a man who has wasted his youth and happiness to help others by managing a country estate. *Uncle Vanya*, in other words, runs together the genres of French farce and realistic psychological melodrama, with the consequence that the character of Vanya remains both ridiculous and pathetic for much of the play. Where Ibsen's dramas indirectly criticize the representational possibilities of nineteenth-century dramatic genres, Chekhov's plays radically rework and sometimes parody them. For Chekhov, the usual dramatic frames for representing reality could not probe the major psychological and historical conflicts of the modern age.

Chekhov subverts both tragic and comic expectations in his masterpiece *The Cherry Orchard* (1904). The play asks its spectators to respond to a family of aristocrats who return to their debt-ridden estate, waste their time when they should be saving the family legacy, then lose and finally abandon the estate. Should they be understood as tragic or comic figures, or both? Chekhov provides ample possibilities for either interpretation and directors have chosen both extremes, as well as mixed them together in various combinations. Despite Chekhov's objections, Stanislavsky staged the play as a tragedy, for example. Whatever the dramatic tone of a production, it is clear that Chekhov wanted his audience to understand the historical process that was destroying the Russian aristocracy and replacing it with a new class, the bourgeoisie. The business man who buys the estate at auction, Lopakhin, had played in the cherry orchard of the estate as a peasant when he was a boy. Chekhov constructs his play so that the audience moves in and out of the situation, frequently alternating between compassion and irony. To adopt a filmic metaphor, he shifts between psychological close-ups and historical long-shots. Chekhov's materialist mix of emotions to generate historical insight was new at the turn of the century. He had to undermine conventional dramatic forms of representation to achieve it.

High modernism after 1910

Ibsen primarily wrote for the stage and Chekhov used his insights as a short-story writer to enhance the depth and range of his dramas. The same cannot be said for most of the high modernists who followed them. William Butler Yeats mostly wrote poetry, Luigi Pirandello turned to drama after a career as a novelist and short-story writer, Paul Claudel, T.S. Eliot, and Thornton Wilder published in a variety of genres, and even Samuel Beckett, better known for his plays than his other works, began as a novelist. While these authors hoped that their plays would be staged and enjoyed by spectators, they also knew that they would be published and read. To a significant degree, the high modernists wanted to attract audiences in the theatre who would respond to their plays like readers.

Moving people to transcend the material realities of the modern world was easier to do on the page than on the stage. The high modernists relied on two major techniques to separate the imaginations of their spectators from the mundane realities of the theatre, focus audience attention on their language, and transport them to a unified aesthetic world. First, they frequently resorted to metatheatricity, which frames the fiction of the theatrical illusion within another fiction to create a play-within-a-play. By calling attention to the artificiality of the stage, metatheatricity interrupts the flow of a performance and undercuts its believability. Spectators frequently reminded of the fictive nature of a play cannot immerse themselves in a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or any other totalizing performance, and may be more easily drawn to the words of the playwright. Second, the high modernists tried to get spectators to separate the actors' bodies from their characters' words. More interested in their written dialogue than in the usual fusion of actor and character in the theatrical illusion, the high modernists attempted to minimize the physical presence of actors on the stage and reduce actors to their voices. Like metatheatricity, this attempt undermined believability and also troubled conventional modes of spectator identification with actors as characters.

High modernists Yeats and Pirandello

To emphasize his imagistic language, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) tried to alter the actor's embodiment of a character, the basis of theatrical mimesis. As a young man, Yeats saw several symbolist productions at the *Théâtre de l'Oeuvre* and returned to Dublin to help start the Abbey Theatre, convinced that Ireland needed a poetic stage. Intrigued by Craig's interest in substituting marionettes for actors, Yeats experimented with some of the actors at the Abbey to see if he could minimize their physical expressiveness and turn them into mouthpieces for his words. He wrote that actors "must not draw attention to themselves at wrong moments, for poetry and indeed all picturesque writing is perpetually making little pictures which draw

the attention away for a second or two from the player” (Puchner 2002:129). Yeats realized, in other words, that the physical presence of the actor would interfere with the “little pictures” that his poetry sparked in the heads of his audience members. Although his experiments to turn spectators into readers were initially unsuccessful, Yeats bragged that he had “been the advocate of poetry against the actor” and vowed to keep trying (2002:129).

Yeats’s breakthrough came around 1910 when he read some translations of *nō* drama and decided to make them a partial model for his poetic theatre. *Nō* uses a chorus of voices, sometimes speaking the words of the main character, plus musical accompaniment, to tell a story, while other performers dance the action (see the case study on *nō* theatre at the end of Chapter 3, p. 157). *At the Hawk’s Well* (1914–1916), the first play Yeats published after reading *nō* drama, likewise separates much of the spoken narrative from the embodied action. Three “musicians,” as Yeats calls them, frame the entire performance by introducing the characters, narrating the action, and occasionally adding their own commentary. In addition, they set the scene by appealing to “the eye of the mind” of each spectator. Instead of looking at actual scenery on the stage, the audience is encouraged by the narrator-musicians to envision “A well long choked up and dry / And boughs long stripped by the wind” in their imaginations (Yeats 1952:399). Even after the actors enter playing specific characters, Yeats’s musicians comment on their actions, effectively reducing them to marionettes that must pantomime exactly what the musicians report. Yeats wrote several more plays based, like *Hawk’s Well*, on a mythic Irish past and intended to call forth “little pictures” in the mind. He recognized that his poetic theatre would never be popular, but hoped to inspire a coterie audience with his mythic visions.

Luigi Pirandello did not directly attack the mimetic basis of acting but rather subverted the believability of the theatre through metatheatricality. Although he had written a few plays during twenty years of publishing poetry, novels, and short stories, Pirandello turned to the theatre more exclusively during the Great War, when

Italy (though on the winning side) began to slide toward social and political disorder. The post-war period added wrenching economic problems and, like many Italians, Pirandello sought order in the midst of this apparent chaos. He found it in the idealist philosophy that he had studied as a student in Germany and that had anchored much of his previous writing. Pirandello believed that the ideal forms of art were more enduring and ennobling than the paltry, ever-changing lives of modern people. Attempting to dramatize this conflict between the reality of art and the illusory qualities of lived experience, Pirandello soon crystallized this insight in the play that would make him famous, *Six Characters In Search of an Author* (1921). Despite a scandalous opening, *Six Characters* succeeded in Milan in 1922, then Paris, and eventually throughout the world.

Six Characters contrasts the lives of actors – Pirandello’s symbols of people with no firm identity – with those of fictitious characters whose identity has been written for them. Apparently abandoned by their author, however, the six fictive characters cannot escape from their melodramatic conflicts, and they seek a resolution to their ongoing drama from the actors. The result is a play within a play, as the actors put aside the production they have been rehearsing and attempt to enact the roles and relationships of the six characters before them. By showing how the actors utterly fail to embody and perform the reality of these characters, Pirandello critiques the general failure of the stage to represent reality. A larger point, though, is that authors writing literature can approach the enduring truths of ideal character types, but the attempt at truth on the stage will always be compromised by the imperfect and mortal bodies of the performers. Only an author can help the six characters; the stage will always fail them. To emphasize the unchanging truths of art, Pirandello instructed the actors playing the six characters to wear masks. Although the play seems to throw up its hands about the nature of truth and illusion, Pirandello does not endorse relativism; art is true and life is illusory.

Pirandello’s search for idealist order through art led him to explore the themes and techniques of *Six Characters*

in several subsequent plays. These included *Naked* (1922), *Each in His Own Way* (1924), *Tonight We Improvise* (1930), and *Henry IV* (1922), in which Pirandello worked through the problem of time and art, touched on in *Six Characters*, through the situation of a man pretending to be insane. These plays, too, relied on metatheatricality to interrupt and undermine theatrical representation, challenging spectators to think more clearly about truth and illusion. Perhaps hoping that Mussolini could bring some of the order of idealist art to the chaos of Italian life, Pirandello joined the Fascist Party in 1924 and remained a fascist until his death in 1936.

High modernism and religion

The need to rise above the problems of the modern world required a set of beliefs that could facilitate transcendence and lead, finally, to a non-material goal. As we have seen, Ibsen and Pirandello turned to German idealism and the Kantian realm of pure aesthetics for possible perfection. Yeats found transcendental relief from modern life in the pagan myths of an Irish past. Other dramatists turned to Christianity, the traditional road to transcendence in the West and another arena for Kantian idealism.

Diplomat, poet, and playwright Paul Claudel (1868–1955) celebrated the mysteries and saving grace of Catholicism and the Catholic Church in several plays over a long career. Influenced by the symbolists, Claudel's early plays, including *The Break at Noon* (1906) and *The Tidings Brought to Mary* (1910), are steeped in mysticism, religious passion, and lush poetry. As in other symbolist plays, Claudel's characters talk less to each other than to the universe and (implicitly) to God. A later work, *The Satin Slipper*, a seven-hour epic romance written between 1919 and 1924, is set in the Spanish Golden Age. In formal, elevated language, Claudel's stately pageant explores the religious fervor that drove the Spanish conquest of the new world and the need to sacrifice earthly passions for the sake of divine salvation. Jean-Louis Barrault (1910–1994) directed an influential production of *The Satin Slipper* at the Comédie Française

in 1943, which led to a Claudel revival in the post-war period. Claudel relied extensively on poetic language to inspire his spectators with the possibilities of Catholic belief and salvation.

Although U.S. novelist and dramatist Thornton Wilder was less insistently religious than Claudel, his faith in a benign American Protestant God is evident in many of his plays. Following the publication of three novels in the 1920s, Wilder began to experiment with one-act plays that reveal his fascination with the metatheatrical devices of Pirandello's theatre. This work culminated in *Our Town* (1938), in which a folksy, God-like Stage Manager calls forth actors who demonstrate that people are destined to repeat universal patterns designed by "the mind of God" without knowing that they are doing so. *Our Town* illustrated Wilder's belief that the theatre was uniquely suited "to raise the exhibited individual action into the realm of idea and type and universal . . ." (Bigsby 1982:262). In *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1943), Wilder's plot traces God's plan for mankind, which follows the human story from Adam and Eve, through the Flood, to the possibility of apocalypse. Despite the actors' occasional humorous rebellions against roles that have been scripted by the Almighty and the knowledge that Cain's evil may lead to massive destruction, the play assures its audience that mankind will again survive by the skin of its teeth. Wilder's language, moving from the plain-style poetry of *Our Town* to the farcical zingers of *Skin*, merged metatheatricality with the goodness of a Protestant Providence to celebrate human possibility. 📺

In many of his religious plays, poet, critic, and dramatist T.S. Eliot (1888–1965) attempted to bridge poetic and realist theatre, with mixed results. A convert to Catholicism, Eliot wrote *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) in verse to engage his spectators in the experience of Thomas Becket's martyrdom in medieval Britain. Eliot relies on a chorus of women in the ritual-like tragedy to lead his audience toward an understanding of the design of God and return them to Catholic faith. Unlike Yeats's musicians in *Hawk's Well*, the chorus in *Cathedral* represents both a generalized presence

presiding over the tragedy and also individual people intended to articulate the response of the audience. Other actors embody individuated characters on stage that are meant to be played more or less realistically. Most of Eliot's later plays, such as *The Cocktail Party* (1949) and *The Confidential Clerk* (1953), continue to use verse and reach for catholic universality, often by contrasting the shadow world of contemporary society with the spiritual substructure that informs its true reality. Eliot's anti-materialist dramas illustrate the difficulty at mid-century both of writing plays that could appeal to middle-class spectators and of ignoring the pressures of filmic realism that increasingly shaped the expectations of his audience. As we will see, the photographic qualities of film kept spectator imagination tethered to material realities.

Beckett and the end of high modernism

Samuel Beckett's (1906–1989) plays kept the insistent reality effects of film at bay by a poetic minimalism that tightly controlled what his actors could do and what his audience experienced as reality.  Although Beckett's work in the theatre extended well beyond 1940, the date that marks the general conclusion of high modernism, we have included him as a part of it because his theatre had more in common with the practices of Yeats, Pirandello, and the others than with the final generation of modernists who flourished after World War II. Despite this placement, Beckett's theatre also, ironically, looks forward to postmodernism.

In another sense, though, it is difficult to fold Beckett's plays into the modernism of most of his predecessors. Modernists from Ibsen to Eliot had built their theatrical “castles in the air” on the premise that there was another reality, idealist or religious (or both), that transcended the modern, material world. Beckett's theatre, in contrast, was more in line with Chekhov's strand of modernism. Like Chekhov's characters, Beckett's figures can find no relief in a spiritual realm from the mundane tedium of their very material lives. How to pass the time, a problem for many of Chekhov's characters, becomes an obsession for many of Beckett's.

Time is a fundamental concern in the action of two of Beckett's early plays, *Waiting for Godot* (1952) and *Endgame* (1957) (Figure 9.2). Our second case study in this chapter examines the modernist continuities and differences among the works of Chekhov, Pirandello, and Beckett.

In other respects, however, Beckett's theatrical ideas and practices extend and complicate both of the primary techniques that distinguish high modernism from the first generation of modernists. Regarding meta-theatricality, Beckett's plays in performance find subtle ways of insisting that they are constructed artifices, even while avoiding the cumbersome metatheatrical structures of Pirandello's theatre. In *Endgame*, for example, when one character asks another what keeps him “here,” a reference to the room that the two characters occupy, the other answers, “The dialogue” (Beckett 1958:58); “here” has changed from a represented place in the drama to suggest the stage on which the two actors perform. Beckett's theatrical minimalism and precisely crafted action rarely allow spectators to forget that they are in a theatre. In *Ohio Impromptu* (1981), for example, Beckett places two men, dressed identically, sitting across from one another at a table with their heads bowed, in a precise mirror image of each other. There is nothing else on stage to suggest a theatrical illusion; the two are surrounded by darkness. They sit nearly motionless for the 15 minutes of the play, while one reads the “sad tale” of the other's life from a book. At the end, Beckett's stage directions specify that the two “[s]imultaneously . . . lower their right hands to table, raise their heads and look at each other. Unblinking. Expressionless. Ten seconds. Fade out” (Beckett 1984:288). Beckett gives us no illusion to get lost in here. This is nearly as far from an enveloping Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* as the theatre can take its spectators.

As we have seen, the high modernists also attacked the mimetic basis of acting. Like Yeats, Beckett severely restricted the freedom that actors usually have to interpret and embody their characters. As Beckett director Alan Schneider once noted, “Actors feel like impersonal or even disembodied puppets of his [Beckett's] will”



Figure 9.2

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in a 1970 revival directed by Roger Blin (seated), setting by Mathias. Company Renaud-Barrault at the *Théâtre Récamier*. Actors L–R: Marc Eyraud (Estragon), Michel Robin (Lucky), Lucien Raimbourg (Vladimir), and Armand Meffre (Pozzo).

Photo: Roger Pic © Bibliothèque Nationale, Département des ASP.

(Puchner 2002:159), a remark that recalls Craig's and Yeats's interest in substituting large puppets for live actors. Beckett placed actors in barrels (*Endgame*), encased them up to their necks in dirt (*Happy Days*, 1961) and entombed them in urns (*Play*, 1963) to restrict their movements. Sometimes he reduced them to mouthpieces for his words, as in *Not I* (1972), where all of the words spoken during the minimal action of the play emanate from a female character named Mouth. The actor playing Mouth must stand on a platform behind a painted black drop with a small hole in it and place her head against a padded frame behind the hole so that only her lips can be seen by spectators as she speaks. In rehearsing *Not I*, the actor Billie Whitelaw reported extreme "sensory deprivation:" "The very first time I did it, I went to pieces. I felt I had no body; I could not relate to where I was; and, going at that speed

[in speaking Beckett's monologue], I was becoming very dizzy and felt like an astronaut tumbling into space" (Worthen 1992:138). Critic W.B. Worthen compares the rigors of Beckettian acting to physical torture.

It may be that Beckett's work was best realized on the radio. The dramatist wrote several plays for this completely audiophonic medium, including *All That Fall* (for the BBC, 1956) and *Nacht und Traume* (for German radio, 1982). The complete control that Beckett sought over productions of his plays was more possible in this medium, where, similar to film, actors' voices and sound effects could be perfected and captured on tape before they were broadcast (see Chapter 12 for a discussion of Beckett's strong objections to a production of his *Endgame* by the American Repertory Theatre). As well, like all of the modernists, Beckett sought silent readers for his published plays. In this regard, Beckett

crafted the stage directions of his scripts with as much care as the dialogue. Critic Martin Puchner, noting the usual integration of gestures and speech by actors in a performance, comments that when Beckett directed productions of his own plays, he instructed his actors to separate their gestures and speech so that one would interrupt the other. “This interruption,” Puchner argues, “replicates the experience of reading a play by transposing onto the stage the fact that in the regular layout of the dramatic text [on the page] a stage direction always interrupts dialogue” (Puchner 2002:167–168). Beckett’s micromanagement of his actors moved the viewing of his plays much closer to the experience of reading a book than any other modernist had been able to achieve.

Not just any kind of reading, of course, but contemplative reading. Most works of theatre invite a group response, but Beckett’s later plays, especially, seem to address individual reader-spectators sitting alone in the darkened auditorium. Readers can take literature at their own pace, and Beckett provides many pauses in his productions for reader-spectators to contemplate what is happening. But the collapse of spectating into reading is never completely possible in the theatre. Instead of encountering words on a page, spectators primarily encounter flesh-and-blood actors, whose bodies call attention to the physicality of human life, engage spectators empathetically, and usually channel audience imagination in ways that are linked to their physical presence. As cognitive critic Howard Mancing asserts, these differences mean that “when someone sees a performance of a play, she or he has an experience much more like actually seeing reality than that person could possibly have when reading a book” (Mancing 2006:196–197). Although Beckett attempted to reduce actors to recorded voices and animated puppets, his antitheatrical minimalism could not eliminate life from the theatre. For some critics, this tension between his rigorous aesthetics and the physicality of live theatre is the source of Beckett’s genius. This formal standoff also marks the end point of high modernism; it is difficult to imagine that modernist theatrical minimalism could go any further.

Theatricalizing modernism after 1940

Most modernists before 1940 looked to spoken language, not the other “languages” of the stage, to carry their plays in production. Because the high modernists questioned the representational validity of all media except print, they also regarded film (but not, usually, the radio) with suspicion. But film had been transforming the expectations of theatre audiences and artists since the 1920s. Many playwrights after World War II had grown up watching the movies and their sense of reality and how it might be enacted on stage differed from the high modernists, most of whom had been enculturated when print was still important. Luckily for these later dramatists, an earlier generation of directors and designers had been experimenting with filmic ways of streamlining their national classics, primarily Shakespeare and Molière, to keep them popular on the stage. The postwar theatre would marry the modernist techniques of these classically oriented directors to the plays of film-conscious dramatists to create several models of modernist theatre in the West during the 1940–1970 era. We will examine three of these models in this chapter and turn to several more in Chapter 10.

Ever since the first generation of modernism, modernists in the theatre had struggled against the constraints of photographic realism. As a moving “picture,” film continued photography’s ties to the literal, material world. By 1930, the Hollywood mode of making films that led spectators to ignore camera movement and the constructed nature of filmic reality had largely displaced the expressionist and surrealist experiments of earlier decades. When audiences viewed films during the 1930s and 1940s, they believed they watched characters that were even more immersed in real material surroundings than any production of an early realist stage play had been able to effect. At the same time, filmic materialism was often more dynamic and emotionally involving than early realist theatre. In general, filmic realism pushed modernism in two contradictory directions – a continuing demand for material authenticity in the stage environment and new pressure to speed

scenic changes and heighten realist acting affects. By the 1940s, modernism, along with the rest of the commercial theatre, was adjusting to accommodate these demands.

Modernist Shakespeare in England

The development of modernist conventions for staging the plays of Shakespeare in England demonstrates how these pressures from film played out in one national culture. Artists and spectators in 1930s England were eager to enjoy the dramas of their national poet, but pictorial Shakespeare in the style of Beerbohm Tree now seemed cumbersome and unbelievable, mostly because of the movies. Before 1914, a few scholars and artists had advocated a return to Elizabethan playing conventions, but fascination with photo-like realism had kept most of Shakespeare's plays anchored to a reproduction of their (ostensible) historical milieu. Scholar-director William Poel (1852–1934) produced Shakespeare on an Elizabethan-like stage (placed behind a regular proscenium, however) at the turn of the century and effected the continuous playing that Shakespeare had intended without the long pauses for the scene changes that had been typical of the pre-1914 period. In a few productions just before the war, H. Granville Barker (1877–1946), who directed many of Shaw's plays, used suggestive scenic pieces, draped curtains, and metaphorical props and costumes to keep the Shakespearean action moving in performances that emphasized simplicity and poetry. Most critics scoffed at Poel and Barker, but their ideas undergirded many later reforms.

After World War I, a succession of directors at London's "Old Vic" Theatre incorporated several modernist innovations that moved Shakespearean performance away from the clutter of early realism. Chief among them was Tyrone Guthrie (1900–1971), artistic director of the Old Vic from 1937 to 1945. Guthrie deployed Appia-like settings of ramps and platforms, realist props and costumes, rapid movement and speech by the actors, and quick lighting changes to lend

Shakespearean production the speedier rhythms and heightened contrasts of the cinema (Figure 9.3).

Working with modernist directors, actors John Gielgud (1904–2000), Sybil Thorndike (1882–1976), Laurence Olivier (1907–1989), and others developed energetic playing styles that emphasized the psychology of their characters rather than their realist situations. Olivier's success in filming several Shakespearean plays – notably his *Henry V* (1944) and *Richard III* (1955) – confirmed the popularity of a more cinematic acting style for Shakespeare on the stage. For spectators attuned to the reality effects of the movies, Guthrie's and Olivier's modernist staging and acting rejuvenated Shakespearean production in the 1930s and 1940s. Like other artists committed to the tenets of modernism, Guthrie and the others believed they were scraping away realist encrustations on the plays to reveal transcendent and universal truths embedded in the language. For these modernists, Shakespeare, rightly staged, could elevate spectators to appreciate and enjoy pure Kantian aesthetics.

Many other English theatre artists continued to push Shakespeare in these modernist directions during the 1950s. At his Arts Theatre, Director Peter Hall (1930–) staged Shakespearean drama and also mounted the first production of *Waiting for Godot* in London in 1955. He continued to alternate contemporary and classical productions after founding the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1961. By the mid-1960s, Hall had developed a distinctive style for all of his projects, a heightened realism that mixed close attention to the language of the play, a generally spare but distinctive use of design elements, and carefully crafted, often forceful movement. It was a modernist style that worked as well for the plays of Harold Pinter (1930–2008) as for those of William Shakespeare.

At first Pinter's darkly comic plays mystified but intrigued the British public with their strange oppressors, panic-stricken artists (*The Birthday Party*, 1958) and garrulous drifters (*The Caretaker*, 1960). When Hall directed a Royal Shakespeare cast in Pinter's *The Homecoming* in 1965, some British theatre-goers and



Figure 9.3

The Old Vic production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, 1934, with Charles Laughton as Prospero and Elsa Lanchester as Ariel.

© V&A Images, Victoria and Albert Museum.

critics were outraged by the dramatist's send-up of conventional family values, but the play ran for 18 months. Initial appearances of the characters to the contrary, *The Homecoming* gradually reveals a working-class family as a group of animalistic thugs and pimps and shows the home-comers of the title – a seemingly abstracted academic and his attractive middle-class wife from America – to be as heartless and bestial as the rest of the family (Figure 9.4). The success of the U.S.

production in 1967 (with most of the same cast) confirmed the play as a modernist classic. The rhythms of Pinter's dialogue, including its many pauses, reveal an ear attuned to the bleak comedy of Beckett's early plays and also show the influence of radio, for which Pinter had written several one-acts. Like many of his plays, *The Homecoming* explores the dynamics of dominance, exploitation and victimization, themes that Pinter first dramatized in personal and psychological terms and



Figure 9.4

Peter Hall's production of Pinter's *The Homecoming* for the Royal Shakespeare Company which opened at the Aldwych Theatre in London, 1965. From left to right: Michael Bryant (Teddy), Terence Rigby (Joey), and Ian Holm (Lenny).

Photo © Zoë Dominic.

which he would later treat in more directly political ways. In his Nobel Prize acceptance address in 2005, Pinter spoke of the compulsive but never completed search for truth in the language of the drama, and he then criticized the U.S. for its calculated language of deception in foreign policy since World War II. With that language and those policies, said Pinter, the U.S. engendered brutal dictatorships and created justifications for brutal wars and torture, notably in the war in Iraq. 

Lyrical abstraction in France

Although film was also popular in France between the wars, the reality effects of the radio probably played a greater role in altering the culture of that national theatre. On the one hand, it is difficult to separate the reality effects of film and radio. Although film is a predominately visual medium, sound has played an increasingly important role in establishing the believability of most film sequences. By the mid-1930s, films were borrowing extensively from the microphone effects, musical conventions, and dialog devices of radio. Soon, the traffic in all types of sound effects was traveling both ways, especially between radio plays and dramatic films. On the other hand, radio listening by itself produces reality effects that can be distinguished from those of “talking pictures.” By hiding the human body that produces sounds – usually a body in a studio in front of a microphone – the radio privileges the mental over the material, the abstract and general over the historical and specific. In addition, radio drama favors distinctive, emblematic sounds, including sounds produced by typical human voices; the actual sounds of real people talking on a crowded street would confuse the radio listener with too much noise, for example. Finally, as noted in the discussion of Beckett’s plays, good radio drama plays on the imagination, creating a space in the listener’s mind that is more intimate than the space of any theatrical stage or film screen. This combination of reality effects from the radio moved the theatres of all modern national cultures in the 1930s and 1940s toward performances in intimate spaces involving emblematic

characters in conflicts that centered on universal themes. Radio, in other words, jibed with important elements of modernism.

Several directors and playwrights in France from the 1930s through the 1950s worked within the reality effects of radio and drew on their heritage of Racinean tragedy and the comedy of Molière to fashion a distinctive theatre of lyric abstraction. In France, as elsewhere in Europe, radio broadcasting was principally a state-run monopoly. Radio France began in 1922, and by the 1940s most households were listening to a mix of music, public affairs, sports, and radio drama for several hours a day. As the French made the radio a part of their everyday activities, its reality effects began to modify French culture.

Even before the 1920s, the work of Jacques Copeau (1879–1949), who had been influenced by symbolism, turned the French stage toward modernism. Like the Shakespearean modernists, Copeau, a critic turned producer-director, eliminated realist details to emphasize the work of his actors in the French classics. At his small theatre, the *Vieux Colombier*, Copeau produced several plays with minimal realism for audiences of only 400 people before 1914 (Figure 9.5). He resumed productions at the *Vieux Colombier* for a short time after the war and later directed at the Comédie Française, the prestigious national theatre, from 1936 until 1940. Copeau and his successors enlivened the type characters and generalized themes of the French classics with a fresh, lyrical energy. He applied this style to Shakespearean productions and modern plays as well. Directors who modeled their artistry on Copeau’s – a group that included Louis Jouvet (1887–1951) and Charles Dullin (1885–1949) – emphasized adherence to the language and rhythms of the script and strove to invest their stylized costumes and minimalist scenery with symbolic significance. After World War II, two of Dullin’s students, directors Jean-Louis Barrault (1910–1994) and Jean Vilar (1912–1971), continued to refine this tradition.

French playwrights influenced by this style tended to write allegories in which the general problems of

**Figure 9.5**

Stage of the *Vieux Colombier*, as adapted for Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

Redrawn from *Theatre Arts Magazine*, 1924.

humanity predominated over historical or psychological concerns. The first major playwright to work in lyric abstraction was Jean Giraudoux (1882–1944), who collaborated closely with Jouvet to stage his plays. These included *The Trojan War Shall Not Take Place* (1935), *Ondine* (1939), and *The Madwoman of Chaillot* (1945). Jean Anouilh (1910–1987), also following this style, wrote light comedies with fairy-tale-like resolutions, such as *Thieves' Carnival* (1938), and dark allegories, the most famous of which was *Antigone* (1943), composed during the German occupation of France. Anouilh's *Waltz of the Toreadors* (1952) provides a ready example of lyric abstraction that demonstrates its modernist ties to the reality effects of radio. Like Molière, Anouilh uses the structure of farce to explore a serious theme – the depredations of time on romantic love in the case of *Waltz*. The play's chief representative of foolish old age is a French general still in love with a mistress who returns, after many years, to discover that she would rather fall in love with the general's young male secretary. The general is upset, but finally resigns himself to the triumph of fiery passion over cooling embers. Emblematic characters, a universal theme, an appeal to an imagined past, intimate staging, and an action that verges on allegory help to mark this lyrical confection as a product of the radio age. These attributes, plus the comedy's attention to sophisticated language, also place it as a representative of post-war modernism.

Psychological realism in the United States

Unlike modernism in England and France, modernist theatre in the U.S. did not begin with theatrical innovators eager to reinvigorate a hallowed national tradition. Political and economic pressures, a legacy of realist theatre, and a self-flattering notion of popular psychology, plus the reality effects of film and radio, led to psychological realism in the United States. Psychological realism became a major trend by mid-century that significantly differed from the modernism of postwar France. Although the roots of this style date from the late nineteenth century and include many of the plays of Eugene O'Neill, the kind of theatre that O'Neill's plays hint at could not have flourished on the stage without the necessary acting, directing, and design practices to support it. Beginning in the 1920s, new approaches to these theatrical practices, informed by filmic and radiophonic techniques, gradually shifted the production of realist plays in the United States toward modernism. By the 1950s, "method" acting, psychologically attuned directing, and fluid scenography produced a theatre of psychological realism that became a distinctive national style. Without these theatrical innovations, the plays of Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and others could not have succeeded in the post-war period. And without the effects of film and radio on the culture, the production

and popularity of psychological realism in the American theatre might not have occurred.

In the U.S. of the 1930s, Stella Adler (1903–1992), Lee Strasberg (1901–1982), and other members of The Group Theatre in New York applied what they took to be Stanislavsky's precepts about acting to their work on realist plays. Although their understanding of Stanislavsky was incomplete, the actors and directors of The Group forged a "method" that helped actors to empathize deeply with their stage characters. After the war, versions of the method taught by former Group members trained a generation of actors that included Marlon Brando (1924–2004), Geraldine Page (1924–1987), and Ben Gazzara (1930–). Primarily through psychological techniques, method acting marries the personality of the actor to the character she or he is playing; when the actor and the character are a good match, method acting can generate explosive and intimate performances. The believability of method acting for spectators drew on the typecasting and close-up shots that were already a part of filmmaking in Hollywood.

While the influence of Appia and Craig on the New Stagecraft Movement during the decade of the Great War had moved some U.S. stage design away from the dictates of literal realism, most scenic and lighting designs for dramatic productions in the 1920s and 1930s continued to emphasize the massiveness of realist rooms and exteriors. Jo Mielziner (1901–1976) and a few other designers of Broadway productions, however, drew on European ideas to discover more abstract solutions for staging realist plays. At the same time, the pressure from film to create quickly shifted scenic locales was also moving realism away from three-dimensional units toward more lightweight, lyrical designs. This led Mielziner, especially, toward a visual poetic realism with the use of color and soaring vertical lines in scene designs that left rooms without ceilings and substituted transparent walls made of painted scrim for the material solidity of regular stage flats.

Consequently, when playwright Tennessee Williams turned to Mielziner to design his "memory play," *The Glass Menagerie*, in 1945, the designer knew he could

regulate the flow between the scenes of narration in the present and the scenes of memory in the past through the manipulation of scrim and lighting. When lit from the front, scrim can give the illusion of a solid wall. Illuminated from behind as well, the wall of scrim becomes transparent, allowing spectators to see objects and actors through a gauzy grain. Mielziner's painterly, soft-edged designs nicely complemented the psychological realism of Williams's plays. He designed seven modernist productions for Williams between 1945 and 1963, including *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955).

Although Mielziner's use of lighting and scrim to shift from one locale or atmospheric affect to another allowed for the kind of scenic transformation that film could accomplish through jump cuts in the editing room, the lighting-and-scrim shift also borrowed from what radio producers called a "segue," a sound transition, in radio drama. By the 1940s, many popular radio serials used a musical or vocal bridge that faded in and faded out to move from one scene to another. At times, the segue moved the listener inside of the narrator's head, where he or she could share intimate thoughts with the listener or take the listener into a daydream or flashback scene.

The principle of the radio segue shaped playwriting as well as design on the postwar American stage. "Inside of His Head" was Arthur Miller's initial title for *Death of a Salesman* (1949), which deploys several radio-drama techniques to tell the story of the dreams of success that push salesman Willy Loman to his death. Mielziner's design for *Salesman* used his lighting-and-scrim shift to move spectators inside of Willy's head, where they could see the world from the perspective of Miller's Everyman character (Figure 9.6). Audiences familiar with the "voice-over" convention of radio drama – a narrator taking the listener directly to a new episode in the plot – had no difficulty following Willy's vocal transitions from present time and place into his daydreams located in the past. Many radio plays divided the internal psychology of the protagonist into different voices and sounds so that the split desires of the main

character could be dramatized. Miller, who had written radio plays in the early 1940s, achieves a similar effect in *Salesman* by dividing the voices “inside of his [Willy’s] head” among several characters. Directly shaped by the techniques as well as the reality effects of radio drama, *Death of a Salesman* was a milestone in American psychological realism.

Salesman was directed by Elia Kazan (1909–2003), the premiere director of psychological realism in the U.S. from the late 1940s through the 1950s. During those years, Kazan also enjoyed a successful career in Hollywood and brought several of the techniques of film directing to his work in New York. Kazan had been a member of The Group in the 1930s and, like several of his cohorts, taught method acting after the war. He used this modernist psychological approach to work with

actors in his stage productions, which included Miller’s *All My Sons* (1947) and Williams’s *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), and in such films as *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *East of Eden* (1955). Both the stage and film versions of Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire* were directed by Kazan (1947, 1951). Kazan carefully coached his actors through method techniques and used their edgy, high-strung psychological rhythms to shape their stage movements and his camera shots. Kazan’s success helped to ensure that the style of psychological realism would unite the film screens and the theatrical stages of modern America. Given the widespread influence of film on the postwar imagination in the West and Japan (and the power of Hollywood’s distribution system), it is not surprising that filmic images of psychological realism achieved international renown.



Figure 9.6

A rendering of Jo Mielziner’s setting for Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, 1949.

Photo: Peter Juley & Son. © The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Modernist theory and criticism after 1940

During the 1950s and 1960s, most theatrical critics (and many in the audience) looked at the heightened realism of Pinter, the lyric abstraction of Anouilh, and the psychological realism of Williams through a critical lens provided by modernism. Given their Kantian assumptions, theorists working within modernism sought to ground all of the arts, including the stage, in realities that could claim transcendent relevance for a universal human condition. Theorist Suzanne Langer, for instance, located the essence of the theatre in the movement from historical feelings into enduring symbolic forms (*Feeling and Form*, 1953). Northrop Frye systematized the criticism of all of literature, including the drama, on the basis of intrinsic formal or archetypal elements (*Anatomy of Criticism*, 1957). When theorists looked beyond formal qualities, they usually turned to trans-historical patterns for their frameworks. Psychoanalytic theorists, for example, probed theatre and drama for the universality of the Freudian unconscious mind or for transcendent archetypes, which rival psychoanalyst Carl Jung believed shaped all artistic expression.

Modernist critics influenced by these theoretical ideas examined the theatre for thematic universals and formal regularities. Following the theorists, the critics isolated the play on the page or the production on the stage from the work of readers and spectators; the art of the theatre was to be somehow understood “on its own terms,” apart from history and culture. Theatre critics focused on problems of aesthetic unity and style, generally ignoring how and what productions communicated to specific audiences. T.S. Eliot continued to be an influential critic as well as a playwright, leading several drama critics to read plays in the same ways that Eliot recommended for poetry. The influential translator, literary historian, and critic Eric Bentley, who helped to establish the study of modern drama as a separate field, generally turned his back on theatrical practice in his most influential book to find formal and thematic continuities among many European plays in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (*The Playwright as*

Thinker, 1945). The British critic Martin Esslin ignored the avant-garde past to constitute a post-war Parisian avant-garde that was not a historical movement (*The Theatre of the Absurd*, 1961). Although Esslin’s so-called “absurdists” – Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, Adamov, and others – did share some ideological similarities, they professed no utopian aspirations for their art and published no manifestos together.

While modernist theorists and critics arrived at many significant insights, they found few good ways of addressing the actual experiences of artists and audiences in the theatre. In his critique of *The Homecoming*, for instance, Esslin summarized its achievement as “the perfect fusion of extreme realism with the quality of an archetypal dream image of wish-fulfillment” (Esslin 1970:157). This comment, apart from its assumption that concepts such as archetypes and wish-fulfillments have universal validity, missed the combination of horror and humor that Hall’s production of Pinter’s play evoked for many British and U.S. spectators. It also refused to connect the performance with the realities of contemporary marriages and families. Likewise, many U.S. critics, in their haste to praise the universal qualities of Miller’s *Willy Loman*, overlooked the links of *Salesman* to the experiences of film and radio and slighted the social criticism of the drama in production.

While most modernist theorists and critics understood that theatre often intersected with current social and political problems, their Kantian orientation pulled them away from examining and praising these intersections, relegating them instead to secondary effects. In fact, several modernist plays of the post-war generation, including many by Pinter and Miller, had strong social and political views. The modernist critical preference to isolate theatre from the rest of life led many dramatists, directors, and critics beyond Europe and the U.S. to reject the precepts of modernism. We will see in the next chapter that the politically active theatres of the 1960s challenged modernism, paving the way both for postmodernism and for more engaged modes of theory and criticism.

Theatrical modernism in Japan

Modernism in Japan has many parallels to the West. As noted in our Introduction to Part III, Japan attempted rapid Westernization in all facets of society, including industry, science, government, education and the arts following the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Those looking to Western models for theatre and drama in Japan dismissed *kabuki* and *nō* as outmoded and feudal. Like the modernists in Europe, they advocated a literary theatre dominated by published playwrights.

In 1906 critic and playwright Tsubouchi Shōyō founded the Literary Arts Society to retrain *kabuki* actors and develop female performers for *shingeki*, literally “new theatre.” The Tsukiji Little Theatre, begun in 1924 to produce *shingeki* plays, took Westernization a step further. One of its founders, Osanai Kaoru (1881–1928), decreed that for two years the Tsukiji Little Theatre would produce only translations of Western works, so that Japanese playwrights might learn from foreign masters. Osanai had already produced Ibsen’s *John Gabriel Borkman* in 1909 – considered the first *shingeki* performance in Japan. Osanai and others published translations of Western plays in literary journals, along with several new Japanese plays, modeled primarily on those of Ibsen and Chekhov. These journals also disseminated and debated ideas of Westernization, which advocated the reform or abolition of traditional Japanese religion, art, and philosophy. Consequently, many of the early modernists in Japan embraced Western concepts of Christianity and Hegelian idealism at the same time as they were writing plays reliant on sophisticated notions of realism, all of which were alien to most Japanese audiences.

Kishida Kunio (1890–1954), a key Westernizer and member of the Tsukiji Little Theatre, studied in France with Jacques Copeau in 1921 and 1922. Like those Europeans who followed the aesthetic ideas of Kant, Kishida attempted to evoke humanistic idealism through his plays. Their apparent lack of political content protected Kishida during World War II, when more outspoken (often Marxist) playwrights who criticized the militarist government were jailed. Kishida insisted that

the playwright is the primary theatre artist, whereas traditional Japanese performance modes celebrated the actor and his movement, speech, and costuming. In both *nō* and *kabuki*, actors deliver dialogue in a stylized, non-realistic manner, which may not even be understood by the audience. In contrast, Kishida wrote, “The theatre must depend on the words of the play. Surely the theatre will come to demonstrate the essential importance, not of ‘plays for the eye,’ but of ‘plays for the ear.’ A playwright, more than anything else, must now be a ‘poet’” (Rimer 1974:137–138).

One of Kishida’s most important dramas is *Mr. Sawa’s Two Daughters* (1935; first produced in 1951). The play is a sad comedy of manners dealing with isolation and unfulfilled desires. The main character, Mr. Sawa, has returned to Japan after living in Europe for many years. Virtually a stranger to his grown children, he is a pathetic anti-hero, a failure in his career and his personal life. Neither fully Western nor fully Japanese, Mr. Sawa does not belong to the present or the past, but finds himself floundering in a changing world that he fails to understand. His daughters long for love or fulfillment in their careers, but they too are unsuccessful in reaching their goals. Kishida’s main characters, like Chekhov’s in *The Three Sisters*, are filled with nostalgia and longing, unable to cope with a changing world. Kishida also borrowed from Ibsen for *Mr. Sawa’s Two Daughters*. Structuring the play are a series of revelations of past secrets that push the characters further and further apart, a pattern similar to many of Ibsen’s realist plays.

While many *shingeki* plays are realistic and focused on poetic language, the Tsukiji Little Theatre also produced prewar playwrights heavily influenced by German expressionism and Marxism. We will examine some of their work in the next chapter.

Key references

Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you

want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Samuel Beckett

Apmonia: extensive, sometimes informal website compiled by Tim Conley and Allen Ruch, with film and theatre performance listings, essays on plays, production photos, bibliography, and an audio section that includes a free online performance of *Krapp's Last Tape*, performed by Donald Davis, directed by Alan Schneider: www.themodernword.com/beckett/.

The Samuel Beckett “Official Site” (2009): extensive website with essays, interview, photos: www.samuel-beckett.net.

Samuel Beckett's Happy Days (2003), DVD-Video of 1980 New York production with Irene Worth.

Samuel Beckett, Three Novels: Molloy, Malone Dies, the Unnamable, read by Barry McGovern. RTÉ Ireland's National Radio and Television, available through Amazon.com, UK.

Anton Chekhov

The Anton Chekhov Collection (2008), DVD-Video, 6 discs (Chekhov's four major plays with Anthony Hopkins, Judi Dench, and others).

Harold Pinter

Harold Pinter “Official Site” (active 2009): www.haroldpinter.org.

YouTube: Includes Pinter's 2005 Nobel Prize acceptance address, clips from Pinter films, and interviews with Pinter. Text of the Nobel address at: http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2005/pinter-lecture-e.html.

Henrik Ibsen

The Henrik Ibsen Collection (2007), DVD-Video, 6 discs (*Hedda Gabler*, *Ghosts*, *Little Eyolf*, *Wild Duck* and *Master Builder* with Michael Redgrave, Ingrid Bergman, Denholm Elliott, and others).

Tennessee Williams, Thornton Wilder

“The Tennessee Williams Annual Review” (2009), website of the journal, with listings of major archives, audios of panels: www.tennesseewilliamsstudies.org.

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CASE STUDY: Ibsen's *A Doll House*: If Nora were a material girl

By Gary Jay Williams

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Cultural materialism

The following analysis of Ibsen's *A Doll House* represents the critical approach known as cultural materialism. The term derives from cultural anthropology and describes a research approach that seeks to understand human social life as a response to the practical (material) problems of existence. British critic Raymond Williams in his studies of modern drama applied the term to literary studies (Williams 1977:1–7).

“Cultural” is used here not in reference to the arts and literature or the aesthetic appreciation of these but as the cultural anthropologist uses it – to point to all the social practices through which a society expresses its understanding of itself. The cultural materialist looks at literary works as social practices, to be read as representations of social formations and the structures beneath their surfaces, structures that serve the interests of power. In this approach, aesthetic evaluations of art take a back seat to concerns with oppressive social structures.

“Materialism” derives from (but is not now limited to) the economic and cultural theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. A society’s thinking and institutions are said to be determined by its basic economic organization, its material production. These materialist forces are considered the real determinants of social conditions in human history, as opposed to any “idealist” or airy philosophies. One of Marx’s famous tenets, first offered in 1859, was: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness” (Marx 1950:328–329).

In any given historical society, the social formations, the social practices, and the human consciousness in general that arise from its economic, material basis may be described as constituting an “ideology.” In the Marxist critique of modern capitalist economies, those who control the means of production (the “bourgeoisie”) determine the values and laws and control all institutions, rather than the working class. All social practices are seen as constructed to sustain this ruling class and its interests. Many in the West today, especially in the United States, reject such determinism because of their belief in individual freedom and potential. Marxism has long been suspect in the United States because it is the basis for socialist thinking and for communism, known chiefly in the failed, totalitarian version of the former Soviet Union.

Today’s materialist criticism represents developments germane to, but well beyond early Marxism. Today’s materialist critic seeks to understand how literature is both a product of, and a participant in, a wide range of social formations and practices, from a society’s language to its constructions of gender, race, ethnicity, or nationhood. The materialist typically draws on many other kinds of approaches, such as language studies, psychological criticism, or feminist criticism, usually in tandem with considerations of economic and class structures.

The cultural materialist urgently wants to make the point that any ideology, like language itself, is not based in some divinely ordained truth but is a cultural construct that can be challenged as such. This is important because an ideology that serves those in power in a society is likely to have so pervasively shaped each individual’s mental picture of lived experience as to seem “natural” rather than culturally constructed. Michel Foucault wrote of institutionalized “discursive formations,” structures that determine the field of available knowledge, which function automatically, but which have such power that individuals cannot think or speak without obeying the unspoken “archive” of rules and constraints. Codes for class membership would be an obvious example, but many formations run deeper. A nexus of forces, including the strictures of institutionalized religions, has determined much of what is taken as Western knowledge of sexuality. Even the Western idea of an “author,” Foucault points out, carries with it an investment in the power of an author to establish immortal, stable truths (see the Chapter 8 case study, “Discoursing on desire,” for more on Foucault).

To take an example from the area of gender discourse, many men feel entitled to “hit on” women or to gaze at them in flagrant sexual perusal. These presumed entitlements flow out of a large, supportive apparatus of oppressive, gender-related practices, which is to say, an ideology. Men are conditioned to assume that they have

the power to treat women as “naturally” subordinate to them. Women often say of men who hit on them sexually, “They just don’t get it!” They are saying, with frustration, that such men are so much the product of this ideology, so accustomed to this exercise of power, that they cannot see how it erodes the self-esteem of women, the humanity of men, and ultimately the relations between men and women. (For more on the concept of ideology, see the case study “Social drama in Kerala, India,” in Chapter 10.)

This picture of the power of ideology raises the issue of individual agency: if men and women are so deeply conditioned by this ideology, can either escape it? Recognizing when art and literature are reinforcing such an ideology is one way to begin to escape it. Some materialist critics have written appreciations of the ways in which complex art critiques such ideologies.

Raymond Williams has shown how the ideology of liberal humanism operates in modern liberal tragedy. Williams notes that Arthur Miller’s plays immerse us in the private world of an individual, such as Willy Loman in *The Death of a Salesman*. Willy embodies the liberal humanist dream of self-fulfillment, albeit measured mostly in material terms. (In this respect, liberal humanism has cordial relations with capitalism.) Seeking self-fulfillment in a flawed society that he cannot change, the hero ultimately destroys himself. The liberal dream of self-fulfillment inevitably leads to the death of the hero as the last attempt at verifying the self. At this point, Williams writes, “liberal tragedy has ended in its own deadlock.” In this liberal humanist vision, “we are all victims” (Williams 1966:103–105).

Cultural materialism’s practitioners do not rule out considerations of transcendent truth and beauty in literature. They do foreground issues of social justice, however, believing that traditional humanistic, aesthetic criticism has been impotent if not complicit in the face of social oppression. Materialist studies of literature may be seen today as part of the whole field of cultural studies.

In general, in studies of a play, the cultural materialist critic asks the following questions.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 What ideologies are inherent in the subject or in the form of the work?
- 2 How does the work, in effect, *consolidate* or *reinforce* the dominant social values of a society?
- 3 Where in the work are they *subverted* or *resisted*, if at all?

Problems in Ibsen’s problem play

In the context of the many struggles for women’s rights in the West, from the late nineteenth century through the early twenty-first, Ibsen’s *A Doll House* has had special interest for many directors and actors – especially for the woman playing Nora. When the play premiered

in 1879, its story of a wife abandoning her husband and children shocked audiences in Scandinavia, Germany, and England. (Such “problem” plays were usually first staged for private producing societies by visionary directors such as André Antoine, Otto Brahm, and J.T. Grein.) One controversy over *A Doll House* even caused Ibsen to write an alternative, sentimental ending

in which Nora, after looking in on her children one more time, falls to her knees, unable to leave. Ibsen despised this ending but preferred to do it himself when a German actor threatened to provide her own ending in which Nora did not leave. (Revisions that softened the ending of the play were being done as late as 1976.) In the late 1880s and early 1890s, courageous women undertook the role of Nora in commercial venues, including Janet Achurch and Elizabeth Robins in England, Minnie Maddern Fiske in New York, and Eleonora Duse in Italy. In Paris, a popular young actress, Gabrielle Réjane, played Nora with strong notes of eroticism, and, in the end, her Nora was an unbroken, rebellious woman. French male critics found her sexually indelicate and one saw in her Nora “a kind of intellectual hysteria” peculiar to Scandinavian women (Marker and Marker 1989:62; Shepherd-Barr 1997:30–31).

But the play has continued to present serious problems of its own making. Actors playing Nora struggle to make credible the journey of the obedient Victorian wife of the first part of the play to the independent woman at the end. In addition, the materialist critic sees a still more profound question, one that Ibsen did not really allow his audiences to dwell on: will Nora’s leaving her home result in her liberation at all in her society?

To explore this issue, we must first consider what the materialist critic describes as the myth of liberal humanism, an ideology deeply embedded in Western life.

The myth of liberal humanism

The term “liberal humanism” is used to describe the ideology in which there is the notion that every individual has the potential, unimpeded by any material barriers, to achieve self-fulfillment. For those who subscribe to this, life is a kind of divinely ordained game plan that rewards spunk. However, such an account of reality obscures or omits the material conditions that limit the scope of individual agency. Spunk may count for little if you are a female in a male-dominated business. Like television commercials, such an account

comes with no label warning you that your dreams of economic autonomy may be illusory. The advertisement image of driving an SUV over a rocky mountain trail to a secluded beach is in stark contrast with the material realities of commuting in it daily through urban traffic to the job that allows you to make the payments on it.

The myth of liberal humanism is inherent in Nora’s miraculous transformation from a child-like wife, imprisoned in a Victorian culture where she has long been infantilized by her father and husband, into a budding, self-reliant woman. This transformation, in Ibsen’s clock-bound realism, occurs over three days during Christmas week.

To be sure, Ibsen unfolds with sophisticated craft the material circumstances entrapping Nora. In the first scene, we see Nora as a homemaker, blissful shopper, and practiced manipulator of her husband – using the only powers and making the only choices that she has in her culture.  Her responsibilities are to please her husband, buy Christmas gifts for her children, and ready the tree. Raised by her father – the absence of her mother is never explained – and by her nanny, Anne-Marie, who now tends Nora’s children, Nora still seems emotionally childlike at times, secretly eating her macaroons. Torvald refers to his wife in trivializing diminutives, as “my little squirrel,” and his “little lark” (Ibsen 1978:125–126). Nora, however, has long since known how to play upon her sexuality and take advantage of the inconsequentiality men assign to her, as she does when she manipulates her husband to get the extra money that she will use to pay off her secret loan. She takes pride in having secretly saved Torvald’s life when his health broke from overwork. She may believe she has “worked the system,” but like many women, Nora is working around ideologies long in place that she cannot change. Her husband is sovereign in the household; on his side are the full force of tradition, state law, and scriptural passages on wifely obedience by St. Paul (*Ephesians*, 5:22–33). What marginal power Nora has she derives from the ways a male-dominated culture constructs her: she is sexualized on the one hand and idealized on the other, subject in both to the

pleasure and convenience of men. Male-constructed capitalist and domestic formations encircle her. The play takes place during Christmas, a traditional Christian family feast day. In the setting of the premiere production in Copenhagen in 1879, a copy of Raphael's portrait of the Madonna and child hung over the fireplace, reinforcing the "natural" order of things (Figure 9.7).

Were Nora a material girl of the 1870s – by which I mean to say, were she an actual person functioning within all the social formations of the time – she would have had no access to an education or job-ladder that would have trained *her* to head a bank. In the male world of business, it was unthinkable to hire a woman to manage other people's property or money. As a married



Figure 9.7

Nora (Betty Hennings), dancing the tarantella for her husband, Torvald (Emil Poulsen), with Raphael's portrait, *Madonna and Child*, in the background (above the piano) in the premiere production of *A Doll House* at the Royal Theatre Copenhagen, 1879, directed by H.P. Holst. At the piano, Dr. Rank (Peter Jerndorff), with Mrs Linde (Agnes Dehn) in the doorway.

© Teatermuseet i Hofteatret, Copenhagen.

woman in Norway in 1879, she could own property only jointly with her husband. Mrs. Linde observes in Act 1, “a wife can’t borrow money without her husband’s consent” (Ibsen 1978:135), and that was typical. Ibsen’s Nora was able to provide security for the secret loan that saved her husband’s life only by forging her then-dead father’s signature.

Krogstad knows her secret and knows how to ruin Nora. Desperate in the face of his blackmail, she briefly considers suicide but has not the courage. She resorts to sexually tantalizing the dying Dr. Rank, trying to extract money from him (the silk-stocking scene in Act 2 – once omitted by some translators). Beneath the painting of the Madonna and child, the religious and social framing of woman in her acceptable role, she raises her tambourine and dances the tarantella wildly, desperate to distract Torvald from seeing Krogstad’s letter that would expose her (Figure 9.7). 

When finally the truth is revealed that Nora forged her father’s signature for the loan to save Torvald’s life, Torvald himself shatters Nora’s last desperate illusion. So far from understanding that her subterfuge was for his sake, Torvald explodes in rage about the loss of *his* honor. The “miracle” Nora hoped for did not happen and never could have.

While Ibsen has revealed a great deal about Nora’s material circumstances, he also gives Nora her famous exit. He asks us to believe that Nora evolves in this crucible of three days and three acts to the point that she can sit her husband down for the famous third act discussion and begin it with three shattering insights, “I’ve been your wife-doll here, just as I was Papa’s doll-child. And in turn the children have been my dolls” (Ibsen 1978:191) (Figure 9.8). This is, in effect, to do nothing less than deconstruct her social identity. For Ibsen’s Nora, and for all the real Noras at the time of Ibsen’s play, one could only grant this kind of transformation if one subscribed to the gospel of liberal humanism. True, as feminist critic Annelise Maugeue writes, Ibsen’s play had important symbolic value for women: “Nora’s action, her improbable departure, symbolized this necessary change in attitude” (Maugeue

1993:523). Late nineteenth-century feminists admired the play and predicted that it would have reformatory effects. However, Annelise Maugeue adds the important material point that Nora’s leaving “is precisely the step that real women could not imagine, let alone take.”

Had Nora been a real woman in Victorian Norway, it would have been very difficult for her to have supported herself on the other side of Torvald’s door. Ibsen’s Nora has earned some money of her own with “odd jobs – needlework, crocheting, embroidery and such,” and with copy work, as she tells Mrs. Linde. But, as Torvald’s pet, she has had no experience with basic account-keeping; when Mrs. Linde asks her how much of the 250 pound loan she has managed to pay off, Nora replies: “These accounts, you know, aren’t easy to figure. I only know I’ve paid out all I could scrape together” (Ibsen 1978:137). Job prospects for real Noras were very poor. Census data for four French cities at the end of the nineteenth century show that one out of every two women was single, widowed, or divorced, and therefore seeking employment. In England in 1851, 40 percent of the women who were working were domestic servants; 22 percent were textile factory operatives. The typical weekly wage for working-class women in the Victorian era was a little over 12 shillings, well below the very comfortable middle-class income to which Ibsen’s Nora is accustomed. In the cotton mills of Glasgow and Manchester, staffed largely by women and children, average wages were between 11 and 12 shillings a week. A London shirt-maker told an interviewer in 1849 that her normal hours were from five in the morning until nine at night, and in the summer she often worked “from four in the morning to nine or ten at night – as long as I can see.” Still she was barely able to support herself (Yeo and Thompson 1972:122–123). The low wages – not the hard work – drove many such women to prostitution.

Ibsen does bring into focus briefly the material circumstances of two other women within his play. Mrs. Linde married her husband not for love (which astonishes Nora) but because her mother was bedridden, and she had two younger brothers to support. Now



Figure 9.8

In the mid-1890s, a canned food company in Paris, the Compagnie Liebig, offered this pocket-size trading card depicting the final scene from Ibsen's *A Doll House*, with the purchase of one of its products.

Courtesy Gary Jay and Josephine S. Williams.

widowed, she seeks a clerical job, which she gets only through Nora's strenuous intercession with Torvald. The nurse to the Helmer's children, Anne-Marie, had to give her own illegitimate child away in order to get employment: "A girl who's poor and who's gotten into trouble is glad enough for that" (Ibsen 1978:155). Nora hears this in a conversation with Anne-Marie at the point when she is glimpsing the unspeakable consequences of Krogstad's blackmail. But when she walks out the door, she will be subject to the same employment conditions. In the late 1870s, courageous women were leading movements in Europe and the U.S. to improve women's working conditions and change the laws, but

Nora would not have benefited from them for another decade. Ibsen's Nora has no ties to such a sisterhood, nor would she have thought to seek them.

Even for those women who had more intellectual resources than the real Noras, circumstances were not much different, as is clear in Ibsen's own *Hedda Gabler* (1890). One could find no more relevant and poignant example than the real-life case of the woman on whom Ibsen based Nora. Laura Kieler (then Petersen) wrote a novel called *Brand's Daughters* that was a sequel to Ibsen's play, *Brand* (1866). She visited him in Dresden in 1871, and they apparently came to know each other very well. Ibsen called her his "lark" and encouraged her

to write more (Meyer 1971:443). After she married, her husband became ill with tuberculosis, and she was advised to take him to a warmer climate to save his life. To do so, she secretly obtained a loan (on the security of a friend). Her husband survived, but two years later Laura sent a manuscript to Ibsen, written hastily under the pressure of needing to pay off her loan, begging his help to get it published. Ibsen judged it a poor work and declined. Laura then burned the manuscript and forged a check to pay off the loan. When the forgery was discovered, she told her husband what she had done. She suffered a nervous breakdown, and her husband had her committed to an asylum. Ibsen biographer Michael Meyer writes: “After a month, she was discharged . . . and for the children’s sake, begged her husband to take her back, which he grudgingly agreed to do” (Meyer 1971:445; see also 634–635). In his liberal humanism, Ibsen had his Nora take “precisely the step that real women could not imagine, let alone take.” Not to examine the ideology embedded in the play is to risk perpetuating it.

The very form of modern realistic tragedy perpetuates the ideology, as Raymond Williams has shown. Realism purports to be clinically life-like, providing a transparent window on events. But realism hides its craft-wise operations. With its selective focus, its exposition planted as unobtrusively as possible, its appearance of real time, its linear sequences of cause and effect action that lead (seemingly) to a third-act crisis, and its careful construction of credible character psychology, realism does everything it can to make us unaware that its representation of life is anything but “natural.” Realism in effect keeps you inside the ideology of the middle-class world that it represents. With its focus on character psychology, it is not a mode well suited to showing how social formations have been constructed or how they might be dismantled. It is not that realism would do so if it could; it cannot and still meet the requirements of the form.

Williams has shown that modern liberal tragedy as a whole, from *A Doll House* through Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949), tracks the individual

struggling toward the fulfillment of desire but ultimately defeated, a victim of social formations that are never addressed (Williams 1966:87–105; 1969:331–347). Such plays are rites of sympathy for the victims. For the materialist critic, it is not enough to leave the theatre having feasted on empathy and fatalism. Williams shows the inherent contradictions between all the talk of social reform in modern liberal tragedy and the invisible limitations of the form. Williams’s one-time student, Terry Eagleton, summarizes the argument:

The discourse of the play [the liberal tragedy] may be urging change, criticism, rebellion; but the dramatic forms – [that] itemize the furniture and aim for an exact “verisimilitude” – inevitably enforce upon us a sense of the unalterable solidity of this social world, all the way down to the color of the maid’s stockings.

(Eagleton 1983:187)

Ibsen’s American translator, Rolf Fjelde, preferred the title *A Doll House* to the more common *A Doll’s House* as the translation of Ibsen’s title, *Et Dukkehjem*. He believed the title without the possessive points not just to Nora, as the doll, but to the entire household – husband, wife, servants, and the whole set of social formations to which all are subject (Ibsen 1978:121) (Figure 9.9).

In the late 1970s, Austrian playwright and Nobel Prize winner Elfriede Jelinek offered her own dark answer to the question of whether Nora will be a liberated woman once she leaves her home. Jelinek wrote a sequel to Ibsen’s play, entitled *What Happened after Nora Left Her Husband, or Pillars of Society*. In it, Nora works in a factory after leaving home, marries an industrialist, is eventually forced to become a high-class prostitute, and then turns to anarchism, which fails. At the end, she is back in her stifling home with Torvald, who clearly will soon become a Nazi.

Ibsen was a pioneer reformer in bringing substantive ideas to the theatre. It is not to detract from his historical achievement that the materialist critic stresses the



Figure 9.9

In this 1991 staging of Ibsen's *A Doll House* at Center Stage, Baltimore, Maryland, the child-like Nora (Caitlin O'Connell) has just returned home from her Christmas shopping spree to be treated patronizingly by her husband, Torvald (Richard Bekins). In the final act, both were in anguish when the newly strong Nora determined that she must leave their home. Directed by Jackson Phippin and designed by Tony Straiges.

© Center Stage.

importance of understanding the limitations of the old liberal humanism and the complicit mode of realism as we find them in *A Doll House*.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites

should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

A 1973 Paramount film of the play, directed by Patrick Garland with Claire Bloom and Anthony Hopkins, is available in a video recording. The opening scene (highly recommended) of this film is available on YouTube: search "Ibsen Hopkins Bloom."

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CASE STUDY: Modernism in Chekhov, Pirandello, and Beckett

By Gary Jay Williams

“Finita la commedia.”

Uncle Vanya, Act 4

Modernism was history by the end of the twentieth century. By the 1960s, the term postmodernism was in use to capture the growing reaction to the closed boundaries of modernism. (On postmodernism, see Chapter 12.) As the reader has seen in Chapter 9, modernism in drama and theatre belongs to a cultural landscape between approximately 1870 and 1970. To illustrate some fundamentals of the modern drama’s view of the human condition, this case study briefly compares three landmark plays in that landscape: Anton Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya* (1899), Luigi Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921), and Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* (1957).

“Modern drama” is the conventional marker for works by those major Western playwrights who,

beginning in the late nineteenth century, departed sharply from what they regarded as the theatre forms of an exhausted past, from classical verse drama to melodrama. They rejected the traditional notions of a compassionate creator at the center of the universe, giving human life order and significance. Modern dramatists consider the results of the apparent absence in the universe of “a divinity that shapes our ends,” to use Hamlet’s phrase (*Hamlet* 5.2.10). This development came against a background of the political revolutions across Europe by the disenfranchised of the Industrial Revolution, and it came in concert with new ideas in science and philosophy. In Charles Darwin’s scientific theory of the evolution of species, including humankind, there was more evidence of the process of natural selection than there was of the intervening hand of God. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels criticized the oppressive nature of Christianity and capitalism, and Friedrich Nietzsche found no creditability in Christianity as a basis

for moral values. Sigmund Freud located human identity within the conscious mind and unconscious primitive desires and repressed memories. By the mid-twentieth century, the works of many modern dramatists were reflecting the cumulative effects of the assault on human life and dignity of two wars of massive scale, both waged with ever-improving machine-age efficiency, and the second ended with atomic age weaponry. With all this and the Holocaust – the slaughter of six million Jews by Nazi Germany, done with industrialized efficiency – there seemed little likelihood of some divine overseer with a plan that made sense of human suffering.

The scrutiny of modern drama continued down through Samuel Beckett's works in which finally there is only suffering amid faded remnants of meaning. With Beckett's inexorable refining down to this vision, the age of modernism may be said to draw to a close. This case study offers close descriptions of the language and theatrical imagery of the plays, and these are in the service of comparisons among these particular plays to illustrate the modernist vision. The approach is sufficiently self-evident that no further explanation of the method is necessary. Comparisons among other plays would be possible for this purpose. Very different critical approaches to these particular plays are possible. For example, one could argue that the self-conscious theatrical allusions and devices in these plays anticipate postmodern strategies. Also, in the comparisons drawn, no "influence" of one author on another is suggested. The ground these plays share is much larger. The study begins with an analysis of Chekhov's play that provides a base for the comparisons to follow.

Uncle Vanya

From the beginning of Chekhov's play to the end, nothing of consequence happens to alter the conditions of the unfulfilled lives of the characters. Nothing happens again and again. That axiom was originally designed to distinguish the cyclical patterns of plays of the so-called "theatre of the absurd," but it is applicable here. Chekhov weaves this pattern in the delicately shaped emotional

rhythms of scenes of longing and disappointment, and he gives us a lightly ironic, comic perspective on the anguish of his characters. By these means and his subtle, symbolic language and stage images, Chekhov brings his realistic play to a level of a poetic meditation on the modern human condition.

In the play, a celebrated and self-absorbed professor of fine arts in the capital city of St. Petersburg, Alexandr Serebryakov, has recently retired to live on the country estate of his deceased first wife. With him is his wife of twenty-seven, the beautiful, laconic Yelena (as in the Helen of Greek mythology). Living there are Sonja, his daughter by his first wife (now the legal owner of the estate), the mother of his first wife, Maria Voynitskaya, a widow, and her son, Ivan Petrovich Voynitsky – Vanya. Dr. Astrov is visiting the family, as he has often for eleven years. He is a physician, affected by his helplessness in the face of the death of his patients, and a bachelor past midlife. Now on the downhill side of idealism, he sometimes drinks to numb the pain.

Sonja and Vanya have long given themselves to the diligent managing of the country estate. Vanya at 47 has finally awakened from his idolizing of the professor. He describes him early in the play as a fraud, the default benefactor of his first wife's estate, writing for 25 years on realism and naturalism, understanding nothing about art and borrowing on the ideas of others, "for 25 years pouring from one empty vessel into another" (Chekhov 1996:96–97). Vanya, endearing but ineffectual, reaches out in rumpled desperation for the affection of the beautiful Yelena, who finds him foolish. When he enters bringing her a bouquet of roses and finds her in the arms of Dr. Astrov, he wilts completely. The moment is one out of an old stock comedy, made poignant. Chekhov allows us to see that Astrov's idealizing of Yelena's beauty would hardly be a liberating alternative for her, any more than would Vanya's infatuation. Ultimately, Yelena resists the persistent Astrov, not without regret. Her conscience troubles her some. She once thought she loved the aging professor, she confides to Sonja. But beneath her regret and conscience lie her fatalism, resignation. She tells Sonja:

“Everywhere all I’ve ever played is a minor role. As a matter of fact, Sonja, I am very, very unhappy! There’s no happiness for me on this earth” (1996:116). The innocent Sonja, aware that she is not pretty like Yelena, still floats the desperate hope that Astrov might find a wife in her.

Professor Serebryakov, realizing that he cannot bear living in the country, calls the family together to announce that he is returning to the city and to propose that the estate be sold. This would finance his future. He delivers the proposal oblivious to his selfishness. The devastated Vanya sees his own life wasted and with no straws left to grasp, fires two wild shots at the professor, comically missing both. In the end, the professor and Yelena depart, leaving the estate as it was and all as they were. Indeed Vanya promises the professor, “Everything will be as it was” (1996:137). In the goodbyes between Astrov and Yelena, Astrov ironically applies an old theatrical phrase to the end of their relationship: *Finita la commedia* (the comedy ends) (1996:137). Astrov, too, leaves, first retrieving the morphine Vanya stole from his medical bag. He bundles up his maps that he has brooded over. They show a degenerating ecological system in the countryside. The forests are not being re-seeded; life is not being renewed. From outside, we hear the departures of the Professor and Yelena, and then Astrov; inside they are softly noted: “They’re gone . . . He’s gone.”

Marina, the old nurse in the corner, winds up her yarn as the play winds down. A candle is lit against the coming dusk. Sonja tries to comfort the tearful Vanya as they return to doing bills and invoices (Figure 9.10). Her famous final speech includes these passages:

What can we do, we must live! We shall live, Uncle Vanya. We will live through the endless, endless row of days and the long evenings, we shall patiently bear the ordeals that fate has in store for us . . . and when our hour comes, we shall die humbly . . . God will take pity on us . . . And we shall rest! We shall hear the angels and see the heavens sparkling with diamonds . . .

(Chekhov 1996:141)

Nothing has changed for these characters. They find no fulfillment in their lives, not in the fame of the professor, the beauty of Yelena, the physician’s idealism, or the rounds of daily work on the estate. Sonja’s resort to the rewards of heaven will not deliver them. Some spectators may admire the spirit and faith of Sonja. But in the end, the candle burns against the coming dusk. *Finita la commedia*.

Six Characters in Search of an Author

In Pirandello’s play, subtitled “A comedy in the making,” we are in a theatre, where a stock acting company rehearses a Pirandello comedy called *Mixing It Up*. *Six Characters* is part of a trilogy of Pirandello’s plays that take place in theatres. In these and other plays, he moves the spectator back and forth across the blurry boundaries between appearance and reality, casting doubt on any attempt to distinguish between them by his characters or us and also casting light on our constructions of truth.

As the company begins its rehearsals, a strange family of six appears, entering from a door at the rear of the stage: “A tenuous light surrounds them, almost as if irradiated by them – the faint breath of their fantastic reality,” says Pirandello’s stage direction (Pirandello 1952:214). In the family are the Father, the Mother, the Step-daughter, the Son, the Boy and the Child (a girl) (Figure 9.11). Compelled and compelling, they come seeking an author to write a play of their lives. They come in desperation, expecting that a work of art will give some order and meaning to their troubled, shapeless lives. Their proper names are never (or scarcely) given; they are incomplete, undefined. They are, we learn, fictive characters, abandoned by their author and left to roam the world like lost souls. Orphaned at birth and adrift, the family suffers in what the Father describes as their “mortal desolation” (1952:234). Relationships within the family are hopelessly broken. The theatre company they look to for help is rehearsing a play that it cannot make sense of, let alone understand the quest of the six characters now in their midst.



Figure 9.10

Sonja (Patti Love) comforts Uncle Vanya (Michael Bryant) in the final scene of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* in the 1982 production in the Lyttelton Theatre, the National Theatre, London, directed by Michael Bogdanov.

Photo by Laurence Burns, courtesy National Theatre Archive.

The play is several steps removed from Chekhov's psychological realism. We probably are aware of the fictive family as emblematic more often than we are drawn to them as individualized characters. Pirandello's strategy, which includes much philosophical discussion by the Father, requires us to be intellectually pro-active, moving from the surfaces of the action to their larger implications, to the level of metaphor. At this level, the condition of the six characters seeking an author to give meaning to their lives is like that of the family in *Uncle Vanya*. Their lives on the old estate revolve around the self-absorbed professor-author, who at the end of the play abandons them (all except Yelena). The professor exits on a note of breathtaking vanity: "I could write an entire treatise for the edification of posterity on how one

should live" (Chekhov 1956:130). It is the baldest irony in Chekhov's play that this is said by the character most oblivious to suffering in the lives of others.

Pirandello's play is more stark; the six characters have not come from a humane, gently ironizing Chekhov, nor do they find one to write their play. In the "family" there are only complex, broken kinship relations, difficult for them to endure (and requiring effort of the spectator to follow). The Father had deliberately abandoned his wife (the Mother), and their son. She is now widowed after a second marriage (which the Father virtually arranged), out of which were born the other three children here, including the beautiful Step-daughter who, like her mother, is dressed in mourning for her real father. The family has been "reunited" by a cruel coincidence.



Figure 9.11

The family of six characters in the 1989 production of Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* by Arena Stage, Washington, D.C., directed by Liviu Ciulei. L–R: Young Boy (Joshua Shirlen), Mother (Bette Henritze), Son (John Leonard Thompson), Child (Amanda Waters), Step-daughter (Roxann Biggs), Father (Stanley Anderson).

Photo by Joan Marcus. © Arena Stage, Washington, D.C.

The Father, going to a brothel, found that the young woman in clothes of mourning, which he had begun to remove, was his step-daughter. It is the scene of this encounter that the bedeviled Father and Step-daughter especially want a new playwright to write, he because any human “wants to get at the cause of his sufferings” (Pirandello 1952:267), and she for the revenge of public shame on the Father. Pirandello puts a powerful taboo into play here. Incest, in this case near-incest, is repugnant in almost all human cultures. It violates our sense of the most basic and trusted of natural relationships. The encounter of a father and daughter in a

brothel, she in mourning clothes, mocks the idea of the dignity of human life. The coincidence is evidence of a universe indifferent to our humanity. Madam Pace, the fat, rouged brothel-keeper with dyed blond hair, mysteriously materializes just when she is needed for this scene. Madame enters wearing a pair of scissors hanging on a chain from her waist. She is a lurid parody of the sisters of fate of classical mythology who supposedly spun, wove, and then cut from the loom the completed thread of human life and destiny.

The play ends with the theatre manager arranging another scene, set in a garden – usually a promise of life

– with a fake stage fountain at center stage. The family argues heatedly over playing the scene at all, while the stage manager wants to know how it all turns out. Suddenly all turns to horror. The Child is found dead, drowned in the fountain, the cause unclear. The Young Boy was seen nearby, “with eyes like a madman” (1952:276). Then a shot rings out, and the Young Boy is found dead, having killed himself with a revolver. The play ends in confusion over whether these things have actually happened or are make-believe. Amid the chaos, the Father cries “Pretence? Reality, sir, reality!” (1952:276).

With the ghastly, simultaneous death of the two children, new life is cut off and with it, any possibility of creating a new play that could make sense of the lives of the six characters. Reality or theatrical representation, it makes little difference; in neither is there redemptive meaning. The family might search eternally. An indifferent universe will remain indifferent.

Endgame

The chief characters in Beckett’s play, the blind Hamm and attending Clov, are acutely aware of the indifferent universe from the beginning of the play. They are on no journey of discovery. They know they have been sentenced to live and suffer the purposeless of existence each day, from beginning to end. Beckett defines them in austere, minimal terms (his plays have been compared to contemporary “minimalist” art). They speak mostly in short, sparse sentences and phrases. They occupy a cell-like “bare interior,” and in its grey light they endure an existence not unlike that which Sonja describes at the end of *Uncle Vanya*, “the endless, endless row of days and the long evenings.” But Hamm and Clov conjure no ultimate meaning to their suffering, have no expectations of salvation, nor do they search for an author.

They recycle routines they have long since devised to “keep it going” in the void. “Me to play,” says Hamm in his first line. They go through these labors wearily, sometimes wryly, necessarily. Clov climbs the ladder to look out at the high window with his telescope, first the right window and then the left, sometimes forgetting to

move the ladder or take the telescope with him, chuckling at his own rote repetitions of a fruitless operation. Out the window, there is no end in sight. Every morning he has confirmed this. There is only gray, “GRRAY. . . . Light black. From pole to pole,” he reports to Hamm (Beckett 1958:32). Clov, in slave-like obedience to the blind Hamm’s commands, pushes Hamm in his wheeled chair around the room so he can feel the wall, “old Wall!” the same confining wall, beyond which is the “other hell”) (Figure 9.12). Clov then returns him back to his place “in the center,” laboring at the blind man’s bidding to center the chair, “Bang in the center,” adjusting it to the left, then right, forward and then back, as if there were a center (1958:25–32). Hamm cannot stand, and Clov cannot sit; Clov walks stooped, with great pain in his legs. The possibility of complete immobility looms in this room; we sense its immanence viscerally. Life will let them die in its own good time. The elderly parents, Nagg and Nell, are immobile in their ashcans waiting for death, emerging for a biscuit, to try to kiss, or for Nagg to tell again the story of the tailor. When an enraged customer complains that the tailor has taken three months to do his striped trousers while God made the world in six days, the tailor replies, “But my dear Sir, my dear Sir, look – (*disdainful gesture, disgustedly*) – at the world (*pause*) and look (*loving gesture, proudly*) – at my TROUSERS!” (1958:22–23). Like many of the characters’ labors, Nagg’s story (“I never told it worse”) is like a tired vaudeville routine, a dying act, except it won’t. These characters, like the remaining pieces in a stale-mated endgame of chess, are trapped; no move they can make will advance them.

The world’s history has never been different; life in this room is a microcosm of it. (Beckett assailed the attempt of the American Repertory Theatre to locate the play in a subway after a nuclear holocaust; see Chapter 12.) “The end is in the beginning . . .” says Hamm late in the play (1958:69). The line is reminiscent of Pozzo’s famous protest in Beckett’s *Waiting For Godot*: “They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, and then it is night once more” (Beckett 1954:58).

“And yet you go on,” Hamm continues, echoing the closing line of Beckett’s novel, *The Unnamable*: “I can’t go on, I’ll go on” (Beckett 1955:414). When Clov finds he has a flea on him, Hamm is very perturbed: “But humanity might start from there all over again! Catch him for the love of God!” (Beckett 1958:33). Clov is unnerved when, in his last look out the window with his telescope, he spies a little boy on the horizon, “a potential procreator?” (1958:78). In the last scene, Clov stands at the door with his coat and his suitcase as if to leave, not acknowledging Hamm’s calls. Hamm goes through a ritual of putting a handkerchief over his eyes, returning to the state he was in at the beginning of the

play. Clov, we know, will not leave, and their cycle of suffering will continue. Clov’s first line in the play is: “Finished, it’s finished, nearly finished, it must be nearly finished” (1958:1). This, of course, is a frustrated iteration of the last words of Christ as he suffered on the cross (John 19:28). But the suffering is not finished, will never finish.

Conclusion

In these three modernist plays, the authors scrutinize, using different methods, the desolation of humankind abandoned by its creator. From Chekhov through Beckett, we see a darkening of the vision and changes



Figure 9.12

Clov (Jean Martin) pushes Hamm (Roger Blin) in his chair in the Paris premiere production of Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* (*Fin de partie*) in 1957 at the Studio Champs-Élysées. Beckett preferred the simpler costumes and staging of this production to the one done in London previously in the same year.

Photograph by J.-P. Mathevet, in Deirdre Bair, *Samuel Beckett, a Biography* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, between pp.370 and 371).

in dramatic form. Among other things, we see the realist's interest in individualized character portraits, as in Chekhov's play, being undercut in Pirandello's *Six Characters*, and its premise is fully exposed in Beckett's work, where the dehumanizing effects of this modern desolation and despair are bared.

Modernist drama, especially in its realist mode, remains a staple of our theatres. The plays of Chekhov, as Laurence Senelick has noted, have become second only to Shakespeare's in frequency of production (Senelick 1997:1). Between October 2008 and July 2009, New York saw his *The Seagull*, *The Cherry Orchard*, two productions of *Uncle Vanya*, and his early *Ivanov*. Critics in recent years, notably Richard Gilman (1995), have been drawing the lines connecting Chekhov and Beckett.

Pirandello's *Six Characters*, which caused a riot in the theatre in its first production in Rome in 1921, soon had the status of a modern classic. Although a 1963 London production played 288 performances, the play's status is largely a literary one. In the U.S., both *Six Characters* and *Endgame* are left to the rare revival by Off-Broadway theatres or by the braver of the resident theatres.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Samuel Beckett

The Samuel Beckett "Official Site" (2009), extensive website with essays, interview, photos: www.samuel-beckett.net.

Samuel Beckett's Happy Days (2003), DVD-Video of 1980 New York production with Irene Worth. Regrettably, there is no available film or clip of *Endgame* of artistic quality that we can recommend.

Anton Chekhov

The Anton Chekhov Collection (2008), DVD-Video, 6 discs (Chekhov's four major plays with Anthony Hopkins, Judi Dench, and others).

Luigi Pirandello

Website with biography and bibliography: www.pirandelloweb.com/english/pirandelloweb_in_english.htm.

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Theatres for reform and revolution, 1920–1970

By Bruce McConachie

This chapter examines the political culture of the modern theatre from 1920 to 1970. Although our interest will occasionally narrow to plays and productions with a specific political “message,” most of this chapter focuses on general questions of political orientation and the different responses of the stage to the problem of political power in modern society. As discussed in the Introduction to Part III, two orientations dominated the politics of the 1880 to 1920 era: bourgeois liberalism; and democratic socialism. Joining them after the Russian Revolution in 1917 was communism, which denounced liberalism, democracy, and reformist socialism in its initial call for worldwide revolution. As we will see, these three political orientations took many specific forms as they played out in various societies, nations, and institutions, including the theatre. The discourses of liberalism, socialism, and communism also spilled out from Europe and influenced political struggles in the rest of the world, notably the fight against imperialism. These major political views and many of their institutions weathered the calamities of World War II (1939–1945) and helped to shape the cold war of the 1950s and 1960s. Many Westerners, however, lost faith in all three political orientations during the late 1960s,

when workers and youth in many world capitals rioted against the international cold war order.

Theatricalizing the Russian Revolution

The victory of communism in Russia in 1921, following the Revolution and the civil war, sharply altered the political dimensions of Western theatre. Only later would democratic socialists discover that the Russian communists despised democracy and instituted many forms of political oppression, including mass starvation and slave labor camps, to maintain their authoritarian rule. In the afterglow of the Revolution, however, the short-term sacrifice of some democratic rights seemed to many European socialists a small price to pay for the opportunity to transform an entire economy and society. Despite the setbacks caused by World War I, eager socialists renewed revolutionary action in Eastern and Central Europe and nearly toppled some postwar liberal regimes, including the fragile German state. Although liberal governments were soon established in the nations of the former German and Austro-Hungarian empires, a new, revolutionary form of Russian theatre soon spread from the Soviet Union to socialists around the world.

To teach illiterate peasants and workers the basics of communism, the Bolsheviks organized Blue Blouse troupes, named for the color of workers' shirts, and sent them around the country. A collection of short skits legitimating the radical changes brought by the Revolution, these Blue Blouse revues were called "living newspapers" because they taught communism through speech, music, gestures, and spectacle. In style and ideology, the Blue Blouse revues were anti-bourgeois and anti-naturalist; they asserted that workers and peasants, despite the past degradations of heredity and environment, could take control of their lives and effect radical change. By 1927, more than 5,000 Blue Blouse troupes were active in the Soviet Union.

As we have seen in Chapter 8, the 1920s also witnessed the brief triumph of Meyerhold and the Russian avant-garde in the new Soviet Union. In retrospect, it is clear that Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and other communist leaders needed the avant-garde in the early 1920s to stabilize their regime internally and to give it credibility and influence outside of Russia, especially since the initial foreign policy of the Soviets was to foment international revolution. In line with this policy, the communists funded futurist and constructivist theatres, invited theatre people from abroad to witness the exciting innovations of the Soviet avant-garde, and occasionally sponsored tours of Soviet troupes to other nations. After the mid-1920s, however, when hopes for international revolution had dimmed, Stalin and his bureaucrats began tightening the funding and freedoms of the avant-garde. They squeezed out and eventually eliminated those who would not conform to the narrow political and aesthetic constraints of "socialist realism," a mix of realism and communist party propaganda.

The influence of the Revolution in the West

The Revolution transformed German expressionism, as we have seen. The failure of post-war revolutionaries in Germany to establish a communist state, however, led to the rapid decline of expressionism and to a counter-reaction. After 1924, as the worst of the post-war

inflationary spiral subsided and the new Weimar government began to exert its authority, socialist theatre artists experimented with more dispassionate and objective means of inducing audiences to alter their society. In 1927, Russian Blue Blouse troupes visited Germany, where German-language troupes had been performing the Russian-inspired revues for several years. At Berlin's *Volksbühne*, director Erwin Piscator (1893–1966) expanded on the techniques of the Blue Blouse troupes to teach straightforward lessons about socialism that emphasized that the working class could exercise power. Piscator used situations of class conflict, film clips of historical scenes, and a panoply of on stage technological devices to create dramatic history lessons in socialism. Piscator termed his plays documentary "montages," in recognition of his debt to the artistry of film. Like Bertolt Brecht (who borrowed several of his techniques), Piscator fled Germany with the Nazis' rise to power in 1933, but returned after the war.

By the early 1930s, spurred on by the worldwide Depression, Blue Blouse troupes were agitating for revolution and spreading communist propaganda throughout the industrial West. In England, Blue Blouse revues came to be called "agit-prop" plays, short for agitation and propaganda. (The term derives from the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, established by the Soviet Communist Party in 1920.) Agit-prop theatre generally involved stereotypical characters and a chorus of workers in class-conflict situations. Relying on bold gestures, mass chants and tableaux, emblematic props and costuming, most agit-prop pieces were written to be performed by amateur workers' theatre groups in union halls and at factory strikes. Amateur agit-prop theatre proliferated in the early 1930s in Europe and the United States in the wake of the worldwide Depression. Germany remained a leader in this theatrical movement until 1933, when the Nazis began closing down their troupes.

In addition to amateur theatre, international communism influenced many left-wing theatre artists and groups after 1920. The agit-prop tradition shaped many socialist troupes in England, including Joan

Littlewood's (1914–2002) Theatre Workshop. In Ireland, Sean O'Casey (1880–1964) wrote socialist plays for production at the Abbey Theatre. His Dublin trilogy – *The Shadow of a Gunman*, *Juno and the Paycock*, and *The Plough and the Stars* (1923–1926) – presents incidents in the Irish fight for independence from the anti-heroic view of people living in the Dublin slums. In the U.S., a few socialist plays, such as John Howard Lawson's (1895–1977) *Processional* (1925) and *Internationale* (1928), departed from the conservative consensus in the 1920s. Socialist hopes also shaped the “living newspapers” of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) in the United States. The U.S. government organized and funded the FTP in 1935 to create jobs for out-of-work theatre professionals.

The living newspapers, which derived from the Blue Blouse form and dramatized such social and economic problems as housing, agriculture, and electrical power through large-cast shows, were among the FTP's most distinctive productions (Figure 10.1). However, the U.S. Congress, fearing the influence of communism in the nation, shut down the FTP in 1939. 📺

Theatre and revolution often combined in Latin America after 1920. In Mexico, where revolutionaries had already overthrown a corrupt government, several new leftist theatres and avant-garde groups emerged in Mexico City after 1917. As in Russia, enthusiastic Mexican revolutionaries mounted huge outdoor performances, primarily colorful pantomimes with music,



Figure 10.1

Triple-A Plowed Under, a 1936 “living newspaper” production by the U.S. Federal Theatre Project about the Agricultural Adjustment Act.

From Mordecai Gorelik, *New Theatres for Old* (tenth printing, Samuel French, 1952).

to celebrate the nation's Aztec roots and its new independence from U.S. and European imperialism. Influenced by Piscator's work in Germany, Mexican dramatist Bustillo Oro's (1904–1989) *Masses* put the audience in the midst of political rallies and strikes with film clips and loudspeakers to tell the story of a corrupt revolutionary leader's fall from power. In Argentina, different groups of theatre artists debated the merits of European inspired modernism and politically committed social realism in journal articles and stage productions during the 1930s. One theatre collective in Buenos Aires, the People's Theatre, produced and toured a range of productions to diverse audiences, and engaged them in often heated post-performance discussions. Their most renowned playwright was Roberto Arlt (1900–1942), who introduced Pirandello-like metatheatrical techniques to critique contemporary fascism in Argentina.

Theatres of anti-imperialism, 1900–1960

In addition to its influence in the West, the Russian Revolution also speeded revolts against imperial domination. By 1914, the imperial powers – chiefly Britain, France, the Netherlands, Germany, the United States, and Japan – had occupied crucial islands in the Caribbean and Pacific, solidified their control in most of South Asia, extracted sizeable chunks from the Ottoman and Chinese empires, and carved up nearly all of Africa. Although rebellions against foreign capitalists had occurred before 1914, nationalistic movements in India, China, and elsewhere gained more leverage against the imperial powers during and shortly after World War I, when the combatants in Europe needed their help. The war in Europe, however, emboldened Japanese imperialists, who saw the decline of European power in China and the Pacific as a chance to expand their hegemony. The triumph of the Bolsheviks in Russia inspired nationalists in the colonized countries, in part because they, like Marx, identified imperialism with capitalism. If workers in one country had destroyed capitalism, nationalists might destroy imperialism in their own.

Many educated colonials also worked against imperialism after 1914 because they saw widening differences in standards of living, democratic rights, and literacy between the populations of their own countries and those in Japan and the West. In per capita income alone, the developed countries surpassed the rest by 2:1 in 1880. By 1914, the ratio was 3:1 and it rose to 5:1 by 1950. While most Westerners enjoyed some individual and political rights, slavery and various forms of serfdom persisted in many parts of the colonial world. Literacy increased rapidly among both sexes and all classes after 1850 in Europe, Japan, and North America, but remained a privilege of the social and economic elite in most areas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Although the imperial powers generally believed they were civilizing and improving their subjects, the realities of empire bred racism, exploitation, and degradation.

Revolution against the imperialists had begun in China in 1911 and continued through the 1920s. Led by Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the Nationalist Party fought against Western-backed warlords to unify the nation. Sun's politics, like those of many anti-imperialists, mixed liberalism and socialism, but emphasized nationalism above both. For a few years during the 1920s, the Nationalists collaborated with Russian-based communists to purge China of foreign imperialists, an alliance that was revived in 1937 when China refused further Japanese incursions and declared war on Japan. The victory over Japan in 1945 finally ended a century of foreign domination. The Chinese communists, who won the civil war against the nationalists in 1949, benefited throughout this period from the perceived alliance between communism and anti-imperialism.

The development of Chinese theatre between 1914 and 1950 followed the political fortunes of the country. As in Japan, Western realist theatre had been introduced before the Great War and began to flourish in the 1920s with the founding of modern theatres, an increase in translations of Western plays, the establishment of new training centers for actors, and the eventual casting of women in female roles. *Jingxi* (Beijing Opera), however,

remained the dominant genre throughout China. Several communist troupes emerged in the 1930s to protest Japanese imperialism; their “living newspapers,” modeled on the Soviet example, appealed to thousands in the countryside and in cities unoccupied by the Japanese. Following China’s declaration of war in 1937, nationalists and communists used theatre to rally patriotic support against the Japanese.

Within communist-controlled areas of the country, Chinese artists developed a new form of theatre based on the fusion of *jingxi* and *yangge*, an ancient rice-planting song. Featuring 20 to 30 dancers accompanied by drums, flute, and other instruments, *yangge* plays typically involved disputes among villagers over abusive social practices and village ethics, performed in a question-and-response pattern. One *yangge* drama, *The White-Haired Girl* (1944), formed the basis for the emergence of a new national drama called *geju*, or song-opera, which flourished after the communist victory in 1949.  By the 1960s, state-sponsored *geju* performances featured thousands of professional and amateur performers, integrated the music and dance traditions of several minority groups within China, and both embodied and propagated Mao Zedong’s ideology of strength through collective effort. More than a thousand performers staged *The East Is Red* in 1964, for example, a nationally famous spectacle.

During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Maoist extremists controlled all aspects of Chinese society. They created a new form of musical theatre called *yangbanxi* (revolutionary model drama), which combined *jingxi* and Western performance traditions. Among the most famous *yangbanxi* is *Taking Tiger Mountain By Strategy*, a play that evokes nostalgia in many Chinese today due to its obvious propaganda.

In India, the introduction of Western-style, spoken drama spawned two closely related theatrical movements in the late nineteenth century. The first, anti-colonial drama, resisted English culture and British rule. This began with an 1872 production of *Indigo Mirror* (*Nil Darpan*), by Calcutta playwright Dinabendhu Mitra (1830–1873), which focused on the plight of peasant

workers oppressed by British indigo planters. In 1905, the British banned a later anti-imperialist play, *Sirajuddaula* by Bengali playwright Girish Chandra Ghosh (1844–1912), for inciting Indian nationalism. Anti-colonial nationalism intensified in India after the Great War and the Russian Revolution and reached a peak during World War II. In 1943, the Communist Party of India founded the Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), which established regional centers throughout the country to produce anti-colonial plays. Perhaps its best known production was Bijon Bhattacharya’s (1917–1978) *New Harvest* in 1944, which incited anger against British failures to help the starving during a Bengali famine that killed more than three million. The second type of spoken play popular in India was social drama, which criticized the inequalities of India’s traditional socio-economic system and argued for liberal reform. Our first case study, “Social Drama in Kerala,” traces the development of this form of protest theatre in southwestern India from the late nineteenth century through the 1960s.

After Indian independence in 1947, the IPTA fragmented and many of its leftists joined with some of the liberal reformers to begin new theatre troupes in Indian cities. Among the most influential was the Group Theatre in Calcutta (now renamed Kolkata), which challenged the dominant, Western-style commercial theatre of the city. Where the old imperial theatres had featured British plays, occasional hybrid shows written by Indians, and the latest hits from London, the Group produced modernist European classics (Chekhov, Pirandello, and Ibsen, for example) and several politically radical plays by Brecht and others. By performing canonical Western plays in an Indian context, the Group hoped to cultivate an audience of serious theatre-goers who would reject the frivolous entertainments of imperial times for politically engaged drama. Director Sombhu Mitra (1914–1997) worked briefly with the Group and then founded his own company, Bahurp. Mitra directed a localized version of Ibsen’s *A Doll House* for Bahurp in 1958 and successfully adapted several plays by Rabindranath Tagore (1860–1941), one of the

leading writers of the early twentieth century, whose plays had resisted modern modes of staging until that time. Mitra's modernist vision for his theatre led him to stage productions of *Oedipus the King* and *Rājā* by Tagore, on consecutive nights in 1964.

Anti-imperialist theatre flourished in many colonized countries after World War II and helped to liberate them from external political domination. We examine more of these theatres in Part IV.

Postwar theatre in Japan and Germany

Unlike the Great War, World War II had little major impact on the theatres of most countries in the West. No such continuity existed for the national theatrical cultures of Germany and Japan, however. The advent of Nazism in 1933 closed left-wing and avant-garde theatres in Germany, silencing or scattering into exile many of Germany's best theatre artists.

Japanese ultranationalists began restricting democratic rights and censoring all forms of Japanese theatre soon after the seizure of Manchuria from China in 1931. In addition to idealist *shingeki* plays, Westernization also led to Marxist *shingeki* dramas in Japan. One of the best was *The Land of Volcanic Ash* (1938), by Kubo Sakae (1900–1958), also an important translator of German drama. In Kubo's celebrated play, an agricultural scientist tries to reclaim land polluted by volcanic ash on the island of Hokkaido. The six hour, two-part play portrays the difficult lives of many social groups in this rural environment and also features the hero's inner conflict over his growing commitment to communism. Due to the play's Marxism and Kubo's communist beliefs, the Japanese government prohibited production of the play and sentenced Kubo to house arrest or jail for much of the war. Until its defeat in 1945, Imperial Japan closed Marxist *shingeki* theatres, censored all theatrical productions, and even turned performances of traditional *nō* plays to patriotic purposes.

After the war in the Pacific, U.S. occupational forces helped to rebuild Japanese theatres, but censored productions that they believed would retard the growth

of constitutional democracy in Japan. Because many *kabuki* plays celebrated the values of revenge, feudalism, emperor worship, and the subjugation of women, *kabuki* theatre in general was suppressed, while the Western-derived, realist *shingeki* was allowed to flourish. One of the most popular *shingeki* playwrights of the post-war era was Mishima Yukio (1925–1970), especially outside of Japan. Like several other of his plays, *The Deer Cry Pavilion* (1956) featured romantic intrigue and psychological intensity. Mishima, an ultranationalist who despised Western liberalism and longed for a return to samurai values, also adapted the stories of *nō* plays into *shingeki*, using modern settings and psychology. Kinoshita Junji (1914–2006) moved beyond the realist constraints of *shingeki* in several folktale dramas of the post-war period, including *Twilight Crane* (1949), which remains the most produced play in Japan. With these, somewhat like Yeats's *nō*-inspired dramas, Kinoshita turned to his nation's mythic past to create a new artistic genre, reliant on a fresh vernacular dialect and a notion of "pure Japanese essence" uncontaminated by the West. Kinoshita moved back to realism in 1970 with *Between God and Man*, one of the few dramatic attempts to come to terms with Japanese war crimes.

Although *shingeki* remained the dominant style in the post-war period, many Japanese artists came to believe that its realist, materialist conventions could not adequately explain their nation's defeat, the occupation of Japan, and the shock and devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Anti-*shingeki* artists began to collaborate after Japanese radicals and workers staged mass protests in 1960 against the ratification of the United States–Japan Mutual Security Treaty. During the 1960s, some of these artists wrote and directed plays that fused traditional Japanese and international modernist elements. Betsuyaku Minoru's (1937–) *The Elephant* (1962), for instance, deals with the horrors of nuclear contamination in a style inspired by *kyōgen* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Several plays in the 1960s and 1970s feature mortals who are transformed into gods as a means of explaining a disgraceful past and formulating a plan for the future of Japan. In Akimoto Matsuyo's *Kaison*, the

Priest of Hitachi (1965), for example, a young man escapes from his historical burden of war guilt into mythic time to become Kaison, a twelfth-century warrior. By the late 1960s new companies, such as Tenjō Sajiki, the Situation Theatre, and the Black Tent Theatre, were experimenting with forms of staging and actor–audience relationships that had traveled a long way from the realist conventions of *shingeki* (see Chapter 12).

In East and West Germany after 1945, local governments quickly rebuilt their playhouses as a matter of civic pride, but a national German theatre emerged more slowly. Until the mid-1950s, the Berliner Ensemble was the only German theatre with an international reputation. Soon after Bertolt Brecht (1891–1956) established the Ensemble in 1949, it became the most influential socialist theatre of the post-war era. Working as both playwright and director, Brecht exposed the

contradictions of capitalism and explored theatrical means of animating audiences to political action (Figure 10.2). In his theoretical writings, Brecht attacked what he took to be Aristotelian dramatic theory and called for a mode of performing that differed sharply from Stanislavsky’s system for training actors. Brecht drew on both avant-garde and modernist traditions. As a Marxist revolutionary, he was committed to overthrowing capitalism, like many in the avant-garde. Similar to many modernists, however, he was willing to work within mainstream institutions, but he also deployed new techniques to distance spectators from performances they were watching in order to critique the ideologies in which characters were caught. “Brecht Directs *Mother Courage*” is the final case study of this chapter.

Brechtian theatre had its origins in Piscator’s documentary theatre of the late 1920s and early 1930s,



Figure 10.2

Helene Weigel singing as Mother Courage in Brecht’s staging of *Mother Courage and Her Children* in Berlin, 1949.

From the Willy Saeger Archive. © The Deutsches Theatermuseum, Munich.

which, in turn, partly derived from Schiller's close attention to historical dynamics in his Weimar classicism dramas (see Chapter 6). In the 1960s, a new generation of German theatre artists also looked to the documentary tradition of the German stage to question their parents about the Holocaust and the Nazi past. Several socialist playwrights, including Rolf Hochhuth (1931–) and Peter Weiss (1916–1982), used documentary devices to expose the extent to which thousands of ordinary Germans, not just the Nazis in command, had been responsible for the extermination of millions of Jews, Slavs, Romani, and other minorities. A firestorm of controversy swirled around Hochhuth's play, *The Deputy*, when it opened in 1963. The play drew on documentary evidence to suggest that many German Catholics and even the Pope himself had condoned the slaughter of European Jewry. In *The Investigation* (1965), Peter Weiss used dialog taken directly from official transcripts of the investigations into the Auschwitz extermination camp. In their lack of spectacle, both *The Deputy* and *The Investigation* suggest that emotion-laden pictures of the Holocaust, whether photographs or films, would detract from the necessity to probe Germany's guilty past. The assumption was that to understand an event of such magnitude and to prevent a recurrence of the attitudes that fostered it requires close attention to the logic and morality of its perpetrators. Other German documentary plays of the 1960s used similar minimalist methods to focus audience attention on British war crimes, European imperialism, the development of the hydrogen bomb in the U.S., and the U.S. war in Vietnam. This socialist "theatre of fact," as it was called, generally shunned complex media effects to rely on the theatre's oldest weapons, the actor's voice and the moral imagination of the audience.

Although some of the techniques of the "theatre of fact" departed from the general aesthetic approach of the Berliner Ensemble, Brechtian and documentary German theatre shared the same general moral and political point of view in the 1960s. The Berliner Ensemble was located in East Berlin, but many socialist artists in both East and West Germany looked to the productions of

the Ensemble as a model for their work. In addition to Brecht's plays, the Berliner Ensemble regularly produced the dramas of Shakespeare and the German classics. Brecht's death in 1956 and his wife Helene Weigel's assumption of the leadership of the Ensemble did not diminish the influence of Brechtian theatre (and may even have enhanced it). In East Germany, the work of playwright Heiner Müller (1929–1995) and director Peter Palitzsch (1918–) (who began with the Ensemble and later moved to West Germany) derived from, but went beyond, Brecht. In the West, playwrights Tankred Dorst (1925–) and Peter Handke (1942–) joined Hochhuth and Weiss in their embrace of Brechtian politics (Figure 10.3). In post-war Germany, Brechtian theatre crossed the cold war divide.

New national theatres in Europe

As noted in Chapter 6, several national theatres emerged in nineteenth-century Europe. These companies were or aimed to become representative of a nation-state, a people with a singular language and culture living within a sovereign state. While nationalism, a successful bourgeoisie, and print culture played a founding role in most of these theatres, socialism and new modes of communication, notably photography, radio, and film, helped to reshape European national theatres after World War II. Nationalism also remained important, of course, as did the idea that the primary spectators inside a national theatre must represent the nation-state. After 1945, however, most people who voted in Western democracies (and indirectly approved the budgets for state-supported theatres) identified with urban workers, not the bourgeoisie, as the representative class of their nation. In Eastern Europe, too, the new communist states controlled by the Soviet Union understood that they must make theatre broadly available to the masses. These shifts led to significant institutional changes in European national theatres.

By 1914, nationalists across Europe had succeeded in creating or reshaping specific theatres as flagships of their nation. Under mainly bourgeois patronage, national



Figure 10.3

The premiere production of Weiss's *Marat/Sade*, at the Schiller Theatre in Berlin in 1964. Influenced by Brechtian theatre, this widely produced play about the political failure of the French Revolution was directed by Konrad Swinarski and designed by Weiss.

Photograph: Heinz Köster.

theatres flourished in France, Norway, and Sweden. Several nations that would emerge after the Great War with their own states – the Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, and Finns, for example – could already claim national theatres by 1914 that were housed in impressive buildings and presented a repertory of plays in their native languages. Between the wars, however, the basis for the legitimacy of national theatres shifted, primarily because modern media altered nationalistic belief. As Benedict Anderson pointed out, nineteenth-century nationalism rested on the link between print media and national imagining; bourgeois Europeans were able to imagine their nation as a group of readers like themselves, united in the same language community (see Chapter 6). After 1920, however, mass media broadened the basis of nationalism. Now Polish and French citizens, for example, could imagine “the Polish people” or “the French nation” from pictures of real crowds in a newspaper, surging masses on a popular film, or perhaps roaring background sounds of voices and applause on the radio. “The people” of the nation had voices, faces, and bodies that could be seen and heard nearly every day; they were no longer a vague abstraction on the printed page that existed beyond one’s immediate town and region. This meant that a truly national theatre could no longer pretend that it represented the nation as a whole when it performed for a small slice of the bourgeoisie in one theatre in the national capital.

Under media and political pressure, European national theatres transformed themselves after 1945. During the 1930s, the Nazi and fascist regimes in Germany and Italy had already taken advantage of the changed basis of nationalism by sponsoring huge rallies and marches. The Italian fascists even supported several traveling theatres to propagandize their beliefs. The recognition that national theatres had to play to the general populace led to more traveling companies and the decentralization of national theatres after the war. This change accompanied a general political shift in Western Europe toward democratic socialism; most Europeans now looked to urban workers, not the bourgeoisie, as the true representatives of their nation.

In Eastern Europe, the communist states set up by the Soviet Union also recognized that it was in their interest to decentralize state-supported theatres. By 1970, most continental nation-states subsidized a major theatrical institution in the national capital, but also sponsored many other theatres in medium-sized towns across their countries. Due to state support for buildings, productions, and ticket prices, more Europeans of modest means were able to enjoy good theatre than at any other time in European history.

Theatre and the cold war

The Europeans were changing their national theatres within the context of the international cold war. The political antagonism between the two victorious superpowers of World War II, the Soviet Union and the United States, quickly hardened into a worldwide ideological struggle between authoritarian socialism and liberal capitalism. Other nations of the world were pressured to align themselves with Russia or the U.S.; a few like India remained neutral, but most succumbed to military might, economic power, and/or diplomatic leverage. Although the mix of alliances and nuclear terror that emerged by the early 1950s prevented another world war, both superpowers injected their influence and sometimes their troops into regional and civil wars, which proliferated under the general stalemate of the cold war. By the 1960s, most politicians and much of the population in both the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. viewed all conflicts within and beyond their borders – whether nationalist, anti-imperialist, ethnic and racial, or even gender-based – through the “us-versus-them” lens of the cold war.

The cold war stifled innovative theatre in both the Soviet Union and the U.S. The ideology of socialist realism, plus censorship and control, kept most Soviet theatre within the boundaries of cold war communism, even after the death of Stalin in 1953. A few directors, however, including Nikolai Okhlopkov, were permitted to experiment with new ideas and forms (Figure 10.4). While approving of Brecht’s Marxism, the Soviets kept Brechtian theatre at arm’s length; they recognized that

its antimilitarism and democratic socialism subverted their authoritarian power. Although U.S. theatre artists generally thought of themselves as apolitical, self-censorship and the reigning authority of the market in theatrical capitalism restrained criticism in the 1950s and for most of the 1960s. Under cold war liberalism, most productions supported notions of individual success, consumer choice, and corporate power, while accepting limits on democracy and on the power of the government to change patterns of economic inequality and traditional racist behavior. These liberal values were apparent in most lighthearted musical comedies and in the intense psychological dramas that relied on method acting for their success. A few mainstream playwrights dissented from this liberal consensus, notably Tennessee Williams, with his attacks on homophobia and consumerist values in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) (Figure 10.5). Lorraine Hansberry's (1930–1965) portrayals of African-American life (*Raisin the Sun*) owed more to international socialism than to the liberal civil rights movement that had begun to change U.S. society.

Despite American and Soviet pressure on other countries to shape their culture and society according to the ideological dictates of either superpower, many theatre artists sought an alternative to this rigid binary. Brechtian theatre emerged for many as a means of

both opposing the international power of American militarism and capitalism and building a democratic, rather than an authoritarian socialism at home. Following the influential European tour of the Berliner Ensemble in 1956, English playwrights John Arden (1930–) and Edward Bond (1934–) joined with director Joan Littlewood and others to improve the democratic socialism that had begun to flourish in the United Kingdom after the war. Italian Giorgio Strehler (1921–1997) and Finnish Ralf Langbacka (1932–) directed productions of Brecht's plays to influence socialist theatre and politics in Italy and Finland.

Brecht's ideas shaped numerous plays and productions in Africa. In the late 1960s, Nigerian playwright Femi Osofisan (1946–), together with other playwrights and left-wing critics in Nigeria, borrowed heavily from Brecht to advance a post-colonial, class-based critique of Nigerian politics and economics in their plays and essays. Several critics of apartheid in South Africa – the policy of rigid racial segregation that kept South African blacks oppressed strangers in their own land – drew on Brechtian theatre.

In Latin America, long dominated by U.S. interests, Brechtian theatre was especially influential during the 1960s. Argentinean playwright and director Osvaldo Dragun (1929–1999) modeled many of his short plays

Figure 10.4

Okhlopkov's production of *Hamlet* relied on a triptych-like design to suggest the prince's imprisonment in traditional culture. Produced at the Mayakovsky Theatre in Moscow in 1954, soon after the death of Stalin.

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Figure 10.5

Scene from the Broadway production of Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in 1955, with Ben Gazzara as Brick and Burl Ives as Big Daddy.

Photo by Fred Fehl, courtesy of Gabriel Pinski. Supplied by New York Public Library Photographic Services.

in the 1950s and 1960s on Brecht's dramas to point up the sacrifice in human dignity demanded by capitalist economics. Brechtian theatre influenced several Mexican playwrights and directors, Luisa Josefina Hernández (1928–) among them. Her *Popul Vuh* (1966) dramatized the traditional sacred book of the Mayan people. Brecht's model of socialist theatre also inspired several directors and playwrights in Colombia in the 1960s. Enrique Buenaventura (1925–) led the charge, staging Brechtian productions, writing plays with revolutionary messages, and helping to reorganize the university theatre movement in Colombia for radical purposes. Although the authorities suppressed the collective theatre movement Buenaventura had helped to begin, its legacy continued in Bogotá and other major cities, with radical street theatre and plays that dramatized Colombia's oppressive history. In São Paulo, Brazil, the Arena Theatre modified Brechtian techniques to search for a specifically Brazilian stage language for social criticism. International activist Augusto Boal (1931–2009) joined Arena in 1956, wrote and directed several politically radical plays, and began experimenting with participatory forms of theatre. Boal broke from the master playwright-director tradition (that included Brecht) to create theatre with the audience. The Brazilian military dictatorship forced Boal into exile in 1971, and he soon published *The Theatre of the Oppressed* (1974), which laid out his techniques for directly involving and empowering spectators.  Both Buenaventura and Boal would have enormous influence in the New Popular Theatre movement in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s (see Chapter 11).

Other models of political theatre

Although Brechtian ideas and techniques dominated radical theatre in many countries during the 1960s, other models of political theatre also emerged during the decade. More significant than Brecht for Mexican oppositional theatre was the legacy of surrealism, which Mexican playwrights began to transform for their own uses soon after World War II. The leading dramatist of

the post-war generation, Emilio Carballido (1925–2008), freely mixed reality and fantasy in a wide range of genres, from film scripts and children's theatre pieces to over 100 works written for the professional stage. A critic of traditional Mexican culture in his opposition to patriarchy, his support of class struggle, and his focus on serious socio-political concerns (often under the mask of farce), Carballido also engaged the positive possibilities of Catholicism and celebrated some of Mexico's founding national myths.

His most famous play, *Yo también hablo de la rosa* (*I, Too, Speak of the Rose*) (1966), has been identified as a surreal allegory, a Brechtian parody, and a postmodern paradox, to note only a few of the many critical tags it has evoked. Through popular storytelling and songs, send-ups of Freudian and Marxist rhetoric, news accounts and poetic metaphors, and even occasional snippets of dramatic realism, the play depicts multiple representations of the same train derailment, as well as several embodiments of the events that led up to it and the responses that followed. Even as this multi-layered pastiche invites several meanings, it also makes fun of the act of interpretation itself. At the same time, a rough populist energy animates the play; marginal members of Mexican society pushed the powerful train off of its tracks and proceeded to loot it when it was down. This oppositional and possibly revolutionary action remains a potent fact during the performance, despite the ridiculous attempts of others in Mexican society to explain what happened. Whatever else it is, *I, Too, Speak of the Rose* seems to be a warning to those who control the public discourses of Mexican society that the poor will not be ignored.

In Poland, Sławomir Mrożek (1930–) developed a parable form of satiric drama that skewered the operations of power in post-war communist Poland. Mrożek, who began as a newspaper humorist and cartoonist, found initial success in the Polish theatre with a series of one-acts that set up ironic models of political power and undercut them through their own logic. *The Police* (1958), for example, depicts a perfect but radically dysfunctional police state. In *Out at Sea* (1961), three

starving characters on a raft establish a socialist republic, then proceed to define justice and freedom in such a way that two of them are able to eat the third, who agrees with the logic of his sacrifice. Mrozek fled Poland in 1963, but continued to write plays that barely skirted censorship and continued to delight Polish audiences. His masterpiece was *Tango* (1964), which satirically deployed the tired form of domestic family comedy to examine the failure of ex-radicals to stop the slide of a liberal Europe into totalitarianism. In Mrozek's parable family, each of the three generations represents a different politics, from the 1920s to the 1960s. Perhaps the most foolish are the grandparents, who prattle on in the language of the dadaists and surrealists while raw power takes over the household. The play was widely produced in Western Europe, where several critics linked it to the so-called absurdism of Eugene Ionesco. While Ionesco may have been a minor influence, several earlier Polish playwrights, notably Stanisław Witkiewicz (1885–1939) and Witold Gombrowicz (1904–1969), had already forged strong links among power, parable, and parody.

Some of the most radical political performance during the 1960s flourished on the margins of mainstream theatre in the United States. The agit-prop tradition, a significant part of working-class theatre in the U.S. during the 1930s, blossomed again in the mid-1960s, as small groups on college campuses and elsewhere sought to protest the war in Vietnam. Vietnam had become a pawn in the cold war, and the U.S. gradually ramped up its military commitment to prevent what it feared would be a communist takeover of the country. Partly because the government was drafting college-age boys to fight, the war in Vietnam aroused massive protests on college and university campuses, especially between 1968 and 1971. Agit-prop groups, calling themselves guerilla theatre companies (after jungle-fighter revolutionaries in Latin America), staged cartoon-like skits at rallies and elsewhere to protest the war. By 1970, there were probably 400 student guerilla troupes in the U.S. Students in Western European cities formed similar troupes to protest American militarism in Vietnam.

By the mid-1960s, several avant-garde groups had emerged in the U.S. One of the earliest was Fluxus, which may be dated from 1948 when composer John Cage (1912–1992) and dancer Merce Cunningham (1919–2009) worked together at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Like the futurists and dadaists, Cage had been experimenting with everyday sounds and chance occurrences to expand the range of “music,” while Cunningham explored modes of movement that might correspond with Cage's mix of unconventional sounds. Both objected to the modernist removal of aesthetics from everyday life and the utilitarian narrowness of cold war American society. An untitled performance of theirs in 1952, which included reading a dadaist poem, showing a film on the ceiling, and pouring water from one bucket into another, was the first of what would later be called “happenings.”

Happenings became significant events in the art world of the late 1950s and sparked an avant-garde movement that came to be called Fluxus, a loose international alliance of musicians and performers dedicated to continuing Cage's experiments with chance events, mundane sounds, and the embodiment of everyday rituals in performance. Cage's class in experimental music at the New School for Social Research in 1958 generated several Fluxus events, as did his international travels and collaborations in Europe and Japan during the 1960s. One event, *Snowstorm No. 1* (1965), put together by Czech Fluxus artist Milan Knizak, simply instructs the facilitators to distribute paper airplanes to the expectant audience and invite them to fly them around the auditorium. For Knizak, the point was to enjoy the beauty of the gliding paper and the fun of exchanging the planes with others. At a time when many real airplanes carried atomic bombs, however, some saw the Fluxus event as a demonstration for peace.

Cage also influenced the Living Theatre, a group begun by Julian Beck (1925–1985) and Judith Malina (1926–) in 1951. In 1960, they produced a theatre piece that played with his combinations of sounds, props, and actions. The year before, Beck and Malina had produced *The Connection*, a play by Jack Gelber (1932–2003) that

purposefully invited audience confusion about whether the drug addicts and jazz players on stage were real people or fictional characters. Their Pirandello-like experiments with reality and illusion soon combined with an interest in the ideas of Artaud after the initial publication in English of his *The Theatre and Its Double* in 1958. Following tours to Europe, the Living Theatre returned to the U.S. in 1968 with a devised production entitled *Paradise Now* that called for the realization of utopia through Artaud's theatre of cruelty and a fusion of life and art. 📺 Like several first-wave avant-gardists, the Living Theatre collective strove to live its artistic practices through its everyday life.

Less strident in its demands but no less utopian in its politics was the Bread and Puppet Theatre, founded by Peter Schumann (1934–) in 1961. Schumann began aligning his puppet pageants and street shows with anti-war demonstrations in 1964. For the rest of the 1960s, the oversized puppet heads of his peasants, washerwomen and workers, plus his bad-guys like King Herod and Uncle Fatso (a capitalist-exploiter dressed like Uncle Sam), were marching against the war, homelessness, and nuclearism. Schumann and his loose collective of puppet animators also mounted parable-like productions, such as *The Great Warrior* (1963) and *The Cry of the People for Meat* (1969), that explored mostly timeless problems of peace and justice through slow moving puppets that were sometimes thirty feet tall. 📺

The San Francisco Mime Troupe also used a traditional form, *commedia dell'arte*, to satirize the U.S. war in Vietnam and push for social justice. Begun in 1959 by actors interested in exploring the traditions of *commedia*, the group moved toward Marxist politics in the 1960s and formed itself into a collectively run theatre in 1970. The Mime Troupe excoriated the war in their contemporary adaptation of a traditional *commedia* script by Carlo Goldoni, *L'Amant militaire* (1967). In later productions, the company used comic-book stereotypes and fast-action farce to demand women's rights and expose the lies of local politicians.

Enraged by the slow pace of civil rights progress and continuing racism in the U.S., the Black Theatre

Movement (BTM) called for revolutionary action in the 1960s. In manifestos, plays, and performances that echoed the demands of the futurists, the dadaists, and Antonin Artaud, leaders Amiri Baraka (formerly Leroi Jones) (1934–) and Ed Bullins (1935–) called for the abolition of mainstream white culture and the immersion of black audiences in ritual-like experiences to enable them to gain a physical understanding of their past. Baraka wrote *Dutchman* (1964), a play about the birth of black consciousness in a mild-mannered subway rider killed by white vigilantes, and “The Revolutionary Theatre” (1965) which, like Artaud's manifestos, bombards readers with grotesque and cruel images to purify them of past complicity with white power. Baraka started the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in Harlem in 1965 and premiered his ritualized historical pageant *Slave Ship* in 1967 at Spirit House in Newark, New Jersey (Figure 10.6). Like Baraka, Bullins used ritualistic, often jazz-inspired structures for his plays, such as *In the Wine Time* (1968), which explored the limitations and possibilities for black revolutionary action. Scorning moderate black artists and religious leaders in the U.S., the BTM artists allied themselves with the Black Power movement of the late 1960s and called for the cultivation of black consciousness and the political overthrow of white regimes.

1968 and its consequences

In 1968, groups of students and workers in several cities, many supported by radical theatre troupes, mounted demonstrations and rebellions against the cold war order. In New York and Paris, students and others rioted to protest the U.S. war in Vietnam and French acquiescence to U.S. policies. In Tokyo and Mexico City, there were violent demonstrations against the political and economic imperialism of the U.S. In Prague, Czechoslovakia, workers and students first celebrated their apparent liberation from Soviet oppression and then battled tanks in the streets when Warsaw Pact troops invaded to restore Russian hegemony. Although these demonstrations and rebellions lacked international coordination, they did express widespread opposition to American and Russian militarism and imperialism.



Figure 10.6

Photograph from a 1970 production of Baraka's *Slave Ship*, directed by Gilbert Moses at Theatre-in-the-Church. Photo: Bert Andrews. Permission given by Marsha Hudson, executrix of the estate of Bert Andrews.

Photo courtesy of the Billy Rose Theatre Collection, the NY Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

They also expressed the hope, inflected differently in each society, for more democratic and peaceful alternatives to the cold war system of international order. Immediate military and political realities sparked the protests, but they also reflected dissatisfaction resulting from the rising expectations of the post-war economic boom and the growing distance between the ideals of both liberal and communist societies and the realities of everyday life under both systems.

Despite the utopian hopes of many of the protesters, few major political and economic changes occurred, primarily because the structures and mindset of the cold war impeded substantial change. The Soviet Union tightened its control over Eastern Europe, and the U.S. reasserted its hegemony in Japan and Latin America. In several countries south of its borders, the U.S. subverted democratic socialism and replaced it with repressive dictators in the 1970s and 1980s. In these decades, many

theatre activists with international reputations – including Sławomir Mrożek, Augusto Boal, Enrique Buenaventura, and the artists of the Living Theatre – were arrested or repressed. In the wake of 1968, the U.S. and Eastern Bloc governments increased their grants to innovative theatre artists, partly as a means of controlling their politics. The cold war would continue for another 20 years before the Soviet Union collapsed, from both internal and international pressures.

In the long run, reaction in the West against the perceived excesses of 1968 helped to undercut commitment to the goals of liberalism and socialism, the twin anchors of Western politics for 90 years. After a brief progressive interlude in the 1970s, this response led to more reactionary politics in the West and Japan. Influenced by capitalist marketing techniques, populations began to view themselves more as consumers and less as citizens, a necessary self-definition for political involvement in both liberal and socialist societies. Linked to consumerism was the rise of identity politics – the individual's identification with a traditional racial, ethnic, or social group – which debilitated the rational calculation inherent in liberal politics and dispersed the class-consciousness necessary for democratic socialism. However, the events of 1968 also challenged the ideas of modernism, as many critics and artists recognized that the separation of performance from politics was nearly impossible and probably unwise. As we will see in Part IV, the initial hopes aroused by 1968 animated many theatre groups to take up problems of social justice. These included many of the dynamics of globalization.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites

should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Ah! The Hopeful Pageantry of Bread and Puppet (2005). Video, Bread and Puppet Productions. (Footage shot between 1990 and 1998.)

Augusto Boal. Short interview 2007 on the theatre of the oppressed. YouTube: search “Augusto Boal.”

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CASE STUDY: Social drama in Kerala, India: Staging the “revolution”

By Phillip B. Zarrilli

There once was a time like this. A time when human lives burned in the “test fires” of social change.

(Tooppil Bhaasi (1924–1992), playwright and director, Kerala)

This case study examines the complex relationship that drama, theatre, and related public events played in “staging” the social, economic, and political revolutions that helped transform “old” Kerala, India into the “new” Kerala. The late-nineteenth-century Kerala was a feudal, hierarchically ordered social system; it was transformed into today’s Kerala, often called a “model”

of social development. I consider theatre both in the narrowly defined sense of the performance of dramas whose content is overtly political – which stage a social crisis or revolution – and in the broad sense of the related “theatres” of public events in public spaces: rallies, meetings, marches, protests, and even publications stage a “revolution” in individual and community consciousness in the streets, meeting halls, libraries/reading rooms, and paddy fields. During certain historical periods, public events collectively reflect not some “frozen cultural ideals, but . . . the turbulence that wracks social order during that time and place. . . . [I]t becomes a direct extension of ongoing or emergent struggle that co-opts any and all venues for their conflicts”

(Handelman 1990:60). Theatre performances become one public arena for the staging of conflict.

The socio-economic system of “old” Kerala

The Malayalam-speaking coastal region of southwestern coastal India today, known as the state of Kerala, is a very small geographical region (15,000 square miles), but with a population of approximately 30 million (larger than Canada’s, but Canada’s land mass is more than 250 times greater). It has the highest density of people per square mile of any state in India. From the eighth century when Hinduism displaced Buddhism and became the dominant religion of Kerala, a highly stratified, hierarchical

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Politics, ideology, history, and performance

Janelle Reinelt raises several important questions about writing histories of theatre when she asks, “what is the relationship of politics [and ideology] to culture? How does social change result in cultural change – or can various cultural practices initiate or precipitate change?” (Reinelt 1996:1). The old rationalist view of politics or ideology as conscious, well-articulated systems of belief is no longer adequate for analyzing the complex relationship between how we think, feel, and relate to the material realities of our human condition. A more complex view of “politics” assumes that all forms of cultural practice are “political” in that they are not neutral. The term “ideology” is now understood to encompass both implicit as well as explicit ideas, theories, and assumptions that inform the human subject’s consideration and interpretation of his/her condition. Consequently, ideologies constantly shape and (re)form our consciousness of, and relationship to the world. (For more on ideology, see the case study, “Ibsen’s *A Doll House*,” at the end of Chapter 9.) Cultural theorist Terry Eagleton argues that what is most important is the place of intersection where ceaseless negotiation takes place, where the possibility exists for a transformation in what and how one thinks, believes, understands, and relates to the world. Eagleton explains that:

there is one place above all where such forms of consciousness may be transformed almost literally overnight, and that is in active political struggle. . . . When men and women engaged in quite modest, local forms of political resistance find themselves brought by the inner momentum of such conflicts into direct confrontation with the power of the state, it is possible that their political consciousness may be definitely, irreversibly altered.

(Eagleton 1991:223–224)

This case study examines how theatre and drama played an active role in helping generate shifts in individual and socio-political consciousness at a local level in Kerala, India during the twentieth century.

socio-economic order was gradually established in which people were born into particular *jātis* – actual or potential networks determined by blood ties and marriage. (The Portuguese gave the name “caste” to these kinship lineages.) One’s identity was understood to be determined at birth, and one’s standing within a local hierarchy was determined by one’s relative “purity” or “pollution” within the entire network of relationships. One’s role and work within society were also established by birth into a particular *jāti* (see Table 10.1).

The interlocking system created a complex, permanent set of restrictions and rights, as well as service

obligations. Strict rules governed what types of clothes you wore, what temples or shrines you might enter, and those you touched and those with whom you ate, socially interacted, or married. To take food from someone born into a lower *jāti*, or to be touched by an untouchable at the bottom of the scale would be polluting, requiring a process of ritual cleansing for the higher born. Kerala became notorious for the distance that untouchables were required to keep away from a pathway or road when a high-ranking *Namboodiri* was traveling.

Only the highest-ranking groups and temples had the right to own land, and thereby the right to permanent

Table 10.1 Brief summary of main *jātis*

Categories	Occupation	Kerala name
<i>Non-polluting jātis</i>		
[Brahmins]	Priests/Landholders	<i>Namboodiri</i> Brahmins not born in Kerala
[<i>Kshatriyas</i>]	Ruling/landholding royal lineages	<i>Samantans</i> , titled <i>Nayars</i>
	High-caste temple servants/ performers of <i>kutiyattam</i>	<i>Ambalavasis</i>
	Smaller landholders	<i>Nayars</i> (upper ranking)
[<i>Vaisyas</i>]	Artisans/traders	<i>Kammalans</i> (some Syrian Christians and Muslims)
[<i>Sudras</i>]	Middle-ranking retainers: soldiers, cooks, barbers, scribes, funeral priests, washermen, performers of <i>kathakali</i>	<i>Nayars</i> (lower ranking)
<i>Higher-polluting jātis</i>		
	Coconut workers	<i>Tiyyas/Izhavas</i> , <i>Thandans</i>
	Tenant farmers	<i>Chovans</i>
	Laborers/astrologers	<i>Kaniyans</i>
<i>Lower-polluting jātis</i>		
[<i>Harijans</i> /Untouchables]	Farm/menial workers	<i>Pulayas</i> or <i>Cherumans</i>
[Tribal peoples]	Farmers/workers	

wealth through agricultural production, or to have such luxuries as a permanent tiled roof. Everyone else living on the land did so only with the permission of those whom they served; therefore, they were subject to eviction. *Namboodiri* Brahmins were considered most pure, and therefore at the top of the hierarchy. They usually served as priests at large, wealthy temple complexes set within walled compounds – such as the Vadakkunnathan (Siva) Temple described in Chapter 3, in which entry was restricted to the “non-polluting” castes. Some *Namboodiri* Brahmins were also landlords of large properties. High-ranking princely families (*Samantans* and royal *Nayar* lineages) were said to be charged with protecting “brahmins and cows,” that is to say, the social order. Like *Namboodiris*, lower-ranking castes such as scribes, teachers, barbers, washers, and ritual specialists, as well as retainues of soldiers, served their kingdoms and/or large extended households. Very low-caste farm laborers (*Pulayas* or *Cherumans*) were virtually born into servitude to the land and family on whose behalf they would till the paddy-fields, giving to their “lord” a fixed percent of their crop at harvest.

Although inheritance passed along matrilineal lines in some castes (*Nayars*), and patrilineal lines in others (*Namboodiris*), absolute power remained concentrated in the hands of the eldest male member of each extended family. Known as the *kāṇṇavan*, this powerful male figure made all decisions within an extended family such as the right to evict tenant-laborers or arrange marriages.

One obligation of the wealthy landholding castes and temples was to patronize the full set of traditional performances woven into the annual Hindu festival calendar. As discussed in a Chapter 3 case study, *kutiyattam* was offered annually in certain high-caste temples as a visual sacrifice to the main deity. Therefore, attendance was prohibited to all “polluting” castes. *Kathakali* dance-drama (see the case study at the end of Chapter 3, p. 143) was patronized by the high-caste princely and landholding families, but performances, when held outside temples, were open to a relatively wide spectrum of people.

Toward a new Kerala: Social consciousness and social drama in Kerala’s “revolution”

Effectively under British colonial rule since 1790, by the nineteenth century Kerala was governed either by direct British rule in Malabar (north), or indirectly through the princely states of Cochin (central) and Travancore (south). Like all India’s princely states, the rulers had some independence, but paid taxes and answered to British authority. During the nineteenth century, the idea that it might be possible to re-imagine and reform the old systems of marriage, caste inequalities, or land-distribution, was gradually brought to public awareness through education, the founding of caste-specific reform organizations, journalism, new forms of literature such as the novel and short stories written in the local language (Malayalam), and public protests. Imagining the possibility of a fundamental change within one’s socio-economic circumstances has the potential to shake the foundations of one’s understanding of the world and one’s place in the world. Together with issues of social reform, the movement toward independence gained momentum and was formalized when the Indian National Congress was founded in 1885, with its share of adherents in Kerala.

A few British and Indian administrators instituted some progressive changes, such as banning compulsory labor and establishing wage-based labor service to the government. Traditional forms of education continued among the high-castes, such as *Namboodiri* study of the traditional sacred texts (*Vedas*). But new forms of education were introduced through the English-language missionary schools and colleges preparing (primarily) *Nayars* and Christians for administrative service. By the late nineteenth century, many Malayalam-language government schools opened, and, in 1902, lower-grade education in Malayalam was mandated. During 1911–1912, caste restrictions in government schools were abolished.

A Hindu religious and social reform movement developed under the leadership of three major public figures. One was Chattampi Swamikal (1853–1924)

who, as a *Nayar*, rebelled against high-caste *Namboodiri* dominance on behalf of his own community as well as the lower-caste *Ezhavas*, hoping to build a new society. His counterpart among the *Ezhavas* was Sri Narayana Guru (1856–1924) who consecrated a number of shrines offering open entry for all, even the lowest-caste Hindus. The “untouchable” *Pulayan*, Ayyankali (1866–1941), staged a protest in 1893. He illegally traveled in a bullock cart along a public road when he should have walked, calling out his presence to any high-caste persons so they could avoid coming too close to him. All these reformers established communal organizations dedicated to the cause of social reform and improvement of their own rights and privileges, and those of other lower castes. Even within the high-caste *Namboodiri* communities, social reform organizations were established to examine their own problems and to re-examine their role within the larger socio-economic system.

Alongside the growth of education, the publication of O. Chandu Menon’s (1847–1899) social novel *Indulekha* (*Crescent Moon*) (Malayalam, 1889) radicalized new literary forms. Menon’s novel follows the development of romantic love between Madhavan and Indulekha, both members of a joint extended family, the Poorvarangil, who represent the aspirations and attitudes of the then new generation of high-caste *Namboodiris* receiving an English education. The novel focuses on the tension between conservative forces of tradition in the old order, and the reformist values represented by English education.

Eventually, dramas were staged as one more tactic for moving ideas about social reform into the public domain. *Indulekha* itself was often staged. But it was the 1929 production of *From the Kitchen to the Stage* by V.T. Bhattathirippad Namboodiri that propelled serious social drama into the forefront of the reform movement. It took up the tremendous problems caused by arranged marriages, among other things. This was one of the first spoken dramas that did not attempt to appeal either to middle-class audiences or to the towns and which was without the broad appeal of the popular Tamil-language music-dramas, intended for entertainment. E.M.S.

Namboodiripad provides the following account of the original production, staged at the Convention of the Welfare Association at Edakkunni in 1929:

The reason for its success was nothing but the fact that the actors “lived” their roles, and in portraying the characters they were virtually projecting nothing but their own actual lives . . . women who had never before in their lives attended a meeting or heard any speech, much less seen a drama [witnessed the play]. The idea of fighting polygamy, opposing old persons marrying young girls, and also the idea of love marriage began to be seen by *Namboodiri* women as possibilities. . . . The transformation that this one, single drama brought about in the minds of the *Namboodiri* women in so short a period could well be equated with that obtained through the medium of meetings and newspaper propaganda for more than a decade.

(Namboodiripad 1976:98–99)

By 1930, Kerala’s own progressive literary movement was widely recognized. Social issues dominated the writing of novels, short stories, drama, and even some poetry. K. Damodaran’s play, *Rental Arrears* (*Pattabakki*), had a similar impact to that of *From the Kitchen to the Stage*. Banned for a time by the British authorities, it was performed for mass audiences throughout the rural Malabar district. It focuses on the eviction of tenant-laborers from the land. Kuttunni, the young male mainstay of the family, has been forced by its extreme poverty to become a petty thief, trying to steal food for his younger siblings. Caught red-handed and jailed for six months, his sister has no choice but to sell her body to get enough food to feed her younger brother. The play concludes with Kuttunni announcing to his sister, “If poverty is to disappear, then the government we have today must change. . . . We should refashion the social structure!”

The use of drama and education for raising social issues continued with the founding in 1948 of the

Kendra Kala Samithi in Kozhikode (Malabar), under the leadership of literary figures such as S.K. Pottakkat, P.C. Kuttikrishnan, and N.V. Krishna Varier. This grass-roots movement established village libraries and reading rooms to promote mass literacy and reading. Each was charged with staging one drama each year for which there would be local and district competitions. This movement set the stage for the emergence of Kerala's pre-eminent social dramatist – Tooppil Bhaasi (1924–1992).

Tooppil Bhaasi and the Kerala People's Arts Club

Tooppil Bhaasi was born in Vallikkunnu, a typical agricultural village in south central Kerala, India and part of the old Travancore kingdom. He received his lower school education in a Sanskrit School, and went on to pass his examination in traditional Indian medicine (*Ayurveda*). However, Bhaasi never pursued a career in medicine. Rather, like many other young men receiving an education during this turbulent period in Kerala and in Indian history, Bhaasi became a student activist and leader, working in the student congress movement as part of the national drive toward independence from British colonial rule. He later joined the communist movement. By Indian Independence Day (15 August 1947), he was temporarily in the Allappuzha jail. He was arrested for his activities of organizing low-caste agricultural workers, protesting against the hoarding of food grains and black-marketeering by wealthy landholders, for the cultivation of waste land, and for attempting to overturn the hierarchical caste system, that is, seeking to replace the old social and economic order with progressive social-democratic models.

Between 1946 and 1952, while the Communist Party of India was advocating active and sometimes violent revolutionary struggle, Bhaasi and other activists were forced to live in hiding because some of their activities were declared illegal. While in hiding, in 1952 he wrote his first play, *You Made Me a Communist*, and the Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC) almost immediately produced it. Founded in 1950 by a group of committed student activists at the Law College in

Ernakulam Town, KPAC began to produce dramas as one means of raising socio-political issues. The group first used shadow puppets and then staged the political drama, *My Son is Right*. But it was their production of Bhaasi's *You Made Me a Communist* that launched KPAC onto the path toward becoming Kerala's most visible contemporary theatre company.

You Made Me a Communist enacts the struggles of agricultural laborers and poor peasants for a better life by focusing on how Paramu Pillai, a conservative farmer, makes the decision to become a communist. The play focuses on his change in socio-political consciousness and calls for the revolutionary overthrow of landlordism. With its very loose structure, and with characters who burst into one song at unexpected moments during the course of the story, *You Made Me a Communist* swept across the length and breadth of Kerala. Dr. Radhakrishnan of the Gandhi Centre, New Delhi, recalled to me his experience of it:

Even though a child, I could sense the excitement! There were nights when KPAC had more than four performances. From one place, they went on moving for months on end. . . . KPAC became a very powerful social inspiration for people to fight against social injustice and for their rights. It gave them the feeling that anybody, irrespective of their low birth [could be] equal.

There can be no doubt that attending a performance of *You Made Me a Communist* in 1952–1953 was a special event. It was not simply a dramatic representation of a fictionalized story and its characters, but part of an unfolding and evolving socio-political revolution as it was happening. Journalist, essayist, playwright, and activist Kaniyapuram Ramachandran explained both the timeliness and excitement generated by this inter-relationship between stage and life in Bhaasi's early social dramas, and in *You Made Me a Communist* in particular:

The fourth element of drama is the audience; and the audience is the fourth character. That

dividing line between stage and audience was simply erased! What they saw there was their real lives! The workers, agricultural laborers, people coming on stage and speaking their own dialects and ordinary language – not literary language. The ultimate aim is to make the audience part of the experience. There is no detachment, but attachment. So with the social issues in the play – it was all so relevant. At the end of a performance the entire audience would come to its feet. So, *You Made Me a Communist* wasn't a drama at all! The social relevance of the play made people forget everything when they saw it. It was a drama for the people, by the people. It gave people what they wanted to see at the right time. It was a magic wand. The audience was like

a mental vacuum that sucked up what was given. . . . In 1951 it was so apt! It was the medicine that the patient was waiting for. People were ready for that message of social change.

Bhaasi always wanted the audience to first understand his plays. They should be clear and straight. He was speaking to the heart, and not the intellect. He used to talk to the emotions, and through the emotions, people would change their thinking.

(Interview with the author 1993)

The impact of the production of this play on the Malayalis was remarkable. So important was it for the spread of the communist point of view from 1952 to 1954 that some commentators have suggested that



Figure 10.7

In a 1993 production of *Memories in Hiding* by Tooppil Bhaasi, in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, the Landlord (right with scarf) forces Teevan to yoke together his father, Ceenan, and Paramu Naayar to plough a paddy field.

Photo © Phillip B. Zarrilli.



Figure 10.8

In *Memories in Hiding*, the jailed Paramu Naayar shouts defiantly near the end: “Our voices will be heard even after we die. They are the voices of revolution.”

Photo © Phillip B. Zarrilli.

without it the emergence of the first democratically elected communist government to the newly established state of Kerala in 1957 would never have happened.

Since 1952, *You Made Me a Communist* has been performed well over 2,000 times and continues to be part of KPAC’s active repertory of social dramas. Bhaasi went on to become one of Kerala’s most important playwrights, providing KPAC with a series of highly popular social dramas, including *The Prodigal Son* (1956) in which a wayward, selfish rowdy is transformed into a champion of the low castes. His *Asvameetam* (1962) explores the social stigma of leprosy. His political satire, *Power House* (1990) focuses on the irresponsible behavior of a government institution – the Kerala State Electricity Board. *Memories in Hiding*, which won the Kerala Best Play Award in 1992, was his final play.

Like *You Made Me a Communist*, *Memories in Hiding* examines the radical change in consciousness of a poor tenant farmer, Ceenan, and re-examines the consequences of the real-life Suranad Revolution in central Travancore (1949–1951) in which Bhaasi took part, and during which a number of agitators and police died. Ceenan is the head *Pulayan*, an agricultural tenant-laborer who works for a landlord. Like his father before him, he has served this “lord” (*tampuran*) as a “slave” – a translation of the Malayalam *adiyan*, implying servitude for someone of higher status. *Pulayans* like Ceenan were tenant-laborers who in effect were considered the “property” of their landlords and therefore functioned virtually as slaves (Figures 10.7, 10.8). The moment of his radicalization comes when, after several generations of quiet servitude, the landlord refuses to assist Ceenan

in seeking the release of his son who has been falsely arrested for the killing of local police in the Suranad rebellion. Ceenan announces:

Tamburaan! (*He stares at the landlord and stands up straight. The landlord is puzzled by the expression on his face. Nannu Nayar becomes afraid. Ceenan stares at him for a moment. In a firm declaration:*)

I no longer have a Tamburaan! I am no longer a slave!!

(*Stares at him, and slowly walks out, exiting.*)

(Bhaasi 1996:55)

From its nineteenth-century realities as a hierarchically ordered, feudal social system ridden with caste and class conflicts, with high birth and infant mortality rates, Kerala was gradually transformed into a turn-of-the-twentieth-century social democratic state with radical reductions in population growth and infant mortality rates. Illiteracy was virtually eradicated, many previously dispossessed peasants and communities were enfranchised, and there was extensive land-reform, with the redistribution of considerable land to the landless. This transformation of Kerala in just over 100 years into a new model of social development has taken place peacefully within a democratic framework and without the outside assistance of neo-liberal global institutions such as the

International Monetary Fund or the World Bank (Parayil 2000:1–15).

Spoken drama and theatre, together with numerous modes of public performance, have clearly played an essential role in redefining individual, social, and political awareness in contemporary Kerala.

Key references

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com.

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CASE STUDY: Brecht directs *Mother Courage*

By Bruce McConachie

In the fall of 1948, Bertolt Brecht returned with his wife and entourage to the Russian-occupied section of war-torn Berlin, where he hoped to establish a theatre. Formerly working as a major writer and director in the Weimar Republic, Brecht had been forced to flee Germany in 1933, when Hitler came to power. Returning from

exile after 15 years, he could not be sure of his reception by the Soviet and German communists who now controlled the institutions of culture in what would soon become East Berlin. Although a Marxist, Brecht favored a kind of theatre that was very different from the socialist realism promoted by Stalin's commissars of culture.

Brecht brought with him a script of *Mother Courage and Her Children*, which he had written in 1939, and

photographs from a Zurich production of the play in 1941, staged when he was living in Finland. He and his wife, Helene Weigel (1900–1971), decided to gamble their theatrical future in Soviet-occupied Berlin on a production of *Mother Courage*. If the show were successful with Berlin spectators and the critics, Brecht and Weigel might gain enough leverage with the communists to wrench a subsidy from the new government and start their theatre. If not, they knew they would have to continue their travels to find another theatrical home.

A chronology of Brecht's career

- 1898 Born in Augsburg, Germany, to a middle-class family.
- 1918 Serves briefly in the German army as a medical orderly.
- 1922–1928 Establishes himself as a director and writer in Berlin with several productions, including productions of his own *A Man's a Man* and *The Threepenny Opera*.
- 1928–1933 Broadens his work to include radio and film, joins the Communist Party, writes several short didactic plays, including *The Measures Taken*.
- 1933–1938 Flees Germany with his entourage to live and work in Scandinavia.
- 1938–1941 Threatened by the Nazis, Brecht works in Finland, then travels across the Soviet Union to the United States. Brecht completes drafts of several major plays, including *Mother Courage and Her Children* and *The Good Person of Setzuan*.
- 1941–1947 Works in Hollywood on several plays, including *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Co-directs an English-language version of his *The Life of Galileo*. Lies about his communist connections in the hearings of the House Un-American Activities Committee and hastily flees to Europe.
- 1948–1949 Premiere of *Mother Courage* in Berlin (11 January 1949). Brecht and Weigel found the Berliner Ensemble.

1950–1956 Directs and adapts his and others' plays at the Berliner Ensemble. Ensemble tours to Paris and London. Brecht dies and Weigel continues to lead the Ensemble (until her death in 1971).

As the timeline of Brecht's career suggests, the playwright-director was caught up in most of the major political crises of the twentieth century – the Great War, the German response to the Russian Revolution, the rise of Nazism, World War II, and the cold war. To help theatre spectators to navigate such dangerous waters, Brecht developed a kind of socialist theatre that engaged them in a careful reading of their political options. Aware firsthand of the persuasive charisma of politicians, the dangerous emotions of patriotism, and the callous manipulations of economic power, Brecht sought to educate, entertain, and empower his audiences with dramatic lessons in social, political, and economic relationships.

When the Berliner Ensemble appeared in Paris in 1955, the French critic Roland Barthes commented:

Whatever our final evaluation of Brecht, we must at least indicate the coincidence of his thought with the great progressive themes of our time: that the evils that men suffer are in their own hands – in other words, that the world can be changed; that art can and must intervene in history; . . . that, finally, there is no such thing as an 'essence' of eternal art, but that each society must invent the art which will be responsible for its own deliverance.

(Barthes 1972:38)

Barthes is well known for his work in semiotics, a method of analysis that critics and academics were beginning to use in the mid-1950s for insights into many fields across the humanities and social sciences. Since that time, some critics have used semiotic analysis to understand theatrical performances.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Semiotics

Most theories of semiotics, including Barthes's, derive from the work of French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). Saussure emphasized the language-like character of all signs, which in the theatre includes the words, objects, physical actions, and all of the other signifying practices that occur in performance. According to Saussure, there is no evident connection between either the sound or the written expression of signs and their meanings; the word “tree” and our understanding of actual trees in nature is an arbitrary relationship. Similarly, for Barthes and other semiologists, there is no fixed relation between signifiers on the stage and what they signify to us in the performance. Spectators interpret a piece of scenery in relation to other signifiers they know, not because there is any inherent meaning in the scenic unit's combination of wood, muslin, glue, and paint. Consequently, according to semiotics, spectators look for differences among signifiers on stage to make sense of their experience in the theatre.

For semioticians, everything on stage that is presented to spectators is a sign of something else. In traditional theatre, the conventions of artistic performance and audience expectation have established and coordinated these signs. In the modern and contemporary theatre, playwrights, directors, and other artists must carefully organize the signs and sign systems of their productions. To continue with the example of scenery, if a designer were to place flats with furniture painted on it (an eighteenth-century convention) next to three-dimensional pieces of furniture (as occurs in most realist settings), spectators would likely experience confusion between these two different sign systems for scenery. Spatial relationships between people on a stage convey meaning; two people facing each other but on opposite sides of the stage probably will be seen as emotionally separated from one another. Contemporary directors usually work to see that an entire production uses a consistent sign system, including the gestures of the actors. The mostly small gestures of everyday life in realistic theatre would be inconsistent with the broad, pantomimic gestures of nineteenth-century melodrama. Modern theatre artists seek to coordinate all of the sign systems in a production, including lighting, set design, costuming, properties, and sound effects, as well as acting.

The director is also expected to present the audience with a clear hierarchy of signs in the moment-to-moment rhythms and pictures of her or his production. Directors “tell” spectators where to look on the stage and shape their response by the manipulation of signs. For a storm and shipwreck scene presented in a minimalist theatrical style, for instance, the director might begin with sound and lighting effects focused on a ship's mast, follow it with a blackout and a transition to soothing music, and end with the entrance of stumbling actors clothed in wet, ragged costumes. In such a sequence, the director would need to coordinate all of the sign systems of the production and also highlight specific signs to tell the story. A knowledge of semiotics can assist directors in unifying their productions and also help critics to describe and analyze the coherence (or incoherence) of a performance.

Below are some questions one would ask in a semiotic analysis of any production.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 Taken together, what do the components of the setting – form, color spectrum, texture, definition of spaces – signify about the world in which the play takes place?
- 2 In what ways do the actors convey meaning by gesture or their use of space and how do these signs relate to other signs on the stage?
- 3 The rhythm of the action on stage also carries semiotic significance. What are the major units of action in a performance and how does the rhythm of their sequencing relate to other signs on stage?

When Brecht began rehearsals for *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1948, he had a poorly equipped theatre, insufficient funds, and many actors and designers with whom he had never worked before. The audience, Brecht knew, would be struggling to survive a cold winter in a postwar Berlin that remained mostly a pile of rubble. How is the theatre historian to understand the effectiveness and success of the production that emerged from this inauspicious beginning? Most historians will likely start their research with the critical reviews of the production, biographies of the major artists involved, and contextual evidence concerning the demographics and desires of the audience. To understand the probable semiotics of the performance, the historian can also examine Brecht's working script and his directorial choices, as they were recorded in the production book and rehearsal photos.

Mother Courage on stage

As a playwright, Brecht set *Mother Courage and Her Children* during the Thirty Year's War (1618–1648) that ravaged Germany, destroying whole cities and killing nearly half of the German population during the historical era of the Protestant Reformation. Between 1624 and 1636, the years encompassed by the play, Mother Courage struggles to support herself and her three adult children by selling supplies to both Protestant and Catholic armies from a wagon that she and her children haul behind them. The drama focuses on the conflict between war profiteering and maintaining a

family, between capitalist economics and family survival. As Mother Courage pursues business as usual, the war pulls each of her children into the ongoing conflict and eventually it kills them. For more than 12 years, Mother Courage haggles while her children die. Although Courage learns nothing from her struggle, Brecht wanted the audience to understand that capitalistic wars must be abolished if families are to survive.

As a director, Brecht tried to induce spectators both to grapple with the historical specifics of early capitalism during the Reformation era and to apply what they learned to their present situation in 1949 Berlin. In this regard, he deployed scenography and lighting primarily to point to his universal themes, not to literally depict the historical situation of seventeenth-century Europe. On either side of the stage were large frames illustrating the general implements of warfare, such as muskets, tenting, and broadswords, while upstage was an enormous, semicircular cyclorama that covered the entire back wall of the theatre. Into this mostly open stage space, Brecht placed occasional three-dimensional scenic units as necessary for the action, such as a cannon, a half-ruined parsonage, and other set pieces, plus Mother Courage's wagon.

Three sign systems for the production

From the success of the Zurich production, Brecht decided that Courage's wagon, the chief symbol of her business enterprise, would constitute the main scenic

unit for nearly all of the 12 scenes in the play. The stage was fitted with a revolve, a rotating circular platform, on which the wagon could move when pulled by Courage and her children. This occurs frequently in the play to indicate that they are traveling as they follow various armies across Europe. When pulled in the opposite direction from the rotating stage, of course, the characters and the wagon simply move in place; for 12 years, in effect, Courage and her business appear stuck on a treadmill. In addition to using white light to illuminate the actors, Brecht worked with his designers to create images on the cyclorama that would indicate the carnage caused by war. Through scenery and lighting, then, Brecht and his designers created a non-realist sign system to indicate the Universal History that underlined the general horror of war – stage images as relevant to his 1949 audience as to the historical situation of the play.

In contrast, the costumes and props used by the actors were historically specific. Photographs of the production show costumes that suggest the actual dress of seventeenth-century Germans, ranging from different military uniforms to regional varieties of peasant work clothes. In addition, the designer distressed the costumes appropriately to suggest their wear and tear over the 12 years of the play's duration. This meant that occasional new clothes, such as a colorful hat and red boots given by an aging colonel to his prostitute-mistress, stuck out on stage in comparison to the drab grays and earth-tones of most of the other clothing. Brecht instructed his property master to keep in mind the hand-crafted nature of the properties used by the characters, such as eating implements, washing buckets, and cookware. The sign systems of these naturalist costumes and props for *Mother Courage and Her Children* were designed to pull the audience into a realist illusion of Specific History.

But never for long. Brecht continually reminded his spectators that they were in a theatre. At the beginning of each scene, a sign suspended from the flies told the audience in large block letters where, in Europe, the scene was set. Each scene began and ended with an actor, in full view of the audience, drawing a half curtain across

the proscenium opening. Throughout, the spectators could see the lighting instruments, which were not masked from view. Whenever the small orchestra in a side box on the stage played some of Paul Dessau's music for the production, a musical emblem was lowered from the flies. Unlike the conventions of most musical comedy, where the music seems to arise out of the emotional situation, Brecht used music to break the dramatic illusion. Dessau's difficult, often atonal and haunting music reminded spectators of their present circumstances, sitting in a theatre and watching a play that had something to tell them about rebuilding their society and culture. Brecht intended this sign system of music and stage machinery to evoke the Theatrical Present, where the actual work of the stage production might suggest the work to be done beyond the playhouse.

The semiotics of Brechtian acting

Brecht involved his actors in all three of his major sign systems – those of the illusion of Specific History, non-realist Universal History, and the Theatrical Present. Simply standing on stage in their naturalist costumes made the actors signs of the social reality of seventeenth-century Europe. Much of the speech uttered by the actor-characters also placed them realistically in the sign system of Specific History. Some of Brecht's dialog and many of his songs, however, point to generalizations about social and economic behavior that indicate truths about all history. Several major characters in the play speak in parables that display the hard-bitten wisdom of peasant life, for instance, and the songs often contrast foolish religious faith to the material demands of survival. In enunciating these truths, the actors either spoke or sang within the signs of Universal History or worked directly with spectators in the auditorium. An actor might even begin a line of dialog within the sign system of Universal History and then throw the end of it to the Berlin audience, shifting abruptly into the sign system of the Theatrical Present.

The actors' gestures and movements also played out across the three sign systems. Brecht coined the term

“gestus” to denote an actor’s ability to present a way of standing or moving that signified the social position of her or his character in Universal History. In the production of *Mother Courage*, actors could even separate themselves momentarily from the character they were playing to indicate to the audience Brecht’s understanding of the social position and action of their characters. That is, the actors could create the persona of “the Brechtian actor” to comment directly, within the signs of the Theatrical Present, on the usefulness and morality of the social role of their characters.

Semiotics in action

From a semiotic point of view, Brecht deployed the three sign systems of his production with ingenuity and fluidity in directing *Mother Courage*. Further, he used spatiality and rhythm, the theatrical tools unique to the director’s art, to underline significant turning points in the story of the play. In the first scene of the drama, two army recruiters lure Eilif, Courage’s oldest son, away from the family and bribe him to enlist. For the start of this scene, Brecht placed the family in a tight knot center stage and close to the wagon to emphasize their unified stand against the recruiters’ threat. As the recruiters chipped away at the family’s unity, Brecht dispersed the family members across the stage. Eventually, one recruiter lured Eilif some distance from Courage, whose back was turned as she bargained with the other recruiter over the price of a belt. While this was happening, the recruiter was filling Eilif with thoughts of military heroics, and Eilif was making the decision to join the army and abandon his family. Brecht found a way to spatially isolate Eilif from his family and then speeded up the action at the end as the recruiters closed in on their prey.

Mother Courage’s loss of her third child, Katrin, is the emotional climax of the play. To warn the townspeople and save their children from an imminent and deadly secret attack, Katrin climbs onto the roof of a peasant’s house near the town and begins beating a drum (Figure 10.9). The attacking soldiers, who cannot reach her (she pulls her ladder up after her), try to bribe her

to stop. They even begin destroying her mother’s wagon, left in Katrin’s care, but she continues drumming to alert the town to defend its battlements. Finally, the soldiers bring a large musket, set it up on its forked holder, and shoot her. As Katrin is dying on the roof, the sounds of cannons and alarm bells from the town indicate that she has succeeded and that the children of the town will survive. Brecht’s use of rhythm and spatiality made this a powerful scene for his Berlin audience. Katrin’s intermittent but progressively louder and longer drumming was the primary rhythmic element, while her vertical isolation on the rooftop gave the sign of her resistance spatial focus and dominance in the scene.

Semiotic critics like Barthes praised the clarity and unifying effects of Brecht’s direction of *Mother Courage and Her Children*. In his organization of the sign systems and his deployment of specific signs at significant moments in the production, Brecht encouraged his 1949 audience to apply Courage’s Specific History to their own Theatrical (and socio-political) Present. The link uniting past and present was through Universal History, Brecht’s Marxist understanding of the ongoing dynamics of economics and power. Brecht used the signs of Universal History to provide some distance and insight for his spectators, rendering their past and present worlds strange and unusual for them, thus preparing them to accept his own vision of events. The term Brecht used to describe this effect on spectators was *Verfremdungseffekt*, Brecht’s German neologism (sometimes mistranslated as “alienation effect”) for a Russian phrase first used by the Meyerhold aesthetician, Victor Shklovsky.

Conclusion

Whether Brecht’s Berlin audience read his signs and sign systems for *Mother Courage* as the director-playwright seems to have intended them cannot, of course, be known. For Brecht and Weigel, however, their gamble had paid off; the success of the production led to the founding of the Berliner Ensemble in 1949, a company that soon emerged as a leader in postwar Europe on both sides of the “Iron Curtain” of the cold war.



Figure 10.9

Katrin, Mother Courage's daughter, beats her drum to warn the townspeople in Scene 11 of the 1949 production of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*.

© Deutsches Theatermuseum, Munich.

While this analysis of the 1949 production suggests that Brecht involved his spectators in interpreting meanings within three distinct sign systems during performances, and used rhythm and spatiality to focus audience attention on meaningful signs at climactic moments, other analyses might come to different conclusions about Brecht's semiotic direction of the play. No semiotician-historian, however, would deny that Brecht's complex yet coherent use of signs helped to ensure the success of *Mother Courage and Her Children* in 1949.

Key references

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com.

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PART IV

Theatre and performance in the age of global communications, 1950–2009

Edited by **Gary Jay Williams**

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PART IV: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS, 1950–2009

THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE

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Augusto Boal, Brazil
Nuevo Teatro Popular, Cuba, Latin America
Japan's Terayama Shūji & Suzuki Tadashi
Dario Fo, Italy
Robert Wilson's Image Theatre
Anti-apartheid plays, South Africa
Postmodern stagings of classics
Plays: Churchill, Ayckbourn, Friel, Shepard, Rabe, Mamet, Fornés, Wilson, Bond
Feminist Criticism, Cultural Studies
Performance Studies
Deconstruction

1970s

Mega-musicals
Wole Soyinka, Nobel Prize winner
Royal Shakespeare Company expands
Performance art
Experimental festivals, Mexico
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Decline of political theatre
Plays: A. Wilson, Gardner, Uhry, Wolfe, Hwang, McNally, Henley
Materialist Criticism
New Historicism
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1980s

Disney Corp. on Broadway
Intercultural productions
Mnouchkine's *Les Atrides*
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Gao Xingjian, Nobel Prize winner
Rise of Asian-American theatre
Plays: Soyinka, Fugard, Kushner, Frayn, Bennett, Vogel, Smith, Wasserstein, Rez, Stoppard, Fo, Parks, Jelinek
National Identity Studies
Cognitive Studies

1990s–2009

WORLD EVENTS, MEDIA

U.S. moon landing 1969
Internet 1969
U.S. President Nixon resigns
China's Mao Zedong dies
Middle East unrest
Terrorism on airliners
Northern Ireland conflict
Helsinki Accord on human rights 1975
Chile's President Allende killed
Satellite television
Cellular phones
Hard rock

AIDS crisis
Berlin wall down
Tiananmen Square protest
Chernobyl nuclear accident
India's Indira Gandhi killed
Israel–Palestine conflict
Personal computers
Disco music
Digital cameras
Heavy metal, hip hop, rap

U.S.S.R. dissolves
Persian Gulf war
European Union
World Wide Web
Globalization
Economic boom, developed nations
Terrorists destroy World Trade Center
War in Afghanistan
War in Iraq
Terrorism in Europe
World financial crisis
Gangsta rap

Timeline 4. The entries represent benchmarks relevant to themes in Part IV. We encourage correlations between the World Events listings and the Theatre and Performance listings. Entries are for reference; some may not be explicitly discussed in Part IV, given the thematic organization of our coverage. For subject and name searches, see the index.

PART IV

Theatre and performance in the age of global communications, 1950–2009

INTRODUCTION: COLONIALISM, GLOBALIZATION, MEDIA, AND THEATRE

Today all cultures are border cultures.

Néstor García Canclini

The landing of United States astronauts on the moon in July 1969 and their planting of the U.S. flag on its surface were watched by an estimated one billion people on television screens around the world. It was taken as both a dramatically new technological triumph and a landmark media event, symbolizing a new era and a new kind of global consciousness. A few years later, the U.S.'s National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) released its famous “blue marble” color satellite photos, showing the planet earth floating in space. Circulating on global television, the images of a beautiful, fragile earth reinforced the hope of many that humankind might come to its senses and cease its destruction of itself and its home.

From the vantage point of the man-in-the-moon, the U.S. astronaut planting his flag on the planet might have seemed a vainly triumphal one, part of the earthly imperial race with the Soviet Union. The moon landing came at one of the many escalating crisis points in the relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, the superpowers that had cast themselves as nuclear gladiators vying to determine the future for all humankind.

From the vantage point of a historian today, the moon landing also came in a decade when many nations were breaking from long histories of colonial subjugation by imperial nations or partitioning by the rival superpowers. Many nations were struggling with the political and economic instabilities that were the legacies of imperialism. Those struggles – in Angola, Biafra, Uganda, Nigeria, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, Nicaragua, the Balkans, and nations in South and Southeast Asia (to name a few) – were often accompanied by wars, bloody coups, terrorism, mass killings, poverty, and starvation, all of which provoked migrations. Colonizing powers had had no interest in helping these nations become economically or politically self-sustaining. The moon landing came at the very peak of student demonstrations in major world capitals against the U.S. intervention in South Vietnam. It came as waves of internal cultural change were sweeping across nations on almost every continent. These included communist China's Cultural Revolution, political protests by the Left in Japan, and civil rights demonstrations in the United States.

The moon landing of 1969 was then, considered in retrospect, a dramatic performance of a national identity of an older kind, partly bred in World War II and unexamined in the bloody cold war. Many nations were already moving toward a very different era in which traditional identities of almost every kind – national, ethnic, racial, religious, tribal, and sexual – were beginning to be challenged and reassessed. The very technology of computers and satellites that made the moon voyage possible would be a strong stimulus to the new processes of globalization that would further challenge traditional boundaries.

This final section of *Theatre Histories* focuses especially on the way theatre and performance artists have given expression to both the cultural disjunctures in the era and the struggle for new communities, twin offspring of events in the last half of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first. Theatre artists were often staging the experiences of displacement and alienation and giving voice to the dialectic between traditional and next-generation communities.

The representation on stage of the culturally displaced who are without power is not entirely new in theatre history. In Euripides's tragedy, *Medea* (431 B.C.E.), a wife cast off by her husband finds herself in double bondage. Medea is a powerless woman and a foreigner in the patriarchy of ancient Greece. In the seventeenth-century Japanese *kabuki* play, *Sanemori*, a samurai warrior saves a child of the enemy and then defects to the opposing side. The Jewish Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* seeks his pound of the Christian's flesh having long endured the embittering climate of ethnic and religious bigotry in Christian Venice. The development of nations and cultures historically has always involved cultural interactions, with trade, migrations, assimilations, and cross-fertilizations being the rule, not the exception, including the borrowings from other cultures by playwrights.

What has been new in millennium globalization is the rapidity, the immense scale, and the horizontality of the transnational engagements. In this era, large numbers of people have been migrating from rural areas to cities and from nation to nation. Prices for jet travel became affordable enough that the middle-class in economically developed nations traveled internationally frequently, for business or pleasure. (Chapter 13 takes up the issue of performances created for tourism and intercultural theatre.) Frequent interactions with other cultures have become commonplace and not just among the wealthy and educated, but at a variety of social levels. As Argentine-born anthropologist Néstor García Canclini has observed, “Today all cultures are border cultures.”

Communication technologies have played key roles in accelerating the process. Between the 1950s and the last decade of the century, radio, film, television, satellite television, video cassettes and compact discs, and finally the Internet’s web of communication brought a steadily increasing number of ordinary people into new cultural negotiations daily. By the early years of the new century, there were over 500 million users of the Internet worldwide. It connected university classrooms in Manchester and Tokyo, living rooms in New Delhi and New York, coffee houses in Kabul and Berlin, surgeons in the U.S. and Iraq, and brokerages in New York and Geneva. Satellite television shaped perceptions of events worldwide and sometimes altered political processes. The end of the cold war in 1989 became a telegenic reality when television carried images of people tearing down the wall separating East and West Berlin and toppling statues of Lenin. Kenneth Branagh’s film of *Hamlet* (1996) echoed this with his final scene showing the toppling of a statue of Claudius, the corrupt ruler who dies at the hands of Prince Hamlet. World television was on hand to capture the opening of the borders in Hungary in 1988, an event that signaled the disintegration of totalitarian communist power in the Soviet satellites, soon to be followed by the collapse of Russia’s communist government. When television cameras were trained on a statue of Saddam Hussein being pulled down in Baghdad after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, it seemed like a conveniently staged replay of an iconic, telegenic event.

However, there are many times when the uses of the global media also offer a new/old lesson for thinking about theatre and performance in a world both fractured and newly interconnected. Some anthropologists and sociologists are finding that, in the process of globalization, the global media are often sites where the disjunctures between cultures are played out. So too, as we will show in this Introduction, are theatre and performance. This introduction examines examples of the way cultural disjunctures have played out in the electronic media and then considers parallels in the work of theatre and performance artists. It considers experimental theatre and performance in postcolonial African nations, and alternative theatres in Latin America, the Pacific, and the backyard of the West,

in all of which artists have dealt with the issues of cultural displacement and quests for cultural identity common amid globalization.

We offer first a sampling of some of the conversations between new media technologies and theatre/performance that will help prepare the way for the work of this Introduction and the chapters to come.

Media and theatre: All in the family

Media technologies have had obvious impact on the forms, styles, and techniques of the theatre. (For a discussion of the ways theatre and film borrowed from each other earlier in the twentieth century, see the Chapter 8 section on film and the avant-garde.) In the realm of theatre as popular entertainment (Broadway and London's West End are two major Western venues of this), producers responded to the expectations of audiences who were becoming accustomed to the escalating spectacles of film and television. Scenic spectacularism became a star performer in big-budget American and British musicals, such as *The Phantom of the Opera* (1984). For audiences accustomed to sophisticated home and auto sound systems and rock concert amplification, musicals began to equip actors with wireless microphones and to digitally balance and distribute blends of singers and orchestras. British and Broadway musicals were recycled into films, CD soundtracks, DVDs, and touring shows for international audiences. There has been no business like show business for the repackaging of its own mythologies, from *Show Boat* (1927) through *Chorus Line* (1975) to *42nd Street* (1980). Broadway's domestic situation comedies, especially those by Neil Simon, were often indistinguishable from television's "sitcoms," in which couches became major characters.

More significantly, both mediums were exploring new expressive possibilities. As we saw in Chapter 9, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* had roots in radio, and Jo Mielziner's setting for it offered a film-like fluidity. By the 1970s, verbal language no longer occupied the central, dominating place in either medium that it once had. As film became sophisticated in visual story-telling and in visual explorations of complexities and ambiguities, it became less reliant on dialog. Film and even some television dramas began developing stories in less linear ways, sometimes creating visual sequences (with the technical help of digitization by the 1990s) that allowed thematic or symbolic associations and multiple readings. Film viewers became more agile in tracking meanings. By the end of the century, a person living in a technologically advanced nation was being exposed to, and negotiating more than 1,600 commercial messages a day from all media. Some of the film developments may have served short attention spans or the thirst for violent spectacle, but they also suggest a shift in cultural sensibilities – more interest in the (ostensible) authenticity of non-verbal emotional expression, less confidence in the truth-value of verbal language or linear continuities. The increasing use

of computers contributed to the visual sophistication of spectators. Even a rudimentary understanding of computer software programming makes apparent the constructedness of language. Video games presented the possibilities of alternative, interactive realities. On the other hand, as computers took on the role of rational data-crunchers and memory-keepers of infinite capacity, spectators may have been seeking in theatre and film more instinctive and emotional experiences.

Many serious theatre and performance artists moved away from the once-primary and sacred verbal play text, challenging its dominance and expanding the expressive range of the stage. Many such developments, and their cultural and theoretical backgrounds, are taken up in Chapter 12 and its case studies. As we will see, Jerzy Grotowski's "poor" theatre of the 1960s was in part a spiritual revolt against a spiritless commercial theatre, with its elaborate scenic trappings. Suzuki Tadashi's *The Trojan Women* (1974) imaged contemporary Japanese suffering and confusion, disrupting the conventional elevations of humanistic renderings of Greek tragedy. Peter Brook's *Orghast* (1971) was an arrangement of musical phonemes and fragments of ancient languages, intoned by the actors along with ancient music. The imagery in the films of directors such as Japan's Kurosawa Akira and Sweden's Ingmar Bergman had an impact on theatre directors and designers. Peter Brook was directly influenced by Kurosawa Akira's film version of *Macbeth*, called *The Throne of Blood*. Many Western theatre artists turned eastward to the performance languages of *kabuki*, *nō*, *kathakali*, Balinese dance drama, and other theatre forms. Multi-media theatres of visual and aural landscapes and choreographed movement were created by many artists internationally, including Ping Chong, Robert Lepage, Pina Bausch, Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman, and Ah Min Soo, leading to what has been called "theatre of images" (see Chapter 12). Theatre directors in Germany, Japan, France, the United States, and elsewhere who were deconstructing Shakespeare and the ancient Greek tragedies (Chapter 12) relied heavily on visual vocabularies. For theatres in world capitals that were exporting "intercultural productions" meant to cross all language barriers and cultural borders, accessible visual communication was of key importance. In a new genre, performance artists found ways to use their own bodies as performance instruments and their own lives as subjects, straddling boundaries between art and life; a particularly rich vein of performance art opened in the Americas.

Even in the realms of realistic drama, the emotionally volatile and destructive forces beneath the surfaces of language were probed in the plays of British playwright Harold Pinter (1930–2008), and U.S. playwrights Sam Shepard (1943–) and David Mamet (1947–). *Angels in America* (1992), the two-play, prize-winning epic by Tony Kushner (1956–), was often rich in language but also almost cinematic in its collage of scenes representing multiple, conflicting strands of

American life during the first years of the AIDS crisis in the late 1980s. The play juxtaposed scenes in the lives of gay men suffering from AIDS with scenes from Jewish family life in New York City and visions representing the beliefs of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons). Kushner also has the play talk back to the film medium. The principal character makes a self-conscious reference to the play's chief spectacle – the dramatic appearance of an angel above him – as being “Very Spielberg” (Figure IV.1). The allusion is to Steven Spielberg (1947–), director of such film spectacles as *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. In 2003, Kushner's play, one of the few intellectually serious new plays on Broadway in the last decade of the twentieth century, was made into a film, directed by Mike Nichols for the cable movie channel, H.B.O.  The crossover is not surprising. The borders between all mediums and genres grew increasingly permeable in the era. Anna Deveare Smith's one-person shows on urban riots in the U.S., *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight Los Angeles*, gave primacy to language but drew from film and video documentary techniques, interviewing people involved in the events, selecting the “shots” and editing the results, as Amy Petersen Jensen has shown in her analysis of Smith's work (Jensen 2007: Chapter 7).

Niche programming in media and theatre: All the families

In the second half of the twentieth century, both the media and the theatre were increasingly defining themselves for particular markets, seeking “niche” audiences. Every reader of this text who is a consumer in the capitalist marketplace will recognize the term “niche marketing.” The term was derived from general niche theory developed by ecologists and then economists in their studies of the use of resources and the competition for those resources, in nature and in the marketplace. Ecologists, for example, use niche theory to explain competition and coexistence among different species within a natural environment (Dimmick 2003:23–24). Niche marketing describes the capitalistic, competitive process in which sellers identify and pursue potential consumers in a well-defined segment of the population. “Target” markets are identified through demographic studies of factors such as age, gender, family size, levels of income and education, ethnic or racial self-identification, uses of leisure time, and geographic location. Marketing staffs of both the media and regional theatres commonly bring in “focus groups” to help them identify audience interests and then adjust their programming accordingly.

Niche programming has proliferated in Western media. Radio stations in the United States, for example, target specific audiences with black rap, Latin American music, sports talk, conservative commentary, jazz light, rock hits from the 1950s, classical music, Christian rock, and Christian talk. By the late 1990s,



Figure IV.1

The appearance of the angel in the final scene of Tony Kushner's *Angels in America: Millennium Approaches* (1990). From the 1992 production of the Royal National Theatre, London, directed by Declan Donnellan, with Stephen Spinella as Prior Walter and Nancy Crane as the Angel.

Photo: Lebrecht Music and Arts.

cable television companies in the U.S. and Western Europe were offering hundreds of channels ranging from CNN News channels to sports and film entertainment channels – a video smorgasbord for every possible interest. Migrating Hispanic populations in the U.S. have been followed by Spanish-language radio and cable television channels. All of these offerings reflect, of course, an increasing cultural diversity within “national” boundaries.

Even before niche targeting became sophisticated, theatres were seeking their niche audiences. To take examples from the American theatre, America’s regional, “not-for-profit” theatres began developing not long after commercial television had evolved into a medium of easily accessible, commodified entertainment for popular consumption. (Not-for-profit is a U.S. federal tax category of organizations exempt from taxes.) They defined themselves in artistic, literary, and intellectual terms, somewhat on the European national theatre model, offering a repertory of “classics,” ancient and modern. They were also constructing themselves as non-commercial alternatives to the broadly popular entertainments of film and Broadway musicals and comedies. They sought to appeal to upscale, educated, and “cultured” audiences in urban areas outside of New York, audiences whose season subscriptions would support them. In the early 1950s, Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., offered “theatre in the round” as the architectural signature of its artistic identity. It promised a stage free from encumbering scenery (a signifier for “commercial” trappings), one ostensibly conducive to more intimate interplay between actors and local audiences and better access to psychological and poetic truths. Another identity marker the early “regional” theatres marketed was the claim that their acting companies were ensembles, collaborating in permanent residence, as opposed to the commercial star-centered productions, imported from “out of town.” In all these ways, the regional movement was defining itself as artistically independent of Broadway, although any transfer of one of its productions to Broadway was a source of pride. The United States’ regional theatre movement was soon followed by the development of professional theatres in residence in universities, private and public. These targeted the slightly different niche of university campuses and the surrounding communities where more artistic risks might be taken. The 1970s and 1980s also brought the construction of many performing arts centers (with theatres and concert halls at the same site) in developing urban areas in the U.S. and Europe. These regional arts centers imitated the large metropolitan arts centers, such as New York City’s Lincoln Center, their mission being to provide access to the performing arts for audiences far from such centers. All of these theatres were, in effect, configuring themselves for niche audiences, and these audiences were largely affluent, white, and college educated.

From the mid-1960s forward, there were “alternative” theatres developing in the U.S. to serve audiences defined by their interests in issues of race, ethnicity,

gender, or unorthodox political views. African-American theatres developed following the civil rights movement. Among the most notable were the Free Southern Theatre, the Harlem-based New Lafayette Theatre (1967–1973) and the Negro Ensemble Company, founded by Douglas Turner Ward (1930–) in 1968. These helped pave the way for the wide critical interest in the works of black playwrights, both experimental and relatively traditional in form, including those of: Lorraine Hansberry (1931–1965), author of *Raisin in the Sun* (1959; film in 1961); Amiri Baraka (1934–), activist and author of *Dutchman* (1963); Ed Bullins (1935–), *The Electronic Nigger* and *In the Wine Time* (1968); August Wilson (1945–2005); and Susan-Lori Parks (1963–), whose *Topdog/Underdog* won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 2002. Wilson's *Fences* (1987) and *The Piano Lesson* (1990), both Pulitzer Prize winners, are parts of his ten-play cycle on the African-American experience. Largely in the form of familiar, modern American realism, they were successful on Broadway and, in recent years, have been produced by some U.S. regional theatres, such as Center Stage in Baltimore, Maryland.

Notable gay and lesbian theatres included the Ridiculous Theatre Company, headed by the playwright, Charles Ludlam (1943–1987), and Split Britches in New York. The Lilith Theatre in San Francisco and the Women's Project of the American Place Theatre in New York are just two examples of theatres promoting the work of new women writers and directors. Among the notable plays by an American woman in the era were the emotionally compressed works of Cuban-born María Irena Fornés (1930–), including *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977) and *Conduct of Life* (1985), which focus on the subjugation of women. The performance group, Spiderwoman, begun in New York in 1976, has created pieces derived from the experiences of Native American women, lesbians, sisters, and older women.

El Teatro Campesino was founded in 1965 by Luis Valdez (1947–) to dramatize the exploitation of Mexican farm workers and has continued to nourish plays reflecting Mexican-American experiences. Latin American theatre groups representing intersections of U.S. cultures and Cuban, Chicano, and Puerto Rican cultures proliferated in the 1980s. The Intar Theatre in New York, under the direction of Eduardo Machado (1950–), who was strongly influenced by Fornés, is devoted to producing new plays by Latino writers.

Plays on the Asian-American experience are the specialty of the East-West Players, founded in Los Angeles in 1965, and three other companies in Seattle, San Francisco, and New York. Regional theatres and performing arts centers responded belatedly to such diverse populations and cultural interests. By the late 1990s, they were selecting seasons in which individual events reached for different population segments, whether African-American plays for black audiences or 1950s Broadway musicals with nostalgia appeal for older, middle-class white audiences.

Festivals became a major theatre industry in the globalization era, especially international festivals as we will see in Chapter 11. These have thrived on niche marketing for what are often pilgrimage audiences who represent different points on the cultural spectrum. Festivals have been built around the canonical authors such as Shakespeare and Shaw and around Christian Bible pageants with spectacular staging, such as the *Great Passion Play* in Eureka Springs, Arkansas; the *Passion Play* at Oberammergau in Bavaria, Germany; and the musical, *Noah*, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Notable annual festivals of international theatre in Edinburgh and Avignon have developed into two-track festivals (see Chapter 11), mainstream and experimental, targeting two different audiences under the rubric of “festival.” Edinburgh’s Fringe Festival offered 1,700 shows in 250 theatres in August of 2004; one million people attended. A famous 1981 festival in Buenos Aires of new plays critical of Argentina’s oppressive government, organized by Osvaldo Dragún, resulted in loyalists burning down the theatre. The annual Festival of Two Worlds, founded by composer Gian Carlo Menotti in Spoleto, Italy, in 1958 with the intention of having European and American cultures face each other in music, dance, and theatre, began holding an American annual counterpart festival in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1977. No theatres have been burned in either venue. The Chapter 11 discussion of festivals illustrates the proliferation of international festivals and with them the problem of the cultural “decontextualization” of performances that originate in one nation and are played in another. Chapter 13 analyzes the related issues raised by intercultural productions for international audiences.

Globalization, media, theatre, and performance

Globalization is the result of capitalist expansionism on a world scale. It is the computerized transnational network of banks that have linked national economies and placed A.T.M.s on every street corner in the wealthy cities across the world. It is huge multinational corporations, such as Walmart, whose sales early in the new century exceeded the gross product of all but 17 of the world’s nations (Gabel and Brunner 2003). It is the European Union of 27 nations that came into existence in 1993 and the aggressive development of export products in the capitalist program of the government of the People’s Republic of China. Globalization is Japanese Toyotas manufactured in Tennessee, Nike shoes made in Southeast Asia, and custom computers made in China using U.S. Microsoft programs and providing customer service from Ireland. It is the rock musical, *Bombay Dreams* and India’s “Bollywood” films for international audiences. It is the increasing flow of migrant workforces from poor, rural areas to cities, often across national borders, and it is the resulting diasporas. It is Hispanic maids working in New York luxury hotels, walled Verizon technical parks in India, and domes for

Vedic meditation rising at Maharishi University in Iowa cornfields. It is corporate-sponsored international theatre festivals and individual vacation trips to cultural legacy sites in under-developed countries. It is our anguished experience of seeing televised images of a diseased child dying in abject poverty in Rwanda alongside stories of the fabulous wealth and astonishing greed of bank executives in the global economic crisis that began in 2008.

The fragility of the economic interdependency created by the linkages in globalized banking has been frighteningly revealed in that crisis. But world affairs can no longer be framed in terms of a center (the West) and a periphery (the Rest), the framing of cold war discourse. Globalization has altered the ways in which cultures engage with each other. The phenomenon has created the need to rethink and not take for granted the identities of nations and communities. In his study of globalization's effects and the responses to it, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai poses a critical question: "What is the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world?" (Appadurai 1996:52). Of course, the habit of thinking about the identity of a culture or nation as if there were completely self-defined and self-enclosed communities, in isolation and in stasis, is not one that a long view of the history of any culture or nation will support.

Globalization has required us to think in terms of a plurality of cultures, in motion and constantly interactive. Appadurai has characterized the globalized world in terms of transnational cultural flows of peoples, money, goods, and technologies, rather than in terms of static nations (Appadurai 1996:27–47). By the early 1990s, over 100 million people were living outside their country of origin, a 100 percent increase in three years. Appadurai sees a continuing process of disjunctures between these cultural flows. He and other scholars have provided evidence that these often play out in the electronic global media. This argument does not displace the common argument that the capitalist media – mostly American – are advancing imperialism by other means, poisoning other cultures with corrosive fantasies of a consumer culture. But it does present a much more complex and dynamic picture.

Many theatre artists have created works that give expression to cultural disjunctures and the imagining of new communities. Playwrights, theatre groups, and performance artists have taken up such globalization issues as the exploitation of Third World nations by wealthy, technologically-advanced nations; the loss of national and cultural identities to the consumer marketplace; and the anxious assertion of new identities – including radical religious identities. We will see some of these issues in the works of theatre artists in postcolonial African nations which have endured, or which are still trying to endure similar cultural transitions. Kenyan playwright Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1938–) has written of the "cultural bomb" of globalization. Its effect, he believes, is to "annihilate a people's belief in their names,

in their languages . . . in their heritage of struggle, in their capacities. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement, and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland” (Thiong’o 1986:3). In this section of our book, we will see theatre groups in postcolonial nations in Africa and in the Philippines working at the grassroots level to create new communities. The problem of cultural identity can be acute. A case study following Chapter 13 considers the negative reception in China today of the work of the Nobel Prize-winning Chinese playwright, Gao Xingjian, once celebrated after the Cultural Revolution, now an expatriot. This complex situation, the near erasure of what was once a national voice, is the result of the Chinese government’s control of its programming of national identity.

The media: Power and resistance

Examples of the way the cultural disjunctures have played out in the electronic media offer instructive parallels to the works of theatre artists. Again, the work of Néstor García Canclini, an Argentinian-born anthropologist who fled political persecution to live in Mexico, is of interest. He writes of the two-way circulation of cultures between Mexico and the United States in the late twentieth century:

If there are more than 250 Spanish language radio and television stations in the United States, more than fifteen hundred publications in Spanish, and a high interest in Latin American literature and music, it is not only because there is a market of twenty million “Hispanics”. . . . It is also due to the fact that so-called Latin culture produces films like *Zoot Suit* [based on a 1978 play by Luis Valdez] and *La Bamba*, the songs of Rubén Blades and Los Lobos, aesthetically and culturally advanced theaters like that of Luis Valdez, and visual artists whose quality and aptitude for making popular culture interact with modern and postmodern symbolism incorporates them in the North American mainstream.
(García Canclini 1995:231)

Luis Miguel Valdez, founder of *El Teatro Campesino* (farm workers’ theatre), is regarded as the father of *Chicano* theatre. He is also the author of *I Don’t Have to Show You No Stinking Badges*. Anthropologist Canclini clearly sees films and plays as important agents for the negotiation of cultural interaction, whether the outcome be an assertion of native culture, an adaptation to the new culture, or a complex intertwining of these.

To be sure, others have rightly warned against the power of media controlled by governments and mega-corporations. In 2004, Italy’s prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, had nearly total control of Italy’s mass media, including the three most

powerful television networks and the leading newspaper. In his videocracy, Berlusconi could squelch any opposition, usher in laws favorable to his holdings, and enjoy near-immunity from prosecution for corruption. The global corporation of the politically conservative magnate, Rupert Murdoch, controls various media in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Asia. America's AOL-Time Warner is the fourth largest corporation in the globalized world. In the U.S., Clear Channel Communications grew from 23 stations to 1,200 between 1995 and 2002 with a "McDonald's" approach that replaced local stations' programming with a corporate-controlled voice that was indistinguishable from city to city. The stations were largely a platform for right-wing conservative talkshows.

But there is plentiful evidence that the uses and effects of the media are not always controllable by corporations or governments, as James Lull argues in his *Media, Communication, Culture*. Two domestic television serials in China were widely recognized as contributing to social unrest in the late 1980s (Lull 1995:123). The famous televised image of a lone young man confronting a line of government tanks in Beijing during the student protests in Tiananmen Square in 1989 was shown by the communist government as evidence of the military's use of restraint. Everywhere else – and satellite television assured that it was seen everywhere else – the video moment was read as a brave, symbolic act of individual defiance of a powerful, oppressive regime. 📺 Public perception/reception is not wholly controllable.

In 1991, the prolonged beating of Rodney King, a black motorist, by four white Los Angeles police officers was captured by a private individual on a now ubiquitous video camera. 📺 The officers' acquittal by a largely white jury in the 1992 trial set off catastrophic rioting for five days in Los Angeles. With U.S. commercial television networks airing the tape repeatedly, the scene became an indelible symbol of continuing, invidious racial discrimination in the United States. In 2004, digital photos of the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by Americans in a Baghdad prison were revealed by a conscience-troubled American soldier who delivered them to an officer on a compact disc, and they soon made their way to a website on the World Wide Web, adding fuel to the controversy over America's pre-emptive invasion of Iraq. Soon after, a Jordanian theatre director created a popular production called "A New Middle East," which recreated scenes of the abuse. On the other side of the Iraqi war, Islamic terrorists with no known state affiliations created international fear with videotapes of their beheadings of kidnapped captives from nations involved in the war. The terrorists assured the global dissemination of the horrific images by providing the tapes to the Arab-language satellite television channel, Al Jazeera.

In Brazil in 1992, the telegenic president, Collor de Mello, was impeached for corruption due to the impact on the public of the televised appearance before a

congressional committee of a singularly honest motor pool driver, who defied the system and testified about delivering bribes. In Mexico City, the host of a popular television morning show for several years was Brozo the Clown, created by comedian Victor Trujillo. On the channel owned by Televisa, a media conglomerate, Brozo read the news, interviewed guests in greasy clown makeup and a tattered costume, and generally presided with foul language. He appealed to the many poor citizens in the capital city who shared his contempt for the hypocrisy of corrupt politicians and the solemnities of conventional news coverage of them. On one show, Brozo exposed a powerful legislator by airing a secretly filmed videotape that revealed him stuffing his briefcase and coat pockets with bribe money. A similar lack of trust of mainstream media news and corrupt politicians may be behind the results of a recent poll in the United States showing that young television viewers were getting most of their news from comic talk shows, including that of the popular satirist, Jon Stewart, on the cable channel Comedy Central.

Theatre, performance, resistance

Many theatre artists, too, have given resilient expression to the difficulties and possibilities of living in a world both globalized and culturally fractured. Their work has aimed, among other things, at exposing corruption; capturing the cultural confusions of the nomadic experience; satirizing racial, ethnic, or gender stereotyping; and fusing disparate performance traditions. The remainder of this Introduction describes theatrical works that do such work at the cultural borders. These have been chosen deliberately for the disparate methods and different global cultures they represent: the performance art of Mexican–American artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1955–), selected theatrical works of artists in postcolonial African nations, and examples from the diverse performance work in China, especially that of experimental groups critiquing dominant social practices, from patriarchy to consumer culture.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña is a prolific performance artist and writer who was born in Mexico and came to the United States in 1978. As with Appadurai and García Canclini, migration and the nomadic experience are central features of the era for Gómez-Peña. He is, by his own account,

a nomadic Mexican artist/writer in the process of Chicanization, which means I am slowly heading North. . . . I make art about the misunderstandings that take place at the border zone. But for me, the border is no longer located at any fixed geopolitical site. I carry the border with me, and I find new borders wherever I go.

(Gómez-Peña 1996:5)

He has created performance events, occasionally solo and often in collaboration with Coco Fusco (1960–) and Roberto Sifuentes (1967–), that focus on the Latino experience in the United States. They are designed to make audiences more aware of the ways in which national and cultural identities are constructed.

The figures in Gómez-Peña's early performances included a Mexican poet/detective (Mister Misterio), a burned-out ballerina who is his friend, an Aztec princess working as a cabaret singer, a wrestler shaman, and an androgynous Maori warrior opera singer. They are all hybrid creations through which Gómez-Peña as ironic trickster probes the cultural collisions that globalization brings about. As an outsider dealing with dominant American cultures, Gómez-Peña chronicles border collisions and cultural hybrids and attempts to provoke spectators to assess and alter harmful, habitual concepts of race, nationality, ethnicity, and gender. In a "performance photo essay" on the World Wide Web, Gómez-Peña demonstrates, with an interactive test, the dangers of ethnic profiling in the xenophobia common in the post 9/11 era. 

In 1994–1996, Gómez-Peña and Sifuentes collaborated on the *Temple of Confessions*, in which they displayed themselves in an exhibit in Plexiglas booths as if they were relics or scientific specimens. They were advertised as the last living saints from a "border region." Spectators were invited to confess their "intercultural fears and desires" to them. In Scottsdale, Arizona, in the southwestern United

Performance art

Performance art may be compared to the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century, such as dadaism, that broke from self-contained aesthetic expression to call into question the very ways in which art is classified, or framed as art. Often, the point is to demystify high art and call attention to the social processes that "confirm" art as art. Performance art has taken many forms, from solo work to large spectacles, but it always seeks to break through that separation of art and life that is characteristic of conventional art. Performance artists often use their own bodies as performance instruments and their own lives as subjects. Their interest is not in written dramatic texts but embodied expression. The works may use video, dance, sculpture, painting, or music. Performance works are often done outside of theatres, on roofs, in shop windows, in airports, in lobbies, or on street corners – rejecting the usual performance venues. Performance art is inhabited by theories of performativity that insist that all social realities are constructed, that "every social activity can be understood as a showing of doing," as Richard Schechner writes (Schechner 2002:140). Performance artists often have taken up social or political concerns, exposing, for example, the ways in which our notions of race, gender, and national or ethnic identity have been constructed.

States, hundreds of spectators “confessed” their fantasies and fears about Mexicans, Chicanos, and other peoples of color. Gómez-Peña describes spectators seeking an intimate connection with him and expressing emotions ranging from guilt to anger to sexual desire. Schechner has suggested the performance event revealed people’s “sense of resigned desperation” in the face of the inevitability of globalization and their need for human interaction to counter its alienating and homogenizing effects (Schechner 2002:261).

Theatre in postcolonial African nations

In postcolonial African nations undergoing cultural transitions, theatre artists have given expression to similar kinds of tensions. Under the pressure of independence movements, European powers withdrew from their 50 African colonial territories between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, after nearly a century of humiliating domination, leaving legacies of deep poverty, political instability, and ethnic wars. Indigenous peoples have tried since to forge cultural and national identities in the artificial nations that European powers created and in which they suppressed local languages and customs. After independence, indigenous theatre artists began to reclaim tribal myths and performance practices and, at the same time, develop new, often politically-themed works that assessed the damage or critiqued the new regimes. A number of African playwrights have been imprisoned for such works. Bertolt Brecht’s plays, designed to provoke audiences to critique their socio-economic conditions, have been influential in several postcolonial African nations.

Nigeria, which gained its independence from Britain in 1960, is rich in performance traditions, such as the Yoruba people’s masquerade festival, *Egúngún* (see Chapter 1). It also has been rich in theatre critical of both its colonial rulers and those after. Hubert Ogunde (1916–1990) drew on Yoruba myths for his anticolonial plays before independence, which authorities banned, and for his *Yoruba Awake!* (1964), written after independence and also banned. Wole Soyinka (1934–), Nigeria’s best-known playwright and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, has written plays drawing on his Yoruba heritage and probing events before and after independence, including his *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975) and *Madmen and Specialists* (1971). The latter is a bitter, if enigmatic play inspired by Nigeria’s civil war, during which Soyinka was detained without trial, and after which he went into exile. He returned to stage his *Opera Wonyosi* (1977), a Nigerian amalgam of *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) by John Gay (1685–1732) and Brecht’s *Threepenny Opera* (1928). It satirizes a self-proclaimed African emperor and the Nigerian middle class.

Nigerian writer Femi Osofisan (1946–) has been critical of Nigerian politics. Influenced by Marx and Brecht, he has looked unfavorably on Soyinka’s sometimes abstruse metaphysics. Osofisan’s plays reflect both his own aesthetic interests and

his passionate advocacy of social justice. His *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980) satirized the Nigerian military government. He adapted *The Government Inspector* (1836) by Nikolai Gogol (1809–1852) to satirize the ruling elite. His *The Chattering and the Song* (1976) is a notable example of the attempts of Nigerian dramatists to use traditional performance modes (including dance and music), myth, and folklore to explore modern class polarities in the country.

In Sierra Leone, independent since 1957, Thomas Decker has promoted theatre in Krio, an urban, English-based Creole language that developed in the interchange among freed slaves in Freetown, their European colonial masters, and the indigenous people of the region. Krio theatre serves a wide cross-section of society and has inspired a number of playwrights, including the radical, Yulisa Amadu Maddy (1936–). His play, *Big Berrin* (1976), the title of which means “big death,” is critical of the plight of the urban poor and resulted in his imprisonment. In Ghana, the Concert Party theatre, a major, long-lived form that mixes many elements, including American black vaudeville and African story-telling traditions, usually concludes with a play designed to provoke audiences to think about current issues.

Not long after Angola’s independence (1975), the Xilenga-Teatro in its capital city of Luanda staged a work derived from the oral performance traditions of the Tchokwe people. An adaptation of Brecht’s *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* by Henrique Guerra was produced in 1979.

In South Africa, where blacks suffered under the British colonial legacy of apartheid policies that relegated blacks to separate, inferior living and working conditions, theatre artists began in the 1960s to create works criticizing these policies, works that were often politically dangerous. One of the most fertile sources of this work was the Market Theatre in Johannesburg (1976), whose productions included *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1972) and *The Island*, collectively created through improvisation by Athol Fugard, John Kani, and Winston Ntshona. *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* is about a man who obtained the “pass,” a document necessary for black men to work in South Africa, by taking on the identity of a dead man. It had wide success in Africa, the U.S., and elsewhere. It inspired other collectively created works, including *Wôza Albert!* (1980), by Barney Simon, Mbongeni Ngema, and Percy Mtwa, which is about the reactions of the white government and the black community to the return of Jesus to South Africa (Figure IV.2). Several of the realist plays of Athol Fugard (1932–) have become well known outside South Africa, including his *Boesman and Lena* (1969), and *Master Harold and the Boys* (1982), an autobiographical play about a white boy’s relationship with his black fellow-worker, a relationship that the boy destroys through biases learned from apartheid. A case study following Chapter 11 discusses Fugard’s collaborative theatre works in more detail.



Figure IV.2

Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema in the “pink-nose” mimcry scene in *Woza Albert!*, by Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema, and Barney Simon, directed by Barney Simon, at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg, South Africa, 1982.

Photo © Ruphin Coudyzer, The Market Theatre.

The Theatre for Development movement has been successful in several African nations. As we will see in Chapter 11, its community-based efforts involve theatre activities in which local residents participate. Typically, a leader guides local performers in identifying a local problem. They create, through improvisation and role-playing, a short play that highlights the problem and sometimes suggests a solution. The play is then performed for local audiences – in a marketplace or a church – followed by community discussion and planning. Such works may take up health care relating to the AIDS epidemic, literacy, or agricultural practices. Some of these democratically created performances seek to raise community consciousness about human rights. Kenyan writer, Ngugi Thiong’o (cited above),

collaborated with a community at Kamiriithu to create an influential production for the movement entitled, *I'll Marry When I Want* (1977). Performed in the Kikuyu language, the piece used traditional ritual, song and dance to tell a story of the betrayal of the people by Kenyans allied with foreigners. The Kenyan government suppressed the work, and Ngugi was fired from his university position.

This movement parallels the work in Brazil of Augusto Boal (1930–2009), who describes similar methods in his *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1975). Penina Mlama (1948–), who has written plays in Swahili dealing with social justice issues and has been active in community-based theatre in Tanzania, describes her strategies in her *Culture and Development: The Popular Theatre Approach in Africa* (1991). Chapter 11 discusses many other examples of this movement.

Theatre and media in a globalizing China

After the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in the People's Republic of China, China's economic and political systems began to gradually embrace capitalism and globalism. Foreign investment was allowed in specified areas and industries, and Chinese products began to be exported. Incorporating capitalism into the socialist state resulted in a major transformation in lifestyle, first for those in cosmopolitan areas and recently reaching some – not all – in rural locales. Levels of literacy, sanitation, housing, education, personal freedom and industrialization improved. Not everyone in China celebrated this transformation. Fears of too much liberalization and too many rapid changes led to violent confrontations between government forces and pro-democracy students at Beijing's Tiananmen Square in 1989. Following the events at Tiananmen Square, all forms of media and the arts were severely censored. In recent years, suppressions have been somewhat less conspicuous, although any internet communications unfavorable to the Chinese government have been subject to censorship.

While still actively controlled by the central government, television, films, and the internet have become vital components of everyday life for a rapidly growing middle class. Popular Chinese language films such as *Hidden Tiger, Crouching Dragon* (2000) exploited international fascination with martial arts. Directed by Taiwanese Ang Lee (1954–), the film was a cooperative production involving China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and the United States – a global enterprise. Despite content that demeans women and exoticizes China, the film won more than 40 international awards and was at the time the highest grossing foreign language film in American history. In 2008, the internationally televised Beijing Olympics, with the epic scale performances of its opening ceremonies, signaled to many that China had joined the economic powerhouses that constitute what is often called “the first world.”

Nevertheless, some areas of media and commerce remain “underground.” For example, DVDs of Western movies are commonly pirated, sometimes reaching Chinese consumers even before the movies are released in the West. These practices raise serious legal and financial concerns about China’s honoring of international copyright agreements in the new global order. In 2009, the Chinese government temporarily blocked access to YouTube, citing its broadcast of a video purporting to show Chinese soldiers beating monks and other Tibetans. Chinese authorities maintained that the video was fabricated.

Shanghai, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Taipei (Taiwan) have been especially important venues for new theatre and performance art, as well as *huaju* – Western-style spoken drama. *Huaju* theorist/director Huang Zuolin (1906–1994) introduced Stanislavsky’s acting method to China in the years 1938–1940. Beginning in the 1960s, he advocated a broad training program that would expand beyond socialist realism to include acting styles derived from Brecht, Piscator, Meyerhold, and Chinese *kunqu* and *jingxi*. (See the Introduction to Part II and Chapter 7.) His influence has been profound. Among contemporary *huaju* directors, Meng Jinghui (1966–) is the most innovative and influential. In addition to new Chinese works, he has directed productions of *Waiting for Godot* (in 1991), *The Accidental Death of An Anarchist* by Dario Fo (in 1993), and Genet’s *The Balcony* (in 1997). He is well known for deconstructing texts, inserting wild satire, and using biting, irreverent parody. He typically explores intersections among theatre, architecture, music, installations, and multi-media. His production of Shen Lin’s *Bootleg Faust* (*Daoban fushide*, 1999) satirized Chinese popular consumer culture by using plot elements from Goethe’s *Faust*, intermingled with often hilarious dialog derived from Chinese slang, classical Chinese poetry, Greek mythology, and Chinese television shows. His production of *Rhinoceros in Love* (*Lian’ai de xiniu*, 1999), written by Liao Yimei, was revived repeatedly in sold-out performances for over a decade. For more history of *huaju*, see the case study in Chapter 13 on Gao Xingjian’s *Wild Man* in post-Cultural Revolution China.

Alternative, anti-text-based performances have also been part of the experimental scene. In the People’s Republic of China, several performance artists and troupes have challenged traditional Confucian and patriarchal values, socialist ideology, and the dominance of spoken theatre. The Shanghai-based Niao Collective (*zuhe niao*) produced *Tongue’s Memory of Home* (2005), a multi-media dance-theatre piece in a new style called *zhiti xiju* (roughly translated as body theater or physical theatre). The work questions accepted views of the body, performance, and language. It suggests that the tongue, although sometimes forbidden from speaking, has other ways of remembering. Verses by censored poets

of the 1980s are projected while the performers use their tongues and bodies as communal memory machines. Their website explains:

[A] tongue, once stripped of language, has other ways of remembering – tasting, touching, feeling. Stripped of language, it is no longer a mouthpiece for ideology and is in fact more free than human beings themselves. By drawing on other senses the tongue can inspire the body to dream of other worlds, between dream and reality, and give us another memory of home . . .

(www.borneoco.nl/zuhe-niao-performances.php)

Such works refuse to fit neatly into traditional artistic categories or genres, artists needing to challenge, as they do here, boundaries that mirror dominant cultural formations. In the recent past in China, performances such as this would have been considered highly provocative.

Summary

Given all of the tensions that have come with globalization and the creativity of theatre and performance artists in registering them, we have thought it important in this final section of *Theatre Histories: An Introduction* to survey a wide variety of performances at the borders and intersections of cultures. Chapter 11 looks at the ways in which both big-budget theatres of the West and poorer troupes in Africa, Latin America, the Pacific, and in the backyard of the West have been altered by, and responded to, the processes of globalization. It includes case studies on Broadway and on South Africa's Athol Fugard. Chapter 12 surveys postmodern theatre practices in the West and Japan that have called attention to the very assumptions behind traditional Western representation, attempting to break down assumptions about the boundaries of art, boundaries that of course mirror the constraints of dominant social and political formations. It includes a case study on the phenomenon of Shakespeare as cultural capital in the global marketplace. Chapter 13 and its case studies deal with cultural negotiations in performances as diverse as shamanistic ceremonies for tourists and Ariane Mnouchkine's intercultural version of the ancient Greek trilogy, *The Orestia*, in her *Les Atrides*. In a case study of Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata*, the author finds herself torn between conflicting views of this famous, epic intercultural production. The final case study examines the performance of *Wilhelm Tell* for tourists by residents of a small town in Wisconsin that constructs and represents itself as America's "Little Switzerland." Here, natives and tourists co-create an illusion of the town's "Swissness" as a singular and unified/unifying experience.

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**Audio-visual resources**

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Abu Ghraib: Photos of U.S. soldier torturing prisoners that circulated in the press and on the World Wide Web (2004): www.newyorker.com/online/video/2008/03/24/080324_lookihaveproof.

Angels in America: Film version of Tony Kushner's play, directed by Mike Nichols, with Al Pacino, Meryl Streep, Emma Thompson. DVD, 6 hours.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña: Interactive "performance photo essay" website on which the artist demonstrates the dangers of ethnic profiling arising from the xenophobia common in the post-9/11 era. Site includes other videos, book lists, interviews: www.pochanostra.com. See also the website address of his sometime collaborator, Coco Fusco, in Chapter 13, Key References.

Rodney King: Video of the televised beating and arrest of King. YouTube offers the original amateur video camera clip and background information. Search for titles, "Rodney King" and "Seeing is Believing: The Handicam Revolution." The latter provides full background on King's arrest and the events through the outcome of a second trial of police officers.

Tiananmen Square student protests, June 1989. YouTube offers many clips of the protests, including the iconic confrontation with Chinese army tanks of a single young man who protested by standing directly in their path. Search YouTube for "Tiananmen Square Protestor."

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Rich and poor theatres of globalization

By Bruce McConachie

Since the 1970s, globalization has tended to push theatrical production in two opposite directions. On the one hand, large theatrical institutions caught up in the globalization process – many national theatres, international festivals, and corporations producing mega-musicals – have expanded, and their costs have escalated. On the other hand, many artists around the world have dedicated themselves to local and regional theatrical institutions that have fought the incursions of Western capitalism and cultural homogenization in their local cultures and economies. Many grassroots theatres in developing regions – often operating on very small budgets – opposed the imperialism, political dictatorships, loss of economic control, and deteriorating social conditions that accompanied cold war divisions and globalization in their countries.

If a large map were scaled to contrast the economic importance of all of the theatres in the world in the year 2010, the theatrical capitals of the West and Japan, plus a few other cities with large festivals, would take up most of the room on what would be a very skewed drawing. Squeezed into odd pockets and corners of this funny map, however, in parts of Africa and in the inner cities and underdeveloped areas of Western countries would

be many small but vibrant centers of theatrical activity. Such a map would also show many medium-range theatrical economies, in regional centers throughout the West and in most of the large cities of the rest of the world. This chapter ignores the medium-sized theatres to focus on the rich and poor extremes. It surveys some salient examples of big-budget theatre in Western Europe and North America, then turns to select instances of low-cost troupes in Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific, as well as to some poorer theatres in the backyards of the West. The primary purpose of this chapter is to investigate how these particular kinds of theatres were altered by and responded to the cold war era and to the processes of globalization that have dominated since.

National theatres in the international marketplace

As we saw in Chapter 10, the post-war economic boom that lasted into the mid-1970s inspired many advocates of national theatres in the West to push for the realization of their dreams through massive building projects and increased budgets and repertoires. In the United Kingdom, two major institutions vied for

financial support from the government: the National Theatre; and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC). The National opened a three-theatre complex in 1976 on the banks of the Thames in London that cost over \$32 million (U.S.) to construct. In 1982, the RSC, which had been producing Shakespeare in the countryside at Stratford since 1961, also opened two new playing spaces in London, at a site called the Barbican, making it the largest theatrical institution in the world. By the mid-1980s, both companies had expensive theatres to maintain and needed big budgets

to fill their several stages with many actors and impressive scenery and costumes.

At stake in the success of both companies was the international theatrical prestige of the United Kingdom. Both theatres strove to produce the best of classical and contemporary theatre and boasted world-class companies and artistic directors. Trevor Nunn (1940–) managed the RSC from 1968 until 1986, and Peter Hall, who had resigned from the RSC, replaced Lord Laurence Olivier as director of the National in 1973 (Figure 11.1). For the government to allow either



Figure 11.1

Peter Hall's 1984 production of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* at the National Theatre, starring Ian McKellen and Irene Worth. Hall resigned from the National in 1988 to found his own company.

company to flounder was unthinkable. Although both companies had begun as national ventures to celebrate English theatre for English audiences, international tourism, global criticism, and high aesthetic expectations had put both in the world's limelight.

Controversy surrounded the London operations of both theatres from their inceptions. Fringe companies in the United Kingdom argued that the tax-generated sums spent on constructing the National should have been spread around to support many smaller groups. Hostility increased when the government revealed that a quarter of the Arts Council's drama budget in 1975–1976 had gone to the National, much of it for operating costs. Critics attacked the poor design of the impenetrable Barbican complex, especially its huge main stage and inadequate second space. This and other factors eventually led the RSC to abandon its London site. The artistic directors and supporters of both companies fought back, but even several outstanding productions from both companies could not quiet the controversies. Meanwhile, both the RSC and the National struggled to meet their massive budgets, often by resorting to smaller shows, shorter seasons, and extensive touring and residencies. The RSC departed from its primary mission to produce the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries by mounting large money-makers, including *Nicholas Nickleby* (1980) and *Les Misérables* (1985). In the face of shrinking subsidies and smaller audiences, the Arts Council for England published a paper in 1999 announcing new priorities for all state-subsidized theatres, which included more educational initiatives and innovative productions. Both the National and the RSC were caught in the crunch between national budgetary constraints and international expectations.

A somewhat similar conflict faced the major theatres of Berlin after German reunification in 1990. During the cold war, both Germanys lavished large subsidies on several theatres in East and West Berlin, which became international showplaces for the rival cultures of the two superpowers. In the western half of the city, the Schiller Theater offered a repertory of bourgeois classics and

contemporary plays from Western Europe and the United States. West Germany also located yearly festivals in Berlin that were designed to display the best West German productions to the world. In East Berlin, the Berliner Ensemble, the Volksbühne, and the Deutsches Theater, once the center of Max Reinhardt's theatrical enterprises, flourished on the international scene during the 1970s and 1980s.

After 1990, a newly unified Germany could no longer afford the costs of maintaining several world-class theatres in Berlin. In part, this was due to the fact that state subsidies in Germany typically covered about 80 percent of all operating costs. German theatre artists wanted their governmental bodies to maintain this level of support. The competition for spectators and subsidies, plus major reorganization in several companies, forced the closing of the Schiller Theater and several others. The Berliner Ensemble continued, but a new company modified its ties to the traditions of Brechtian production. To enhance the reputation of Berlin as a center for global performances, *Theatertreffen*, the festival that showcases the best German productions of each year, increased its international productions. Like London, Berlin remains a center of globalized theatre, but the price of an international reputation limits the number of Berlin theatres that can maintain it.

The conflict between national and international priorities also played out in Canada, at the Stratford Festival. Begun in a town named after Shakespeare's birthplace in the province of Ontario in 1953, the Stratford Festival is now the largest repertory company in North America and heavily subsidized by the Canadian government. Though not an official national theatre, it is widely recognized as the theatrical flagship of Canada.

In his *Shakespeare and Canada*, Canadian historian Ric Knowles points out several ironies that have dogged the Stratford Festival since its beginnings. Many Canadians understood the initial success of the Festival as a marker of Canada's maturity as a nation-state, despite the fact that Stratford rested on the authority of a famous English playwright and borrowed most of its actors and

its first artistic director (Tyrone Guthrie) from the country that had once ruled it as a colony. From the late 1960s through the 1970s, Stratford struggled to find a more “Canadian” identity; its board appointed a Canadian artistic director and more Canadian actors were hired. Nonetheless, many Canadians criticized the Festival for failing to recognize and incorporate the variety of Canadian nationalisms that had begun to proliferate. Some were also critical of the status of Stratford as a high-art venue for the privileged. During the 1980s and into the 1990s, many Canadian playwrights and directors targeted “Shakespeare” at Stratford for satiric attack and reappropriated the Bard’s plays for their own uses. Black Theatre Canada produced a “Caribbean” *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 1983, for instance, while Skylight Theatre did a native-Canadian *The Tempest* (1987) and Theatre Under the Bridge staged an urban *Romeo and Juliet* (1993), literally under a bridge in downtown Toronto.

By the 1990s, the Stratford Festival still drained tax dollars from the Canadian people but had cut or compromised most of its national responsibilities to Canadians and looked to multinational corporate sponsors, international consumers, and global criticism for its legitimacy and prestige. Knowles examines Stratford during the 1993 season and concludes that globalization had triumphed over national priorities. According to Knowles, the emphasis on aging sensualism in *Antony and Cleopatra* suited the consumerist fantasies of its audience, as did the conservative construction of black street culture for the 1993 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Other productions that year included *The Mikado* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, both old standards attractive to the aesthetic predispositions of its mostly upper-class customers, many of whom were from the U.S. Fourteen pages of the souvenir program listed the individual and corporate donors for the season, and multinational companies got their names printed on the tickets for each show they sponsored. Knowles concludes that:

Shakespeare at Stratford in 1993 was constructed and read as an intercultural, multinational, and

historically transcendent product, presented for the pleasure of a privileged and culturally dominant group of consumers for whom “globalization” meant market access, and for whom cultural production was undertaken for the benefit and advantage of those who could afford it.

(Knowles 2004:54)

International festivals

Although “festival” is a part of the Stratford’s name, it might more properly be called a repertory theatre. Festivals may be better defined as invited gatherings of several theatre companies in a limited area for a limited time, usually less than a month. For theatre-goers, festivals typically offer the opportunity to see a number of critically acclaimed productions in a few days. For producers, invitational festivals are a chance to re-run their best shows, usually with low production costs and excellent publicity. Because many festivals invite small companies as well as large ones, some marginalized and experimental troupes have an opportunity to play to festival audiences. Transnational festivals also contribute to theatrical globalization. They tend to internationalize aesthetic trends and provide an important showcase for directors with global reputations. The fringe festivals that have grown up around some of the more prominent internationals also provide a chance for a few troupes to emerge as globally known companies.

Several festivals emerged after World War II that had been designed to bring high culture to the common people. This was the goal of Jean Vilar, who founded the Avignon Festival in southern France in 1947. During the 1950s, Vilar also directed the Théâtre National Populaire (TNP), and the two institutions coordinated their efforts to decentralize French theatre and open it up to popular audiences. By 1963, the Avignon was attracting over 50,000 spectators for French theatre. Vilar, who had left the TNP to devote all of his time to the Festival, added new spaces and brought in younger directors.

Although several of Vilar’s productions and the ones he championed at Avignon had challenged the French

status quo, the radical Living Theatre from the U.S. (see Chapter 10) led demonstrations in 1968 against what they called his “reactionary” leadership of Avignon and demanded that the Festival open its doors to all comers at no admission charge. The next year, several French-language troupes began offering fringe performances at Avignon, outside of the official program. These unofficial groups proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s – amateur and professional troupes performing everything from edgy minimalism to fully staged classics – and gradually created a second Festival, called Avignon Off.

In 1994, the official Festival began to internationalize its offerings, although French-language productions still predominated. Avignon now boasts over 500 productions throughout the month of July, with most of them at the Avignon Off. French subsidies and corporate sponsorship, however, have elevated the official Festival to the status of global culture.  As at the Canadian Stratford Festival, jet-set playgoers, the French elite, and international critics can enjoy high-priced theatrical fare at Avignon that does little to challenge their values. Although the fringe continues to dominate in sheer number of performances, by a ratio of about 10:1, few fringe productions are attended by these global players.

A similar ratio has emerged at the Edinburgh Festival in the U.K., which officially recognized its fringe festival as a separate operation much sooner than did the organizers of the Avignon. Most view the Avignon as a success, but its two-track festival – the official Avignon for the international elite and the Avignon Off for others – clearly was not what Vilar (or the Living Theatre) had in mind.

Perhaps the biggest drawback of international festivals is the decontextualization of their performances. Most productions at festivals have originated in a different city

and with a local audience, one that might not share the interests and concerns of the national and international spectators attending the festival. Many directors and companies get around this problem by mounting well-known plays for festival spectators – the plays of Shakespeare, Beckett, and Chekhov, for example. When the DuMaurier World Stage festival in Toronto invited Brazil’s *Grupo Galpão*, a street theatre troupe, to perform in 1998, however, the results were disorienting for most of the audience. Few Toronto spectators could understand the conventions of the neo-medieval biblical pageant that the *Grupo Galpão* had reshaped for their radical political purposes. The production, thrust out of its normal context in the streets of Brazil, became mostly an exercise in exotic tourism (see Chapter 13 on theatre and “tourism”). Not all festival productions suffer this level of decontextualization, of course, but those that veer very far from the expectations of international audiences risk the most (Figure 11.2).

Despite such tensions between the local and the global, international festivals have increased. The Vienna Festival in Austria, begun soon after World War II like the Avignon and the Edinburgh, has long featured companies from Russia and eastern Europe. Its popularity, coupled with the ongoing success of the Bayreuth and Salzburg festivals, which date from before the war, has helped to foment the international festival spirit in other German-speaking areas. The Bonn Biennale, for example, got underway in 1992 and the Ruhr Triennale began in 2002. Many other cities around the globe now sponsor one or more international festivals. As nation-states have lost power in the globalization process, large cities have gained it, and hosting an important festival boosts a city’s international reputation. These cities include Montreal, Toronto,

Figure 11.2

A touring production of *Romeu & Julieta* by *Grupo Galpão* in 2000, which met with more success among global spectators than some of their earlier work. Here the company is performing at the Globe Theatre in London.

Photograph by Sheila Burnett.



Los Angeles, Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Wellington (New Zealand), Sydney, Melbourne, Singapore, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Athens, Rome, Paris, London, and Dublin, to name some of the most prominent. In addition, world-class cities have been hosting the Theatre Olympics, an international festival lasting over two months with more than 150 productions since the first one in Athens in 1995.

Mega-musicals

Producing musicals is now a global business. Composers, directors, and producers design musical spectacles like Andrew Lloyd Webber's (1948–) *The Phantom of the Opera* as franchise operations that several companies can run for years in all the major cities of the English-speaking world. The scope and scale of these productions have led to several innovations. As costs and investment time continue to rise, producers have found ways to share their risks with non-commercial theatres. Moreover, the multinational corporation is taking the place of the individual producer in marketing mega-musicals. (In the past, producers typically formed short-term corporations, but the global corporate players of today are long-standing firms, with investments in a range of products.) *Phantom* and its offspring have been called mega-musicals for their lavish production values, enormous investments, high ticket prices, and potential for huge profits.

The transition to risk sharing and corporate production for mega-musicals began in the 1980s. When London producer Cameron Mackintosh (1946–) teamed up with Lloyd Webber to produce *Cats* in 1981, the lush pop music and lavish spectacle of this dance-based production outclassed most of the other musical offerings in London and New York. The show began an international run that lasted more than 20 years. Mackintosh followed with other musical hits in the 1980s – *Les Miserables* (1985), *Phantom* (1986), and *Miss Saigon* (1989). Significantly, *Les Miserables* began at the publicly funded RSC, where Trevor Nunn staged its initial run. He and Mackintosh franchised the production, contractually obliging other producers

of *Les Miserables* to mount it as near as possible to the original, with the result that both Mackintosh and the RSC profited nicely from the arrangement. Following his work with Mackintosh, Lloyd Webber formed a corporation, Really Useful Group, to produce his next musicals, which have included *Sunset Boulevard* (1993) and *The Beautiful Game* (2000). 

More corporations entered the mega-musical business in the 1990s. In Toronto and New York, Livent produced two musical splashes, including *Ragtime* (1996, Toronto), before ending in bankruptcy. The Walt Disney Corporation began producing on Broadway in 1994; it renovated a theatre on 42nd Street to house *The Lion King* (1998) and future productions. In the West End, Disney co-produced *Mary Poppins* with Mackintosh in 2004. Clear Channel Communications, a corporation with major investments in radio and television, also began developing mega-musicals (usually with other producers), but its major interest, in corporate lingo, was “feeding the road”: creating musical products that supplied its road companies with profitable fare. To ensure these profits, both conglomerates primarily featured “family entertainment,” such as *Rugrats – A Live Adventure* (1998). Although this economic constraint did not rule out significant artistry – *The Lion King* won six Tonys, one for best musical – it did limit the financial risks.

Disney and other producers also began contracting to develop Broadway mega-musicals with not-for-profit theatres in the U.S. When the non-profit regional theatre movement in the U.S. began in the late 1960s, companies in Chicago, Minneapolis, San Francisco and elsewhere looked primarily to European theatres and classical plays for their models, not to commercial Broadway. Few even produced musicals on a regular basis until the 1980s. The success of *A Chorus Line* (1975) at the New York Public Theatre (NYPT) and its transfer to Broadway for a 15-year run, with the resulting transfer of millions to the NYPT, however, permanently altered the non-profit landscape. The La Jolla Playhouse in San Diego has transferred several musicals to New York, including *The Who's Tommy* (1993) and many

revivals. Disney opened an initial version of its *Aida* (1998) at the non-profit Alliance Theatre in Atlanta. Even the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis, the model of the classically-oriented regional theatre, has played the mega-musical game; in 1999, Mackintosh took his production of *Martin Guerre* to the Guthrie to prepare it for a Broadway opening. Once indifferent to each other's fortunes, the non-profits and the commercial theatres of the U.S. are now cooperating in the hope of milking musical cash cows.

In 2000, a mega-musical in New York cost about \$10 million to produce and roughly \$400,000 per week to run. With a possible weekly gross of around \$800,000, most musicals must play for a year and a half before they break even. After two years in New York and with the "Broadway" label affixed to its price tag, a mega-musical can begin a run in the international market; in 2003, ten versions of *The Lion King* were playing around the world. To explore how Broadway became the launching pad for mega-musicals and similar entertainments, the first case study in this chapter examines the history of Times Square.

Radical theatre in the West after 1968

While heavily financed theatres that played mostly to Western consumers were adjusting to globalization after 1970, other theatre groups operating on shoestring budgets opposed many of the changes that were altering the lives of disempowered peoples during the same decades. As noted in Chapter 10, the uprisings of 1968 awakened a socio-political consciousness in a new generation of theatre artists who were eager to help those oppressed by the cold war system of global power and the elites and governments within each country that supported it. Influenced primarily by democratic-socialist ideals, these radical artists recognized the disparities in power caused by class, racial, and/or regional differences and hoped to forge an alternative culture that might help workers, peasants, and others to oppose capitalist power. To connect with this new audience, these troupes typically performed in parks,

community centers, popular demonstrations, village squares, churches, and similar gathering places. Although much of this radical theatre began in the West, it had more political effectiveness in developing countries.

In the U.S., three radical troupes – The Living Theatre, The San Francisco Mime Troupe, and The Bread and Puppet Theatre – were already in operation before 1968 (see Chapter 10). The Living Theatre performed in Europe for most of the 1960s. Bread and Puppet toured Europe in 1968, and their broadly satirical productions influenced many European theatre artists. Two major companies emerged in France – the *Théâtre Populaire de Lorraine*, and Provence's *Lo Théâtre de la Carrière* – which pushed for the recognition of the unique culture of southern France using the Occitanian patois and decrying the region's industrialization by Parisian "imperialists." The events of 1968 led to the founding of several theatres in West Germany, most notably the Grips Theatre, which produced radical plays for children and youth in Berlin. In Spain, several theatres opposed dictator Francisco Franco and his repressive regime during the early 1970s, despite rigorous censorship. These included *Els Joglars* in Barcelona, troupes agitating for Basque independence in northern Spain, and *Tabaño* in Madrid, which mocked Spanish consumerism, authoritarianism, and the Catholic Church in several productions.

The theatres of John McGrath (1935–2002) and Dario Fo (1926–) represent the highpoint of radical, post-1968 theatre in Europe. Both had succeeded professionally in the entertainment business before turning to radical theatre. McGrath chose the name for his theatre, "7:84," from a statistic published in 1966 in *The Economist*, which stated that 7 percent of the population of Great Britain owned 84 percent of the capital wealth. For McGrath and his company, "7:84" underlined the need to develop socialist alternatives to the capitalist system that dominated English and Scottish lives. Following the start of 7:84 in 1971, McGrath quickly adapted his theatre to the tastes of British working men and women by including broad humor, catchy tunes, and identifiable locations. His two companies toured to working-class halls and pubs

throughout the 1970s with such plays as *The Cheviot, the Stag, and the Black, Black Oil* (1973), which demonstrated that capitalists' desire to profit from North Sea oil was simply one more episode in the long exploitation of the Scottish poor by the English rich.

In 1968, Dario Fo and his playwright-actor wife, Franca Rame (1929–), broke from the commercial theatre to establish a theatrical cooperative, which soon produced *Mistero Buffo* (1969), a one-person show (with Fo as court jester) that satirized Catholicism. *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* followed in 1970, a farcical attack on police corruption (Figure 11.3). During the 1970s and 1980s, Fo continued his explorations of Italian folk drama, including *commedia dell'arte*, wrote several more plays, and expanded his repertoire of theatrical clowning. Rame wrote and performed feminist pieces, such as *All*

Bed, Board, and Church (1977), which excoriated Italian patriarchy. Fo and Rame performed at many rallies for progressive causes and in culturally deprived zones, often donating the proceeds to radical political movements. These proceeds might be quite substantial; in the mid-1980s, Fo often attracted over 10,000 spectators per performance. In 1997, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. 📺

These radical theatre artists of the post-1968 generation were only the most prominent of the several thousand artists and their troupes in Western Europe and North America that used theatrical means in an attempt to change the direction of politics and economics of their nation-states toward more egalitarian versions of democratic socialism in the 1970s and 1980s. They targeted non-theatre audiences of agricultural or industrial

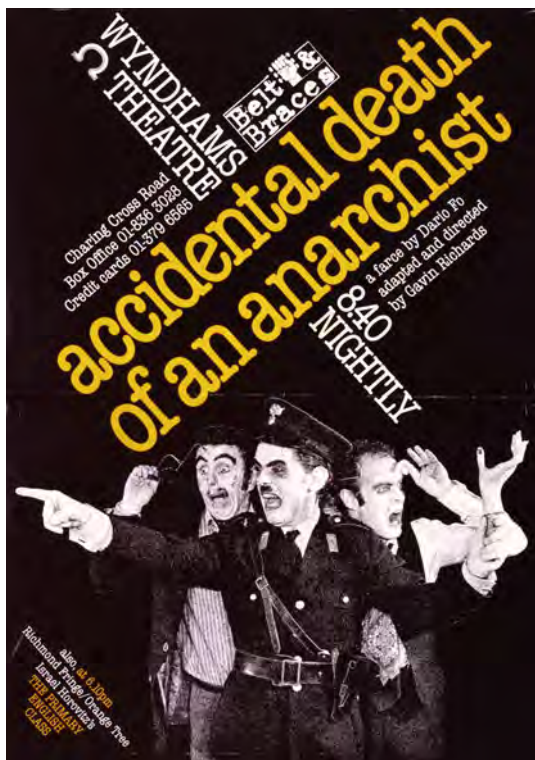


Figure 11.3

Poster for a production of Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, at Wyndhams Theatre, London, 1980.

© V&A Images, Victoria and Albert Museum.

laborers, often worked in collectives and created plays collaboratively, and generally incorporated many elements of folk and popular culture without, however, bowing to commercial tastes or values. Most troupes struggled financially, and several turned to governmental funding to support their work. Although these groups could claim many strategic successes, the movement as a whole had little impact on the shape and direction of Western society. Measured in terms of the democratic socialism favored by most of these artists, the West was clearly less progressive in 1990 than it had been in 1968.

Critics have pointed to several reasons for the failure of radical theatre to transform Western society and culture. Accepting governmental funding may have compromised their goals. Many artists left the movement to work in commercial entertainment, and some companies maintained a superior attitude toward their audiences instead of working with them to produce what they wanted and needed. While these shortcomings within the movement probably played some role, other factors were likely more important. After World War II, most workers relied on their unions and socialist or democratic political parties to improve their lives; they did not build alternative institutions in opposition to capitalism. Even the Communist Party in Italy was working within the system by the 1970s, and Dario Fo had to break his ties with them in order to present his more radical theatrical visions. Radical theatres found little support within the ongoing secular institutions of working-class life.

Further, the ideological constraints of the cold war, perpetuated by Western nation-states and the commercial media, limited the options that workers and others imagined as practical for themselves. It was one thing to cheer the radical socialist vision of the San Francisco Mime Troupe or 7:84 at a weekend performance, but quite another to act on those beliefs in the union hall or at the voting booth. Finally, with increasing globalization, workers and others were defining themselves less in class, racial, or regional terms than as consumers, and this reorientation of primary identity undercut their commitment to radical politics. Although

many theatre troupes in the West clung to the utopian hopes of the late 1960s, their audiences were moving toward other values and identities.

Post-1968 radical theatre in developing nations

In contrast, radical theatre companies in the developing world after 1968 found audiences that were more responsive to their politics. Several troupes grew out of institutions that already opposed the politics, unions, and culture of the dominant society, and these companies maintained their ties to alternative institutions during their theatrical work. Further, many theatre artists and their audiences lived under oppressive governments and faced a difficult choice between servile poverty and the dangers of active opposition. Apolitical consumerism, the default choice of many Westerners, was simply not an option for many people in developing countries during the 1970s and 1980s. Several non-Western theatre companies chose active opposition to their national regimes and helped their oppressed countrymen toward better lives and political liberation.

Many theatre troupes in Africa aroused their audiences to oppose the legacies of imperialism, racist policies, and state-sponsored oppression. In Eritrea, on the horn of Africa, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) produced several plays in the 1970s and 1980s as a part of its struggle for independence from Ethiopia. The EPLF staged some of these plays and many variety shows near the front lines of military combat as a morale booster for the troops, one-third of whom were female. *If It Had Been Like This* (1980), by Afewerki Abraha, transcends the usual fun of troop entertainment to explore one of the goals of the Eritrean struggle: equal rights for women. Reversing the usual gender roles, the farce shows a man cleaning house, preparing food, and suffering the beatings of his wife when she returns from work, after drinking and carousing with another woman. Afewerki's send-up of normal gender roles in eastern Africa led to mixed responses among the soldiers, but left no doubt that feminism would be a part of the EPLF's fight for independence.

In South Africa, the People's Experimental Theatre performed plays in the 1970s that undermined the apartheid regime. *Shanty*, by Mthuli ka Shezi (1947–1972), demonstrates the need for solidarity among three characters representing the major groups of non-whites, “Black,” “Indian,” and “Colored,” as defined by the apartheid government. The play dramatizes the beliefs of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, headed by activist Steve Biko and others. Internationally celebrated “white” playwright Athol Fugard (1932–) worked in several small, sometimes illegal theatres in the 1960s and 1970s to stage his multiracial plays for mixed audiences. Our second case study, at the end of this chapter, focuses on Fugard's anti-apartheid plays in South Africa.

Perhaps the most successful radical theatre in the developing world was the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA), a network of community-based theatres that fought against the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos from 1967 until its fall in 1986. During the 1970s, PETA members combined improvisational exercises, values from Catholic liberation theology, and the radical educational ideas of Paolo Freire (a Brazilian educator who also influenced Augusto Boal) to train themselves in theatrical skills and community organizing. Core groups of facilitator-organizers moved from Manila and other cities into the countryside to educate villagers in anti-imperialism and democratic socialism through theatrical activities and performances. In most of the

companies, facilitators helped locals to write and direct scripts that analyzed their social, economic, and political conditions and suggested solutions. PETA's widespread local bases and popularity gave it enormous resilience in the face of Marcos's attempts at suppression and the official opposition of the Catholic Church. By 1986, nearly 300 local theatres, run by fishermen, peasants, students, industrial workers, and others, comprised the PETA network. 📺

After the fall of the Marcos regime, PETA shifted its emphasis from anti-imperialism and socialism to examining and protesting the effects of local, national, and global policies on everyday lives. In addition to many touring productions for youth and village audiences, PETA has a repertory company that mounts large productions in the courtyard of a former Spanish fort in downtown Manila. Recent productions include *Domestic Helper* (1992), about Filipina maids who must work abroad to support their families back home, and *1896*, staged in 1996 to mark the centennial of the Filipino revolution against Spain (Figure 11.4). In 1995, PETA collaborated with the San Francisco Mime Troupe on a musical satire about elections in the Philippines. Most of PETA's financing now comes from external NGOs (non-governmental organizations) and from local contributions and fees. These fund a wide range of projects, including local workshops, a school for people's theatre, outreach and touring programs, and direct subsidies for theatrical and video activities.



Figure 11.4

The Philippine Educational Theatre Association's *1896*, performed in 1995 and 1996. Libretto by Charley de la Paz; music by Lucian Leteba; directed by Soxie Topacio.

Photo © PETA.

Theatres for development

Given its present educational and community-building goals, PETA has become an example of a theatre for development as well as a radical political theatre. The term “theatre for development” (TFD) originated in Botswana, Africa in the mid-1970s to describe performances intended to help communities address their difficulties with health, agriculture, literacy, and similar problems. The basic model, as it emerged in a series of conferences and workshops, involved theatre activists researching a community problem, creating a play through debate and improvisation, presenting the piece to the community, and following the performance with discussion and community planning. Well-funded by NGOs, this model spread throughout English-speaking Africa in the 1980s, as we saw in the introduction to Part IV. Many theatre and community leaders, however, criticized the early phase of TFD for its crude modernization ideology, its failure to involve community participants, and its blindness to local customs and political power struggles.

Most present versions of TFD have improved as a result of these criticisms and have remained an important strategy for activists seeking theatrical means to improve the lives of many Africans. The Nigerian Popular Theatre Alliance (NPTA), for example, works in the areas of adolescent health and education, democratic citizenship, economic empowerment, and conflict resolution, an important concern for many Nigerians because of the bitter history of civil war in that country. Affiliated with a local university, the NPTA also educates future leaders in the problems and possibilities of TFD.

 In Zambia, SEKA, the acronym for Sensitisation and Education through Kunda Arts, works through university teachers, community activists, and theatre artists to tackle many of the problems of village life in central south Africa. Among these are child labor, rampaging elephants, and HIV/AIDS, particularly rife in rural Zambia. To involve the villagers in their programs, SEKA relies primarily on interactive theatre that uses stories and songs from local life to demystify

problems and create collective solutions (Figure 11.5).

 Partly to fund their major programs, SEKA also creates customized productions for conferences and performs traditional Zambian culture for tourists. SEKA's stated goal is an appropriate summary of the aims of many TFDs: “We believe in changing circumstances by changing minds and changing minds through the arts – theatre and stories in particular.”

A similar version of TFD emerged in Cuba. Soon after the Cuban Revolution in 1959, Castro and his deputies began to use a type of theatre for development to transform Cuba. Although influenced by the success of the Blue Blouse troupes in the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution, the Cuban radicals also drew on the examples of Buenaventura in Colombia and Boal in Brazil (see Chapter 10). In 1969, the Castro regime sent a company of professionals from Havana who had been performing modernist works into the Escambray region, roughly in the center of the island, where counter-revolutionary groups had been fighting in the early 1960s. Their job was to work with the traditional small farmers and peasants of the region and prepare them for the collectivization that the regime planned to introduce. Mixing revolutionary propaganda with participatory techniques and developmental strategies, the *Teatro Escambray* succeeded with the local population and became a model for Cuban revolutionary theatre by the mid-1970s.

Nuevo Teatro Popular

The combination of radical political theatre and theatre for development exemplified by the *Teatro Escambray* exerted wide influence in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s. In part, this was because Cuba had repelled U.S. intervention and countered U.S. imperialism with policies that encouraged national revolutions. Cuba also welcomed dissident radicals and exiled revolutionaries from all of Latin America and encouraged them to apply the lessons of *Teatro Escambray* and other Cuban success stories to their own nations. Some of these theatres pushed for a Cuban-style revolution, but many more worked toward versions of democratic socialism.



Figure 11.5

A SEKA performer in a large mask clowns for Zambian villagers.

Photo © Miranda Guhrs of Seka (www.seka-educational-theatre.com).

In Mexico, where over 200 theatres joined socialist politics to community development, this movement was called *Nuevo Teatro Popular* (New Popular Theatre), a term that can be applied to the movement as a whole.

Throughout Latin America, *Nuevo Teatro* was nearly as various as it was huge, embracing amateurs and professionals, performing in agit-prop and realistic styles, drawing urban intellectual and village peasant audiences, and ranging widely among aesthetic and political priorities. Some of the more prominent companies

included the *Teatro Experimental de Cali* from Colombia, *El Galpon* in Uruguay, *Grupo Octubre* from Argentina, and the CLETA (*Centro Libre de Experimentación Teatral y Artística*) alliance in Mexico. Each of these groups, in turn, influenced dozens more in their regions. These *Nuevo Teatro* companies helped to empower peasants and workers in Colombia, Peru, and Mexico, worked against repressive dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, and supported democratic socialist regimes in Chile and Nicaragua. 🎬

In their *Latin American Popular Theatre* (1993), Judith Weiss and her co-writers point to several factors that made *Nuevo Teatro* a movement and not just a series of similar theatrical efforts. First, these radical troupes drew from a common tradition of Brechtian theatre and politics, often via the work of Buenaventura and Boal, even though their productions varied widely in style. Second, Spanish-speaking groups in several nation-states shared many of the same directors, actors, and playwrights, sometimes because exile from one country would force a theatre artist to work in another. Third, several theatres gained funding from the same international NGOs (Inter Pares and OXFAM, Oxford Committee for Famine Relief), for example) for their community development work. Fourth, most troupes conducted research into the social and economic circumstances of their audiences, and all sought substantive spectator feedback. Finally, the major troupes met regularly in festivals and conferences to compare their best productions and to workshop new strategies. Not surprisingly, Cuba took the initiative in this regard, promoting significant hemispheric meetings of theatre artists and troupes in 1964 and 1967.

Since 1990, with the end of the cold war, the decline of Cuba, and the fall of most dictatorial governments in Latin America, the *Nuevo Teatro* movement has lost momentum. Fewer theatres now do this kind of work; the traditional organizing and theatrical strategies of *Nuevo Teatro* do not always speak to the new realities of globalization. Nevertheless, many troupes have made a successful transition to the globalization era. The *Yuyachkani* company in Peru, for example, began moving away from Marxist theatre in the 1980s in response to the mass killings of indigenous and rural mestizo populations by the Maoist revolutionaries in Peru known as The Shining Path. In such pieces as *Contralviento* (1989) and *Adios Ayacucho* (1990), *Yuyachkani* – the name translates roughly as “I am remembering” in Quechua – affirmed the need to remember the victims of these genocides and to understand the trauma they had caused. Performing primarily to sophisticated audiences in Lima, *Yuyachkani*

invites its spectators to experience indigenous points of view and to broaden their vision of what it means to be a Peruvian in their multilingual and multiethnic country.

In Chiapas, the southern-most area of Mexico, two related theatre companies are also raising questions about national identity that are directly related to the dynamics of globalization. As men lose traditional positions in farming and women migrate to the cities to support their families, globalization is pulling apart indigenous Mayan communities. In response to these and other problems in Chiapas, *Lo'il Maxil* and *La Fomma* work with Mayan populations to improve literacy, raise political awareness, and pressure the Mexican government to provide better options. *Lo'il Maxil* (Tzotzil for “Monkey Business”) is closely allied with the Zapatista movement, which has been negotiating with the government for a degree of self-rule in Chiapas since their armed uprising in 1994. *Lo'il Maxil's De Todas Para Todas (From All, For All)*, initially produced in 1994, for example, celebrates a rural Mayan community that is robbed of its lands, banished to the jungle, and then takes up arms to reclaim its heritage. Significantly, the ending of the play recommends negotiation with the Mexican government, not the continuation of armed rebellion. *La Fomma* is an acronym in Spanish that stands for “Strength of the Mayan Women.” In addition to producing plays aimed at assisting women with a variety of new social problems, their dramas target the neo-liberal economic policies of Mexico that have forced the separation of Mayan family members. Other plays, such as *Hechame la Mano (Lend Me a Hand)* (2001), explore the dangers for women of participating in the international tourist trade.

Community-based theatre since 1990

Lo'il Maxil, *La Fomma*, and most other theatres with roots in *Nuevo Teatro Popular* are now considered part of a worldwide phenomenon that U.S. theatre scholars and others have called community-based theatre. Though not a coordinated movement, community-based theatres around the world share several features in common.

Drawing on the legacy of *Nuevo Teatro Popular* and other theatres that mixed political agitation and developmental strategies, community-based theatres also depend upon ongoing dialog between artists and spectators, and explore ways of maximizing the agency of a local audience. Unlike those earlier theatres, however, the political beliefs of artists committed to community-based work are not oriented to revolutionary action or democratic socialism, but grow out of their commitment to a local community or social group. Although most espouse leftist values, some are motivated by a conservative desire to preserve the past or to pursue neo-liberal notions of community development. Not surprisingly, these political differences often relate to competing definitions of the term “community,” which may encompass one or several regional, racial, or ethnic groups, but usually involve excluding some groups as outsiders. Community-based theatre’s commitment to a “community” has been both a strength and a weakness, energizing some groups for self-improvement and progressive change and limiting the social, political, and aesthetic reach of others. For those communities caught up in problems related to globalization, community-based theatre has primarily led to smart tactics and long-term adjustment or resistance, but also to parochialism and nostalgia.

There are thousands of community-based theatres around the globe. In Western Europe and North America, community-based artists and facilitators have focused much of their attention on empowering marginalized groups, celebrating the useable past of a community, and helping people to energize communities that have been damaged or destroyed. With regard to this third goal, Roadside Theatre in the United States works with Appalachian citizens to restore pride in their past culture (among many other projects). The LAPD (the Los Angeles Poverty Department) seeks to generate a sense of community among the residents of Skid Row in Los Angeles. In Toronto, Ground Zero has been more interested in empowerment than community building; it has facilitated the political agency of several groups, including indigenous tribes and unionized hospital

workers. While facilitator Ann Jellicoe (1927–) has helped several communities in England to celebrate their histories, Swamp Gravy, located in a small town in Georgia in the U.S., draws on local tradition and African-American Christianity to bridge the racial divide in the American South. Several companies work toward all of the goals noted above. Stut Theatre in Utrecht, The Netherlands, devised a production involving Dutch, Turkish, and Moroccan young people and their parents to recognize the needs of the two marginalized groups and encourage intercultural understanding.

Community-based theatres in other parts of the world also incorporate these goals, as well as pursuing aims that demonstrate more commitment to social and economic transformation. In Brazil, *Nos do Morro* (Us from the Hillside) produces theatre for the poor citizens who live in the hills above the wealthy beach areas of Rio de Janeiro. The theatre serves as a local community center that provides participatory entertainment and occasional intervention to help the workers, street children, and dispossessed of the area. Like PETA in the Philippines, *Jodrikdrik* in the Marshall Islands trains squads of young people to lead outreach programs using theatrical techniques that help other youth adjust to the many problems that globalization is bringing to the islands, including AIDS, increasing alcoholism, and the disruption of traditional culture. In Kenya, the *Kawuonda* Woman’s Group shows the continuing influence of Theatre for Development programs in a small village. When the women dramatize one of their stories for the village, they typically rehearse them in the midst of doing the laundry or picking coffee beans, and they perform their short scenes within a circle of dancers and singers to demonstrate their female solidarity. The artists leading *Aguamarina* in Costa Rica model their work on the socialist politics of *Nuevo Teatro* in the rest of Spanish-speaking America. One of their recent pieces, created collaboratively with local fishermen, examined the problem of industrial trawlers that fish Costa Rican waters and saturate the local market with cheap produce.

Many of the artists involved with these community-based theatres have adopted strategies to moderate or resist some of the effects of globalization that are changing the lives of the populations they assist. The U.S. media, especially television programming and films, now saturate the lives of young people around the globe; global media are fast replacing traditional cultures as a common point of reference in most societies. *Jodrikdrik* on the Marshall Islands recognizes this fact and encourages their participants to mix island traditions with popular songs and media genres from the U.S. in their annual talent show, called, appropriately, *Showtime!* In Rio, *Nos do Morro* has found film and television work for several of the young actors who have performed on its stage. Other community-based theatres, including PETA, *La Fomma*, and *Aguamarina*, have helped their participants to organize collectives to maintain the economic viability of traditional crafts in competition with international corporations.

The pressures of globalization are also changing the organizational strategies of community-based work. *Yuyachkani* in Peru maintains its company identity, but also facilitates the work of individual members to pursue projects related to company goals. Ground Zero in Toronto has abandoned the notion of a theatre company altogether. Its founder, Don Bouzek, now works with temporary alliances of funders, clients, and artists to produce theatre pieces that will advance progressive causes and alliances in Canada. Two scholars of contemporary interventionist theatre, Alan Filewod and David Watt, argue that such “strategic ventures” involving like-minded artists and activists collaborating together on specific projects, provide the best strategy for transforming communities in the global future (Filewod and Watt 2001: *passim*).

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you

want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Centro Libre de Experimentación Teatra y Artística: Mexican alliance of Nuevo Teatro groups: <http://eleta.org/>.

Dario Fo. Nobel Prize website with biography and text of Fo's acceptance speech (1997): http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1997/fo-bio.html.

Festival of Avignon. Official website (2009): <http://festival-avignon.com>.

Nigeria: Theatre for Development Centre, Zaria, Nigeria: website (dated 2007, active 2009): www.tfdc-ng.org.

PETA: Philippine Educational Theatre Association: website: petatheater.com.

Really Useful Group Official website, with information on *Phantom of the Opera*, *Cats*, *Sunset Boulevard*, and other Lloyd Webber and Mackintosh productions: www.reallyusefultgroup.com.

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CASE STUDY: The vortex of Times Square

By Bruce McConachie

Shopping on Broadway

On every Saturday night in 2002, tourists to New York City who had attended the musical *42nd Street* at the Ford Center emerged from the darkness of the auditorium into the crowd to blink at the bright lights of the real 42nd Street. Instead of the “naughty, bawdy, gaudy, sporty” 42nd Street of the musical, those tourists soon encountered stores in the Broadway–42nd Street area with the brand names of American mass culture – The Gap, McDonald’s, and Toys “R” Us, among many others. Where the musical is overtly nostalgic, appealing to the desperate hope for show-biz fame celebrated in Busby Berkeley’s 1933 musical film (on which the stage musical is based), the Times Square district today pulsates with contemporary culture. The hope for commercial success still remains, of course; in 2002, crowds gathered around a Turkish master of spray painting, a young black man breakdancing, and a few Chinese calligraphers who printed your name for a price. Other salesmen inside the stores offered Coke, Kellogg, Samsung, Proctor and

Gamble, General Electric, Sprint, and Nike products (to name a few). Times Square has meant many things to many people in the past hundred years, but now it is principally about shopping. Indeed, squeezing through the crowds along Broadway or 7th Avenue between 42nd and 48th Streets at 11pm on a Saturday night, tourists may soon get the feeling that they are careening inside an enormous reflecting bowl of American pop culture and celebrating their identities as consumers of all those familiar products that are dressed up and dancing in the computer-controlled megawatts of more than 500 illuminated signs above their heads (Figure 11.6).

The meeting of actors and spectators in a space dedicated to performance is only one part of theatre-going. In all historical eras, spectators have traveled to the sites of performances and re-emerged into the environment in which their theatres were located. The ecology of theatre districts has directly shaped spectators’ expectations and memories of performance events. Throughout history, buildings or places set aside for public performances have often been sited at

important crossroads, near centers of power, sometimes overlooking a central city square. (At other times, as in Elizabethan London and Tokugawa Tokyo, significant theatres were located at the margins of power.) The location of a state-supported playhouse or of a commercial theatre district within a city can tell the historian much about the role of the theatre in that society and culture.

The Broadway vortex, 1904–1960

Times Square got its name in 1904. The owner of the *New York Times* newspaper, Adolph Ochs, pulled some strings at City Hall and asked that the old Longacre Square be re-named Times Square in honor of his newspaper, which had just relocated there. In 1904, Times Square was one of the fastest-growing areas in



Figure 11.6

Traffic and advertising signs along the Seventh Avenue side of Times Square at night, December 2004.

Photo © Bruce McConachie.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Vortices of behavior

In *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, historian Joseph Roach describes theatre districts and other urban areas dedicated to performance as “vortices of behavior.” The word “vortex” usually means a whirling mass of water, but it can also refer to a metaphorical whirlpool that draws everything toward its center. According to Roach, theatre districts create vortices that pull performers and audiences together into the same space, where they transform everyday behavior into performances that nurture and validate their culture. States Roach:

The vortex is a kind of spatially induced carnival, a center of cultural self-invention. . . . Into such maelstroms, the magnetic forces of commerce and pleasure suck the willing and unwilling alike. Although such a zone or district seems to offer a place for transgression, for things that couldn’t happen otherwise or elsewhere, in fact what it provides is far more official: a place in which everyday practices may be legitimated, “brought out into the open,” reinforced, celebrated, or intensified. When this happens, what I will be calling condensational events result. The principal characteristic of such events is that they gain a powerful enough hold on collective memory that they will survive the transformation or the relocation of the spaces in which they first flourished.

(Roach 1996:28)

Roach implicitly invites the student of theatre history to locate such vortices of behavior in the past and present, to note how everyday behaviors are celebrated and intensified within them, and to focus on those “condensational events” that have emerged from the “maelstrom.” As their name implies, condensational events condense, conflate, and compact certain practices in such a way that they can “travel” to other locales for re-performance by other actors. Perhaps the most widely recognized “condensational event” associated with Times Square over the years has been the dropping of a giant, illuminated ball at midnight on 31 December to mark the start of the New Year. That event first occurred in 1907 and it has been widely imitated and re-performed ever since.

Following Roach’s ideas, it ought to be possible to write a brief history of Times Square by examining the major condensational events that emerged from this vortex of behavior. Several of these events, of course, have been theatrical in nature. Broadway-Times Square (the two terms are nearly interchangeable) has initiated thousands of plays, revues, and musicals that have toured the country, endured the blunderings of countless amateur productions, and switched media to be recycled as film and television re-makes (see the Introduction to Part IV). Other condensational events of the Times Square area, however, have not always supported the commercial stage – or have supported light entertainment but not heavier dramatic fare. A history of the Broadway district as a vortex of behavior, then, might also comment on the effects of condensational events on the expectations and memories of theatre-goers – the mental images the district has generated that have shaped the hopes and dreams of patrons walking to and from the theatre.

In using this approach for any historical period, the historian of theatre and culture would ask questions such as the following:

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 How did the entertainment district of a historical period operate as a vortex of behavior?
- 2 Within this vortex, which everyday behaviors were celebrated and intensified? Which behaviors emerged as condensational events?
- 3 How did these condensational events travel through the culture in several media and to other locales?

metropolitan New York. The subways had opened that year and the station at 42nd and Broadway, a major junction in the new system, was soon pouring thousands of New Yorkers into the district every day. The moguls of the commercial stage, who had concentrated their theatres ten blocks south in Herald Square, saw the opportunities of the new district and began to open new playhouses. By 1910, there were 40 first-class theatres and nearly as many vaudeville and burlesque houses in and around Times Square. Restaurateurs also took advantage of the increased traffic and soon several “lobster palaces” were catering to the pre-show and post-show trade. Led by such tunesmiths as Irving Berlin and dance celebrities Vernon and Irene Castle, popular ragtime music was rousing New Yorkers out of sedentary spectating and swirling them into the new “dance craze.” To feed the craze, entrepreneurs opened dozens of dance halls and nightclubs in the Times Square area before 1914. Not all was top hats and ball gowns, however. Saloons, cheap hotels, and whorehouses jammed the side streets east and west of Broadway for the gamblers, chorus girls, longshoremen, waiters, and newspapermen who lived in the district, and the tourists and elite who came to play.

Perhaps the most important condensational event of this historical period, and one that would epitomize the vortex of Times Square for the next hundred years, was the instant success of the spectacular sign. Advertising billboards had long been popular, but it was only after 1890 that they began to be powered by electricity. O.J. Gude, already a leading adman in New York at the turn of the century, perfected the first generation of electric

signs. The first of Gude’s “spectaculars,” as the new signs were called, depicted the Heatherbloom Girl in a short, illuminated drama that showed a rainstorm whipping at the dress and petticoats of the lightbulb-outlined giantess and revealing a glimpse of her stockinged calf. Gawkers gathered for hours on the street below in 1905 to watch the recurring scene. Condensed versions of this potent mix of product placement, sexual titillation, and electricity would continue to circulate through American culture and come to dominate the advertising pitches of global culture by the end of the century.

While Gude’s spectaculars illuminated Broadway as “The Great White Way,” the image of the chorus girl led to “white” condensational events of another kind. Florenz Ziegfeld began producing his annual *Follies* in 1907. By 1920 he and his designers, with the help of hundreds of “girls,” had perfected the Follies fashion model of *haute couture*. Sexy, sophisticated, but wholesome and always white, this image gained cultural dominance. The chorus girl and her imitators paraded into fashion runways, beauty pageants, car shows, and football half-time events for the next 50 years (Figure 11.7).

Although the ambience of the Times Square vortex in the early days validated most of the theatrical activity on Broadway, there were exceptions. Before 1914, even serious dramatic offerings at high-priced theatres rarely taxed the mind or criticized the status quo. This began to change in the 1920s, however, as the productions of the modern American theatre mixed it up with the revues, musicals, murder melodramas, and sex farces on Broadway. The theatre of Robert Edmund Jones,



Figure 11.7

Publicity photo-collage showing the see-through runway for Florenz Ziegfeld's *Midnight Frolic*, produced on the roof of the Amsterdam Theatre between 1913 and 1927. The runway pandered to the male gaze, allowing male audiences to see up the women's skirts.

Photo © Museum of the City of New York.

Elmer Rice, and Eugene O'Neill had little in common with the froth and fun of Times Square in the "roaring" 20s. Nineteen of O'Neill's plays gained production on Broadway between 1920 and 1934. At the same time, the Theatre Guild was staging many of the playwrights of European modernism, including Shaw, Kaiser, and Pirandello. By most terms of comparison, Ziegfeld's Broadway was incompatible with *Desire Under the Elms*.

In contrast, the plays of George S. Kaufman (1889–1961) and others who practiced deflating farce and witty repartee fit right in to the ambience of 1920s Times Square. This was the era of *The Smart Set*, *The New Yorker*, and the wits of the Algonquin Round Table. The image of Kaufman, Dorothy Parker, Alexander Woollcott, Edna Ferber, Robert Benchley, Harpo Marx, and others sitting around their reserved table at the Algonquin Hotel and trading wisecracks emerged as a condensational event that put Times Square on the map as the home of quick wit, backbiting innuendo, and modern irony and aplomb. Kaufman's early plays, including *Dulcy* (1921), *Merton of the Movies* (1922), and *Beggar on Horseback* (1924) – all co-authored with Marc Connelly (1890–1980) – recycled the sparkle and snap of the Algonquins for middle-class distribution. This brand of wisecracking irreverence also made it into many movies, most memorably the early films of the Marx Brothers – Chico (Leonard) (1887–1961), Harpo (Adolph Arthur) (1888–1964), and Groucho (Julius Henry) (1890–1977). Their *Cocanuts* and *Animal Crackers* succeeded first as stage productions (1925 and 1928) and later joined *Monkey Business* (1931) and *Duck Soup* (1933) as films to parody the powerful, send up sexual propriety, and celebrate release from middle-class restraints.

The rise of film viewing, the decline of live entertainment, and the Depression of the 1930s led to a major shift in the environment of Times Square. By the late 1930s, the Broadway vortex still boasted opulent signs, black-tie openings, and glamorous nightclubs, but dime museums, peep shows, and flea circuses had also moved in. Sleaze and eccentricity were replacing the swank and style of the 1920s, as the elite found other playgrounds

in the city. Mr. and Mrs. Middle-Class America had decided that they would rather pay to watch films than live theatre, and the growth of film production led to the transformation of numerous Broadway playhouses into movie theatres. It also brought many of the delights of the Coney Island amusement park into downtown Manhattan. Film audiences, however, still liked to see their stars live, and the Hollywood moguls accommodated this profitable desire by creating film premiere nights at the movie palaces of the nation – on Broadway. The event of the opening night, no longer restricted to the elite and condensed for radio and newsreel consumption by the masses, circulated widely in the culture of the 1930s and 1940s.

On August 14, 1945, the date that Japan surrendered to the Allies to end World War II, Times Square became the center of the nation's joyful celebration. All the media of the day broadcast sounds and images of strangers hugging, kissing, and sobbing. By 10pm on that evening, two million people had flocked to the Broadway district, the largest gathering in the history of Times Square. A *Life* magazine reporter shot the photo that would condense and memorialize this event for the nation. In it, a sailor in his dress blues and round white hat scoops an unsuspecting nurse off her feet and plants a joyful kiss on her lips. This image of Times Square as the center of national celebration underwrote the ecology of the district from 1945 through the early 1960s. This image was at odds with the serious plays of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and others who continued and enhanced U.S. theatrical modernism. But it was congenial to the upbeat musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein, Kander and Ebb, and Lerner and Lowe. As in the musical *Guys and Dolls* (1950), set in a half-mythical Times Square of night clubs, gambling dens, and Salvation Army shelters, the Great White Way of the post-war era seemed to be the home of benevolent eccentricity. Its seedy but romantic urbanity continued to buoy the nation's spirits through the anxious era of the early cold war. The electrified signs of the times, now mostly designed by Douglas Leigh, were bigger and more inviting than ever. Perhaps his most successful

“spectacular” was an enormous image of a satisfied Camel smoker who blew perfect smoke rings (made of steam) out of his mouth every four seconds.

Times Square goes global

By the 1970s, the Broadway district had sunk into sleaze and crime. Pornography, drugs, and prostitution had been a part of the area since its beginnings, but these problems began to drive out legitimate businesses in the early 1960s even as the clientele for these activities remained largely middle-class. Worse, the crime rate rose to one of the highest in the city – not just victimless crimes but frequent muggings, rapes, and murders. Several national images and condensational events emerged from Times-Square-as-hell-hole during the 1960s and 1970s. These were perhaps best captured with the release of the film *Taxi Driver* in 1976, in which Robert De Niro plays a deranged taxi driver who goes on a killing rampage against the hookers, hustlers, and assorted crazies in this urban heart of darkness.

The businessmen and politicians who ran New York understood that the Broadway district could not be allowed to rot forever. It was too centrally located and still generated millions of tourist dollars. But they dithered until the 1990s over plans for its renewal. Luckily for them, the crime rate declined, and New York City gradually dug itself out of its fiscal hole. Promoters floated several plans for the area in the 1980s, one involving an indoor mall with aerial walkways and another the erection of four enormous office towers straddling Times Square. In the 1990s, local investors, city bureaucrats, and global conglomerates, aided by a change in the ideology of urbanity, gradually overcame these earlier schemes. A 1978 epic-marking manifesto by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas celebrated “Delirious New York” for the surfaces of its neon signage and pop glamour. New zoning laws honored this altered ideology and began to require the signs of the Broadway district to continue to burn brightly. Each sign facing the Square now had to produce a minimum LUTS (Light Unit Times Square) reading. The real estate moguls of New York who owned much of the land in the

Broadway district soon found global corporations, including Disney and Clear Channel Communications, to rent, renovate, and rebuild their properties.

By 2000, Disney and Clear Channel controlled much of Broadway. Not only had Disney renovated its own theatre and begun producing shows, but also, as the owners of ABC and ESPN, it rented space and employed thousands of others in the area. Clear Channel funded productions for its national subscription series of mega-musicals. Viacom, the owner of MTV, many of the Times Square “spectaculars,” and its Viacom Building at 45th and Broadway, was also a player. The actual investment in live theatre by these three global conglomerates was only a small percentage of their total revenue. Most of Clear Channel’s money came from radio stations, for instance; its Theatrical and Family Division generated less than 10 percent of its revenues.

The future of Broadway theatre(?)

Will these and other global corporations continue to be interested in supporting live theatre on Broadway? While no one can say, the Times Square vortex will likely remain an important launching pad for world entertainment. Its smile-button commercialism is no longer particularly friendly to live theatre that does not conform to the mega-musical formula, however. In December of 2004, only one non-musical drama was playing on Broadway – *Gem of the Ocean*, by August Wilson (1945–). The reduction of straight plays in Times Square to two or three per season has been common.

More significantly, perhaps, the ambience of Times Square forcefully reminds all theatre-goers that theatrical spectating is itself old fashioned and may soon be outmoded. Traveling to a separate place for entertainment, sitting in a seat for most of the time, and responding with laughter and polite applause may still have its pleasures, but how much longer can it compete with the delights of direct participation in the newer media of communication? In 2003, *Total Request Live*, MTV’s version of the old *American Bandstand*, was

broadcast every afternoon from a second story studio overlooking Times Square. People gathered in the street below to look through the glass wall, wave at the bands in the studio, and occasionally provide cheering backup on television when a rock star waved back. Like reality TV, these are the kinds of condensational events that the vortex of Times Square is now producing. Of course, *Total Request Live* appealed mostly to teens, but will they become theatre-goers when they reach 40? Although the materiality of Times Square is not about to disappear into virtual space, the chance of participating in its mediated image may be becoming more important for many than the physical reality of being there.

Broadway has always been a vortex of contrasts, however, and live theatre is a necessary part of the mix for many. In 1980, roughly 60 percent of spectators for Broadway shows came from the New York metropolitan area. By 2000, most spectators, around 56 percent, came from elsewhere, and the total theatre-going population had increased by nearly two million people in 20 years. Approximately twelve million audience members came to a Broadway show in the 2000–2001 season. During

that year, theatre in the Times Square area generated about US\$4.4 billion for the city's economy, including production costs, theatre expenses, and estimated visitor spending. Apparently, the Broadway mega-musical has found a new and expanding niche that even the thrills of direct participation in new media cannot touch.

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CASE STUDY: Athol Fugard: Theatre of witnessing in South Africa

By Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei

Athol Fugard (1932–), as we have seen in the Part IV Introduction, is a white South African playwright, actor and director who spent the years prior to 1990 in collaborations with black theatre artists in order to “bear witness” to, and protest the system of racial separation called “apartheid.” This was internationally applauded but semi-legal; at various times Fugard was placed under government surveillance, had his passport revoked, and he and his family endured threats and police raids. Many of the black actors he worked with were arrested. In 1962, he led an international boycott

of playwrights who refused to have their work produced in South Africa's segregated theatres, but in 1968, he changed his mind and urged (unsuccessfully) that the boycott be lifted. Since the end of apartheid, he has continued to write internationally acclaimed plays, often of a more personal and sometimes autobiographical nature.

Some critics, such as Loren Kruger, have suggested that his success among white liberals throughout the world may have compromised his integrity. Many others feel that the plays reveal the political evils and personal suffering caused by apartheid. By “bearing witness,” they also focus attention on how personal traumas are embedded in (and exacerbated by) the political situation.

Fugard's plays usually focus on a few individuals who are closely tied – by blood, love or friendship – and the complex, private agonies they inflict upon each other. Before we look more closely at the plays, it will be useful to understand the social and historical background of apartheid.

Apartheid in South Africa

Apartheid is a Dutch and Afrikaans word meaning “apartness.” It was imposed as a legal form of racial segregation in South Africa in 1948, although British colonizers had practiced racial discrimination in South Africa since 1795. For example, the British created a system of “pass laws” in the nineteenth century restricting the movements of black people both between designated tribal areas and into areas occupied by whites and “coloureds,” as those of mixed race were called. Blacks were required to carry a pass card at all times and were forbidden to be on the streets of white areas at night. Eventually blacks, Asian Indians, “coloureds,” and other non-Europeans were denied the right to vote, to own land, to practice certain professions, and many other basic rights. These British colonial policies were strengthened by the National Party in 1948, when it adopted the legal system of white supremacy called apartheid.

Under apartheid, people had to carry identification cards specifying their race. It was illegal to marry or have sexual relations with a person of a different race, and the races had separate public facilities such as restrooms, swimming pools, restaurants, hospitals, theatres and schools. The so-called tribal homelands had separate governing bodies, and “anti-communist” laws were passed to outlaw all political protest or opposition to the government and its policies. Through the 1980s, blacks were forcibly “resettled” in an attempt to create whites-only areas. Despite international protests, in 1955 at least 60,000 blacks were removed by armed soldiers from Johannesburg, where many had lived in an area called Sophiatown. Sophiatown was demolished and its former residents were forced to live in the newly created black suburb of Soweto, an acronym for Southwestern

Townships. Where Sophiatown once stood, a new white town called Triomf (Triumph) was built. Although focused on blacks, forced resettlement was also practiced on other non-whites, such as Indians and Chinese. It has been estimated that over three and a half million people were forcibly removed.

Although international outrage over apartheid began in earnest in 1952, when 13 newly independent Asian and African states protested to the United Nations, it took the 1960 massacre of 69 peaceful protesters in Sharpeville (followed by the arrest of 18,000 people), and finally the shocking police brutality against the people of Soweto in 1977 to force the UN to implement an embargo on arms sales to South Africa. By the 1980s, there was virtual civil war in South Africa, and most of the world participated in political, economic, and cultural boycotts of the nation. In 1990, the National Party renounced apartheid, and in 1994 Nelson Mandela, who had been a political prisoner from 1963 to 1990, was elected the nation's first black president. In 1995, the government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Its role was both to permit victims of human rights violations to bear witness and also to consider amnesty for perpetrators. Among those who petitioned for amnesty, 5,392 cases were denied and 849 were granted. Violators of human rights included members of the pre-1994 apartheid government, as well as former soldiers of the ANC (African National Congress) who had fought against that government.

Theatre under apartheid

South African theatre is rich and varied. The experiences of apartheid, however, clearly molded the development of recent drama. As Dennis Walder perceptively notes:

Athol Fugard is South Africa's most important and prolific playwright, and the first to enjoy an international reputation. Yet his long and celebrated career is part of a much larger achievement: he has helped create a kind of drama that has established South African theatre

as an arena in which audiences around the world have seen the emergence of a unique cultural form, drawn from the multiple traditions of Africa and Europe. Works by playwrights and practitioners as varied as Zakes Mda, Gcina Mhlophe, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon, as well as groups such as the Serpent Players, Workshop '71, Junction Avenue Theatre Company and the Handspring Puppet Company, have engaged with the immediate issues of the time through collaborative workshop techniques and a stirring mix of improvisation, mime, dance, music and document. Migrant labour, child abduction, school rebellion, police torture, illegal strikes, township removals, imprisonment without trial and, more recently, the drama of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: these have all been grist to the theatrical mill in South Africa. If there is one common impulse, it has been the urge to tell a story; and not just to tell a story, but to bear witness. The idea of witness, with its overtones of truth and sacrifice, has particular power in the face of the darkest events of our times. It is an idea that suggests the potential of art to respond to such events, and to reach across the boundaries of class, race, gender and nation, without descending into facile universalism.

(Walder 2003:1)

Fugard's play *Blood Knot* (1961, originally titled *The Blood Knot*) was groundbreaking. Directed by the author, it starred himself and black actor Zakes Mokae as brothers who had the same mother but different fathers. One appears white-skinned and the other appears black-skinned. Although they love each other, the realities of racial discrimination cause conflict. For example, the light-skinned brother could choose to live as a white man (although risking arrest if caught) whereas his dark-skinned brother will never have such a choice, and must always suffer. When the light-skinned brother dresses up "white" to meet a white woman, he begins to treat his

brother as an inferior. In turn, the dark-skinned brother, reveals submerged fury, even hatred. Eventually, they remain together as blacks, but the brothers clearly harbor complex feelings for each other. When the play opened, a South African newspaper noted:

Theatre history was made in Johannesburg this week when a White man and a Black man acted together publicly in the same play. . . . Municipal by-laws purport to prohibit racially mixed performances, but . . . producer Leon Gluckman has taken a chance and "The Blood Knot" opened in the Y.M.C.A.'s intimate theatre on Wednesday night before a fashionable and wildly applauding (White) audience. . . . The authorities have taken no action (yet) to stop the performance, possibly because the legal aspect has been delicately avoided so far.

(Wertheim 2000:18)

Productions of this play in London and New York signaled the start of Fugard's international recognition, and helped prevent censorship at home. However, the day after *The Blood Knot* was broadcast on British television in 1967, Fugard's passport was taken away, supposedly for reasons of national security. Productions created with the multiracial Serpent Players – such as *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1972), *The Island* (1973), and *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act* (1974) – were often performed in secure locations such as garages or private homes to evade the police, and the actors did not take home written scripts in order to avoid being arrested for keeping "subversive materials."

Fugard, like other South African artists and cultural critics, applauds South Africa's vibrant "protest literature," but like them, he insists that politics should not be the sole criterion for judgment. Yet his mind is often torn. In 1991, he called himself "a storyteller, not a political pamphleteer." He stated that while he accepted the reality that South African theatre is characterized by a "direct and electrifying . . . relationship" between "the events on the stage and the social and political reality out

in the streets,” he felt frustrated that audiences expected him to write only political works. He complained that this expectation “takes away certain freedoms from me as a writer.” Nevertheless, he acknowledged that “I can’t find any area of my living which politics has not invaded” (Fugard 1992:71–73).

Collaborative creation and witnessing

Athol Fugard was an actor before he became a playwright. His writing is inherently performable and theatrical. Fugard has often stated that all he requires for his plays is “the actor and the stage, the actor *on* the stage” (cited in Walder 1987:x). He was influenced by Jerzy Grotowski’s concept of “poor theatre” that relies on the actors’ bodies and voices, not on spectacle (for more on Grotowski, see Chapter 12). Fugard’s collaborative works emphasize the actors’ personal experiences. In a 1973 interview regarding the creation of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, he said, “[O]bviously, I did a hell of a lot of actual writing. But I’ve not been allowed inside a black township in South Africa for many years, so I am very dependent on the two actors for a basic

image, a vitality, an assertion of life” (cited in Wertheim 2000:80).

In 1958, he joined the interracial Union of South African artists, and soon after he helped create the African Theatre Workshop. *The Blood Knot* was written partly in response to the horrific Sharpeville massacre, the event that so outraged his sense of justice that he determined to return to South Africa after two years in London. In 1963, he and a group of inexperienced black actors founded the Serpent Players. The impetus for founding the troupe came from a visit by black actor/artist Norman Ntshinga, who made “the old, old request, actually it’s hunger. A desperate hunger for meaningful activity – to do something that would make the hell of their daily existence meaningful” (Fugard 1983:81). Fugard tells what happened a few days later, when Ntshinga returned with others:

[A] knock on the front door ushered into my life a group of four black men and one woman. . . . This little group had read about my success in the local paper, and had come to ask me to help them start a drama group. None of them had had any

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Social justice and the artist

What is the role of theatre (and art) in society? This question has troubled artists, philosophers, politicians, religious leaders and critics since the earliest days. Plato feared that mimesis could lead people away from the truth. Brecht wanted theatre to force the audience to consider the political implications of their actions. For Zeami as well as for medieval European Christians, theatre could provide spiritual enlightenment. For the Korean shaman, theatre allows the spirits of the dead to continue to participate in the lives of the living. Parents today worry that excessive displays of sexuality or violence might harm their children’s psychological development.

Theatre has been used to rouse the masses to revolution and to entertain soldiers in battle. It has been censored by governments and used by them as political propaganda. Should the arts be primarily or only for entertainment? Should they foster an ideal such as beauty or truth? Does theatre teach us how to be better people, to understand ourselves, or to live productively in society? Can it contribute to social justice? To what extent should the state intervene in, control, or support theatrical performance?

Finally, what does it mean to be an ethically responsible artist? What is the role of the artist who perceives that the society she is a member of is behaving immorally?

previous theatre experience, and very typically, they all had the most menial of jobs: the women were domestic servants, and the men worked as very basic physical labourers. . . . Apart from the exhausting process of teaching these men and women who came to my door the basics of acting, there would be in addition the problems of a white man associating with black people in the South Africa of that day. The authorities would not allow me to go into the black townships, and these black men and women were running a very considerable risk of police harassment in coming into a white area at night. Because of all of this, my first impulse was to say no. I wanted to devote all my time and energy to capitalize on my success with *The Blood Knot* by writing a new play. A totally selfish concern with time and energy is necessary for a serious writer. My guilty white liberal conscience would, however, not allow me this indulgence. I very reluctantly agreed. . . . Our first performance space was scheduled to be the disused snake pit of the Port Elizabeth museum, and this gave the group its name, "The Serpent Players." . . . I would like to believe that at the end of this exercise, I was no longer the patronizing white liberal that I considered myself, but I had become instead a friend of these remarkable and beautiful people. As such, they trusted me, and in our weekly sessions in the little fisherman's shack next to the Indian Ocean, which was my home at the time, I began to learn something about their lives. What I soon realized was that theatre had a much more significant role to play in those lives than just being a source of entertainment. . . . The black townships in and around Port Elizabeth were the targets of very intense and very brutal police activity. Anything remotely resembling a political conscience, or awareness, could lead to the disappearance of the man or woman involved. Thanks to the presence of police informers, it was a climate of fear and suffocating silence. In our

talking in that little fisherman's shack, we began to realize that the stage offered us a chance of breaking this conspiracy of silence, and allowing us to talk, albeit in code, about the things which were happening in the daily life of the township.

(Cited in McDonald and Walton
2002:130–132)

Their first productions were adaptations of works such as Büchner's *Woyzeck* and Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, setting them in a South African township to emphasize their relevance to daily life. In late 1966, they presented their first collaborative, improvisationally developed work, Fugard's *The Coat*. Fugard has said that reading Grotowski helped him realize new ways to work. He sought

techniques for releasing the creative potential of the actor. . . . The basic device has been that of Challenge and Response. As a writer-director I have challenged, and the actors have responded, not intellectually or merely verbally but with a totality of Being that at the risk of sounding pretentious I can only liken to a form of Zen spontaneity.

(Fugard 1974:xi–xii)

The Serpent Players created three important collaborative works. *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* focuses on the daily life of poor blacks who could not leave their registered township without proper papers, even to find work. *The Island* deals with a production of *Antigone* put on by two black prisoners on Robben Island, the infamous penal colony where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned. The third play, *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*, was inspired by the image of six police photographs of a man and a woman of different races having sexual intercourse. The play recounts what happens when a neighbor denounces the lovers.

A closer look at *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*

These three plays are highly theatrical – indeed, meta-theatrical – with sometimes humorous aspects, offering

exceptional acting opportunities for John Kani and Winston Ntshona, the black actors who, together with Fugard, devised them. *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* uses photography and play-acting to consider the ways that black township residents are forced to create and perform self-images in order to survive. Unlike *Statements*, where photography is used as a tool of political repression, here it is a means for the poor and oppressed to retain memories, record family relationships, create fantasies or fulfill dreams. As Styles the photographer says, “People would be forgotten, and their dreams with them, if it wasn’t for Styles. That’s what I do, friends. Put down, in my way, on paper the dreams and hopes of my people so that even their children’s children will remember a man . . .” (Fugard 1974:13). However, as the play shows, photography can also be used by the oppressed to outwit the oppressors.

As the play opens, Styles (performed by Kani), is reading a newspaper aloud and commenting to himself (and directly to the audience) on the stories and on his own experiences. We see that he is literate and clever. This 20-minute monologue permits the actor to take on many different roles: white and black, upper class and indigent, African and foreign. It is a tour de force of acting, while demonstrating that survival in the real world of apartheid requires a black person to perform many roles. We learn how Styles made a fool of his former boss, and how he realized that he must become self-employed to have self-respect. We also learn, in comic yet heroic detail, the obstacles he had to overcome to open the shop, from bureaucrats to cockroaches. The plot of the play, however, deals with the dilemma of Sizwe Bansi. In a flashback, Styles tells the audience how Sizwe (performed by Ntshona) came to his studio, seeking a photo of himself to send to his wife. Sizwe (who is illiterate) imagines writing a letter to his wife. In a flashback within the flashback, he enacts meeting his friend Buntu (also played by Kani). We learn that Sizwe’s permit to work in Johannesburg has been revoked. He will have to return home, where there are no jobs. Buntu goes into an alley to urinate, but encounters a dead body. The friends realize that they can

solve Sizwe’s problem by exchanging his identity card (and its photo) with the dead man, who had permission to remain and work in the city. Of course, Sizwe will only remain “dead” as long as he remains out of trouble – if the police check his fingerprints, the masquerade will end. The play questions the supposed truthfulness of photography and suggests the necessity of play-acting in order to survive.

Plays such as this, created in a collaborative process during apartheid, serve as examples of how “witnessing” can both create art and encourage social justice and political change. Without the participation of the white Fugard, the voices of these black actors – speaking for the oppressed peoples of South Africa – could never have been heard. They continue to be revived all over the world today, suggesting that “bearing witness” to the past may also enable audiences to more fully understand the present.

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Director, text, actor, and performance in the postmodern world

By Gary Jay Williams

Aristotle to postmodernism: Texts and contexts

Among the most significant developments in theatre globally in the last third of the twentieth century were the challenges to the Western theatre tradition in which the play text, and particularly the text of any play regarded as a “classic,” was understood to be the primary source and controlling authority for all meaning in a performance. As we have often seen in this book and will again in this chapter, theatrical performance in the indigenous theatres of Asia, Africa, Native America, and other non-European countries has never been viewed as being as text-anchored as it has been in Western theatre. In the West, and in Western-influenced theatres elsewhere, challenges to the primacy of the text began to be widely felt in the 1960s and 1970s. With this came the expansion of the role of the director and experiments in the collaborative creation of works for performance by companies. Socially committed directors began to use classical texts to reflect contemporary political and social justice issues. Experimental companies formed to create new works emphasizing non-verbal methods, often generated in improvisation, hoping to find alternatives to text-anchored representation.

The developments led to a major shift away from traditional thinking about the classics as a kind of literary protectorate, self-enclosed, timeless and universal, that should not be contaminated by contemporary culture or contemporized production. Postmodern performance, as we shall see, became interested in privileging the contemporary encounter with such texts, often insisting that the uneven seams between a play from the past and the culture of the present be exposed. In the postmodern view, any performance is bound to generate new meanings alongside the old; and *performance* is seen as the theatre’s authentic work. Early critics of this trend found in it the “imperialism” of a “director’s theatre” that they thought much more controlling and limiting than the “textual imperialism” from which such directors wanted to be free. By the early twenty-first century directors and actors were less likely to approach a classic text with some programmatic, unifying “concept” than they were to approach it through an open, non-hierarchical process that prizes the encounter between the contemporary sensibilities of a talented, imaginative company and a careful combing of a play text. Authenticity, it is believed, must be found in that negotiation, with any ambivalences and any disharmonies

between past and present in full view; there is no other path to authenticity and honesty. This chapter and its case studies illustrate these developments and explain the cultural and theoretical forces underlying them.

Aristotle had set the Western pattern of privileging the play text and the author in his *Poetics* (c.330 B.C.E.), the first systematic Western philosophic inquiry into the nature of theatre – or, to be more accurate, the drama. Aristotle focused on the formal attributes of tragedy, viewing it in effect as a naturally evolved, self-standing literary form, universal in appeal. In this discourse, theatrical production was seen as secondary, a kind of inferior supplement at best. “Song,” said Aristotle, was an “embellishment,” and “spectacle” was the “least artistic” element, “connected least” with “the art of poetry.” Tragedy was first a literary form: “For the power of tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors” (Aristotle 1971:52). To be sure, Aristotle offered the first major insights into the structure and effects of some of the first Western drama. The philosopher did not much explore the performing art of considerable complexity that the Greeks had been developing since the sixth century B.C.E., nor their audiences’ immediate social engagement with it. Their theatre had been born in the Dionysian festivals of Athens, and it encompassed choral song and dance, powerful acting, and the use of masks in large, carefully designed performance spaces. The comedies and tragedies dealt with problems of contemporary interest; controversial plays often stirred debate. (See Part I, Chapter 2.)

Aristotle’s textual analysis was ultimately transmitted with the canon of Greek philosophy through Western print culture (see Part II Introduction), along with the ancient play texts. For centuries, Western drama criticism looked more upon the language and structure of the stand-alone play text than upon the dynamics of performance. Many of the West’s great professional playwrights, such as Shakespeare and Lope de Vega, did not always adhere to the Aristotelian dictates beloved of the academy. Early in the twentieth century, some playwrights and performers mocked the received

traditions, including Alfred Jarry (1873–1907) (see the first case study following this chapter). But the first widely resonant challenges to the Western concept of the play text as the controlling center of meaning in performance came after World War II, along with challenges to other Western philosophical traditions. The most visible locus of the challenge in theatre was in the staging of the classics; it was here that the new role of the director stood out sharply.

In Western theatre in the first half of the twentieth century, the mission of the director of a classic – whether by the Greeks, Shakespeare, or Molière – was, in effect, to function as a kind of surrogate for the playwright. The Aristotelian privileging of the text converged with the modernist aesthetic goal of a seamless marriage of text and production. A production of a classic was to be the warm animation of a play’s (ostensibly) universal and unified meaning. A production was to be a transparent, unobtrusive window on that meaning. Underlying this was liberal humanism’s somewhat vague doctrine that art’s chief obligation was to sustain faith in human potential. Some stylistic variations in settings and costumes were acceptable as long as all sign systems led back to this.

By the 1960s, the full effects of the experience of World War II, including the industrial-scale slaughter of Jews by the Nazis at Auschwitz and other killing camps, made it hard for some to believe in that “divinity that shapes our ends” of which Hamlet speaks. It became equally hard to give full credit to the youthful Hamlet’s idealistic, renaissance characterization of humankind: “What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason . . . in apprehension how like a god” (5.2.10; 2.293–296). Many European playwrights, such as Samuel Beckett, took a dark, existential view of the human condition. (See the case study on Chekhov, Pirandello, and Beckett at the end of Chapter 9, p. 417.) The Polish critic Jan Kott, in his influential *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (1964), found in Shakespeare’s histories and tragedies a process of history that was violent, stark, and relentless, with no redemptive end. Directors began to explore classical texts for

opportunities to give voice to their despair over what seemed to be an endless cycle of meaningless suffering.

By contrast, in East Germany, playwright and director Bertolt Brecht took the Marxist initiative and led his Berliner Ensemble in creating a theatre intended to provoke social critique of Western traditions. The purpose of this politically proactive theatre was to lead audiences to re-examine and challenge inhumane systems and institutions, including Western capitalism. (See the case study on Brecht's *Mother Courage* at the end of Chapter 10, p. 450.) The East German Shakespeare scholar Robert Weimann, reflecting a new Marx-influenced method of cultural analysis, made the case that in the West, Shakespeare's plays had been reduced to a bland "classical" ideology, when in fact they had offered audiences of their time a complex blend of politics and play. Moreover, he argued that contemporary performances of his plays can never recover the past; they are bound to generate new meanings.

Both the existentialist and the Marxist views challenged the traditional view of art as dedicated to beauty and universal themes, self-enclosed, set apart from the contemporary world. Both trends had wide influence in Europe and Asia. Both trends meant more active directorial intervention.

Directors began to shape "concept" productions of ancient and modern classics. In effect, these often foregrounded the production itself as an encounter between a lapsed world and an anxious contemporary one. By the late 1960s, the idea of the director as the primary artist, or at least a coequal with the playwright, was emerging. It was becoming commonplace to speak not of Shakespeare's but Peter Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1970), not of Molière's but Roger Planchon's *Tartuffe* (1962, 1973), not of Euripides's but Suzuki Tadashi's *The Trojan Women* (1974). 

To be sure, productions in the past had always remodeled the classics to the sensibilities of their audiences, but from inside relatively congenial, homogeneous cultural discourses and always behind the requisite façade of due diligence in honoring the literary legacy. Now, more profound cultural gaps had opened. Some

directors deconstructed the plays of the Greeks and Shakespeare to critique any grand views of human potential embedded in them – which the humanist tradition had emphasized – and to mine any darker elements (for an explanation of "deconstruction," see the case study, "The crisis of representation and the authenticity of performance" following this chapter). When Peter Brook (1925–) directed *King Lear* with the Royal Shakespeare Company (1962), he emphasized in his staging any possibilities the text offered for an existential vision of an endlessly cruel, godless universe and eliminated some lines that countered that vision (see the discussion later in this chapter). By 1974, Klaus-Michael Grüber's *The Bacchae* at the Berlin Schaubühne had taken matters much further, going beyond any attempt either to "recover" the ancient play by Euripides or to reinvent Euripides as a post-war existentialist. Grüber's production instead critiqued those projects, staging a never-ending process of the stitching and restitching together of ancient fragments, open to varying readings (Fischer-Lichte 1999:16–17). At the opening of the production, the weakened Dionysus, god of the theatre, was rolled out on a hospital gurney, barely able to speak his name in the opening line, "I am Dionysius, the son of Zeus" (Euripides 1959:155) (see Figure 12.1).

This production and such a directorial approach may be described as postmodern. A brief discussion of this term will help clarify why responsibility was devolving onto the director to be a creator of a particular vision for a production. Postmodernism is a much-debated term that has had many applications and many theorists, including Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, and Hans Bertens (see the companion website for an extended bibliography). The concept is as unstable and many-centered as the world out of which it comes and which it tries to describe. It has been used both to signal liberation from modernism and to signal an apocalyptic collapse of all possibility of meanings. It has early roots in theories of architecture, and it is also surely the result in some part of increasing diversity culturally. Among the chief attributes of postmodern work, in the theatre and



Figure 12.1

Dionysus (Michael König) on a hospital gurney in the opening scene of Euripides's *The Bacchae*, directed by Klaus-Michael Grüber, Schaubühne Theatre Company, Berlin 1974.

Photo © Helga Kneidel.

other arts, has been the critiquing of traditional processes of representation. This is born in part of a deep skepticism about modernism's desire to wrap experience in a single, unified, cohesive vision ostensibly suitable to all cultures. The postmodern perspective is characterized by what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard describes as "a deep incredulity toward metanarratives," that is to say, descriptions of any aspect of the human condition that aspire to be singular, unifying, totalizing truths (Lyotard 1984:xxiv).

Grüber's staging of *The Bacchae* foregrounded the very process of performance itself because he wanted to stage a skepticism about what traditional representation can accomplish. For such a radically postmodern approach, Steven Connor's characterization of postmodern theatre is apt: it asserts "the presence of performance against the inauthenticity of representation" (Connor 1989:154). Traditional theatre approaches to both classical and modern drama seemed to hold out a promise of eternal, redeeming truths lying behind the plays. Postmodern performance by contrast promises no such "full presence" but only the "empty presence" of the here and now (Connor 1989:140–141). It refuses to allow the viewer to come to rest on a singular, comfortable, stable meaning or value. Not all postmodern theatre is as radical as Grüber's *The Bacchae*. But generally postmodern performance wants to provoke the viewer/reader to be aware of, and to critique the very strategies of representation.

Some described this as a crisis of representation, and one of the most urgent and influential theatre voices decrying the limits of representation in conventional, text-bound theatre was that of Antonin Artaud (1896–1948). In a landmark work of theatre theory, the French theatre visionary called for a "theatre of cruelty." He envisioned, in highly charged language, a theatre that would "break through language" to access the mysterious and darker forces of life left untouched by literary masterpieces and the sterile reverence accorded them (Artaud 1958:7). His book, *The Theatre and Its Double*, challenged language-centered theatre as wholly inadequate to the deeper purposes of theatre, and from

the 1960s to the present, it influenced the work of many directors. (His ideas are discussed later in this chapter and in a case study following it, p. 531.)

The new directorial strategies – reinterpreting texts, reading texts resistantly, or "interrogating" texts – sometimes were congenial with, or even influenced by developments in twentieth-century literary theory, which grew from the same cultural soil. Structuralist critics had suggested that the structures in literary works, like the structures of language, are simply the means by which humankind tries to make meaning out of chaos. Meaningful structure in literature is a projection of human consciousness, as are the structures of all other cultural phenomena such as myths, social rituals, sports, or forms of entertainment. Their origins are not to be found in some immaterial, Platonic truths. Then in the mid-1960s, Jacques Derrida critiqued the structuralist assumption that language was a stable system of signifiers (symbolic references) representing stable meanings. Derrida argued that language was a system of constructed signs disseminating a variety of possible meanings; language was always a dance of relative signifiers around the absence of a foundational center that was once thought to supply stable, transcendental meanings. As a human construction then, all language – and all texts – can be seen as being embedded with particular ideologies – local value systems and social practices. "Text" began to be used as a term for any symbolic system a culture might construct, be it a religious ritual, clothing fashions, or *Hamlet*. The critical movement that Derrida's work inspired, known as deconstruction, began to investigate the array of meanings (often conflicting) available in a text, and the ideological premises implicit in them, with special interest in the self-contradictions in a text. Given the flux of meanings a work generates, it sometimes can seem to be at cross-purposes with itself – not alarming unless one were expecting of art a perfect unity found nowhere else in human endeavor. Criticism also began to recognize the roles of different readers/viewers in determining the meaning of a work; the notion of a heroic author as the source of unifying meaning began to look like a

comfortable humanist assumption, impossible to grant in the face of the instabilities and constructedness of language.

One effect of all of these critiques was to remove literary works from the exclusive status in which they were viewed as self-enclosed high art and to view them as products of particular historical cultures carrying ideologies that needed to be “unpacked.” Feminist critics saw the classics reproducing oppressive patriarchy. Materialist critics saw them reinforcing mythologies congenial to capitalism. Brecht offered, in theory and practice, an anti-Aristotelian, non-illusionistic theatre that aimed at critiquing some of these Western mythologies.

The Western re-evaluations of theatre practice were also the result of an increasing interest in other cultures. One important development was the turn by directors to the theatre traditions of the East. Prominent directors and visionaries, including Artaud, Brecht, Jean-Louis Barrault, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, and Ariane Mnouchkine found inspiration in traditional Asian performance arts, including Balinese dance, Beijing Opera, Indian *kathakali*, and Japanese *nō* and *kabuki* theatres. These represented traditions with no binary division between performance and text. As we have seen in this book, the Sanskrit poetics of theatre, Bharata’s *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the foundational work for traditional Indian theatre (written sometime between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E.), offered an encyclopedic account not only of play forms but of all the elements of performance, including music, dance, and acting (Bharata 1967, 1961) (see Chapter 3). Traditional Japanese theatre theory focused on the work of the actor, from works by the playwright Zeami Motokiyo (1363–1443), who articulated the concepts of *nō* theatre, through the four volumes on *kabuki* theatre published in the eighteenth century, called *Actors’ Analects*. The scripts of traditional Japanese theatre include vocal notations for the actor, and because of the fluidity in narrative voices, texts are not limited to dialog spoken “in character.” One of the results of Eastern influence on Western theatre was that Western performance training began to incorporate Asian martial arts methods, such as *taiquiguan*, *kendo*, and *kalariipayattu*,

using them as holistic approaches to physical control, heightened awareness, and creative expression. For some Western artists, Eastern theatre traditions seemed creatively liberating, and some found in them alternatives to exhausted Western spiritual traditions. Sometimes the cultural road ran two ways; directors in Asia were discovering Artaud, Brecht, and Grotowski. Artaud’s *The Theatre and Its Double* was published in Japan in 1965.

This chapter now turns to selected major works by some of the experimental directors between the 1960s and the 1990s, some of whom were at first characterized as *auteur* directors. This term, borrowed from film criticism, points to the director as the primary artist rather than the writer. The borrowing itself reminds us of the profound impact that film, as a medium of images, circulating internationally, had on the word-based theatre. The powerful imagery in the films of directors such as Sweden’s Ingmar Bergman and Japan’s Kurosawa Akira challenged stage directors and designers to enlarge their own expressive vocabularies. The artists and productions discussed below represent the trends in directors’ negotiations with classical texts and the creation of new “texts” between the 1960s and the turn of the century. It will be useful to begin with explanations of the influential theories and practice of Artaud and Grotowski, which allow deeper consideration of the changing concepts of the function of texts, directors, and actors. The chapter concludes with examples of what has been characterized as image theatre.

Director and text in Antonin Artaud’s “theatre of cruelty”

In the opening pages of *The Theatre and Its Double* (a collection of writings originally published in 1938), Artaud wrote of a deep “rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas and signs that are their representation” (Artaud 1958:7). He saw a cleavage between spirit and body and between civilized culture and the dangerous forces at the heart of existence. To restore unity, the theatre must give direct access to these forces, without the obstacle of indirect representation, without written language. He called provocatively for a

“theatre of cruelty” and sought to liberate audiences from linear storytelling, from keyhole realism with its character psychology, and from all the masterpieces of the past (1958:7–13, 33–47, 84–92). The famous title of his Chapter 6 is “No More Masterpieces.” Plot (Aristotle’s “imitation of an action”) and character – the all-absorbing spheres of interest for modernist directors and actors (until plays such as Beckett’s) – were vestiges of a diminished form of theatre. Artaud envisioned a primal, non-verbal theatre affecting the whole organism, with performances enveloping the spectator using incantation, ancient musical instruments, rhythmical dance, symbolic gestures, masks, manikins, and ritual-like costumes. He was inspired by his brief experience with Balinese dance theatre, admiring its color, ceremonial movement, sensuousness, prodigality, and ostensible connection to the metaphysical. Artaud writes mystically of the need for the actor to access a realm of passions through the body. The contact between performers and the audience would be intense; performances would take place in a whitewashed hall with galleries above; audiences would follow the actors to different acting areas (1958:89–100).

In Artaud’s theatre, the director would be the author of such theatre works; there would be no playwright in the conventional sense. As to the material to be performed, “we shall not act a written play,” he writes, but “make attempts at direct staging, around themes, facts, or known works” (1958:98). He suggests, for example, performing an erotic tale by the Marquis de Sade, staging incidents about the conquest of Mexico, Elizabethan plays “stripped of their texts,” and romantic melodramas – any material that would allow “a passionate and convulsive conception of life,” and correspond to “the unrest characteristic of our epoch” (1958:89–122).

At the fierce heart of his vision, the ultimate goal was an embodied performance that would give access to some metaphysical plenitude, unimpeded by the secondary representations of written language and character impersonation. (This is explained further in the case study following this chapter.) This goal – theatre

without representation – was one neither Artaud nor his followers ever achieved. But Artaud’s mystical jeremiad against a text-based theatre opened a path for experiments seeking more sensuous theatres, and theatres that drew audiences’ attention to the limits of illusionistic representation.

Experimental directors in many nations took up his charge to become creators of a sensuous *mise en scène*. Some assembled “texts” for productions that privileged theatrical vocabularies over the textual. In Paris in 1968, Jean-Louis Barrault (1910–1994) staged a three-hour adaptation of writings by Rabelais, and Ariane Mnouchkine’s Théâtre du Soleil company assembled a collage of sketches on the French revolution for *1789. The Serpent* (1969), created by American director Joseph Chaikin (1935–) with his Open Theatre company, was a collage of material from the Bible and scenes from the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Japanese director Suzuki Tadashi created several collages of material from a range of plays in his own hybrid style. Called *On the Dramatic Passions* (1969), these included the *kabuki* classic, *Kanadehon Chūshingura* (*The Treasury of Loyal Retainers*), *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1898) by Edmond Rostand, and *Zō* (*The Elephant*, 1961) by Betsuyaku Minoru. Polish director Tadeusz Kantor (1915–) created his *The Dead Class* (1975) using an amalgam of his own writings and works by other Polish writers. The “text” of Peter Brook’s *Orghast* (1971) was an arrangement of musical phonemes and fragments of ancient languages by poet Ted Hughes, intoned by the actors along with ancient music. Performed in the ruins of Persepolis at the Shiraz Festival in Iran, it opened with the Prometheus myth (Brook’s epic *Mahabharata* (1985)  is taken up in a case study in Chapter 13).

Artaud himself had tried his concepts without success in his 1935 staging of an adaptation of *The Cenci* (1819), a romantic revenge play by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822). But his writings were internationally influential. By the late 1960s, Artaud was influencing directors in Japan, and “No More Masterpieces” was the title of a graduate directing course in the Yale School of Drama in the United States. By the end of the

century, as we shall see, it was clear that Artaud had offered much more than the anti-authoritarianism the 1960s counterculture found in him.

The holy actor as text in Jerzy Grotowski's "poor theatre"

The Polish director Jerzy Grotowski (1934–1999) may be said to have brought Artaud's anti-textual vision into practice, but with a special emphasis on a communal theatre that he saw as being a modern equivalent of old communities of belief. At its center would be the "holy" actor. Grotowski conceived of a "poor theatre," stripped of elaborate production elements of the commercial theatre. Scripts were to be tapped for their archetypal human dimensions and productions forged in collective collaborations. The "holy actor" would be an ascetic athlete of the soul, physicalizing the sufferings and ecstasies of the human spirit, uniting psychic and bodily powers to achieve "translumination" (Grotowski 1968:15–59). The actor was now, in effect the chief poet in this theatre, creating "his own psychoanalytic language of sounds and gestures in the same way that a great poet creates his own language of words." In this morally astringent theatre, the actor was to sacrifice personal psychology and eliminate in the body any resistance to full expression through a *via negativa*: a holy path of eradication of the self to expose primal truths. Grotowski limited his audiences to 100 to assure immediacy. His theoretical language was sometimes obscure and mystical, redolent of both his Polish Catholic background and existentialist despair. But clearly, performance itself was to be the authentic center, the object and subject of performance, and not a representation of another thing. Among the sources on which Grotowski drew were Stanislavsky's method of physical actions, Meyerhold's biomechanics, Indian *kathakali*, the Beijing Opera, Japanese *nō* theatre, and Carl Jung's theory of archetypes that activate the collective unconscious.

Grotowski's productions in his intimate Laboratory Theatre in Wrocław included a free adaptation of *Akropolis* (1962), a play by Polish playwright, Stanisław Wyspiański (1869–1907). In the original, set in the

Royal Palace at Krakow (a Polish version of the Athenian acropolis – the height of civilization), figures from its tapestries come alive and are led by the resurrected Christ to redeem Europe. In Grotowski's dark, ironic conception, the acropolis was the extermination camp at Auschwitz (not far from Krakow), a symbolic cemetery of Western civilization, where Jewish prisoners labored to build cremation ovens and fantasized about love and happiness.  In this and *Apocalypse cum figures* (1969), the performances by Grotowski's key actor, Ryszard Cieslak, seemed to realize Grotowski's vision. He reportedly achieved a trance-like state, an interpenetration of actor and role in an externalization of inner suffering – the actor becoming both subject and object. Here, an actor's intense creative process became one with the performance, became the "text" (Figure 12.2).

When Grotowski's company played in New York in 1970, American theatre critic John Simon, deeply rooted in language-based theatre, ridiculed Grotowski's pretensions to a non-verbal and mythic theatre, and described *Akropolis* as "nonsense," "repulsive," "humorless," and "theatre of collective self-analysis" (Simon 1975:148–163). But Grotowski's productions toured the world, and together with his writings and workshops, influenced many directors. In the late 1970s, he renounced this phase of his work, believing his ideas had been misunderstood, especially in America, and that he had not broken through theatre's division between the actor and the passive spectator.

Peter Brook's Shakespeare and contemporary authenticity

The productions of British director Peter Brook (1925–) represent a wide array of experiments across 40 years that have established him as one of the most innovative directors in twentieth-century theatre, and at times a controversial one. He symbolized the *auteur* director, on a quest to revitalize Western theatre, renegotiating with old texts and creating new ones.

He brought Artaud, Brecht, and Beckett to bear on his 1962 *King Lear* with the then-new Royal



Figure 12.2

Ryszard Cieslak as Esau, one of the Jewish prisoners in Auschwitz, dreaming of the freedom of the life of a hunter, in Jerzy Grotowski's production of *Akropolis* at the Polish Laboratory Theatre, Wrocław, 1962.

Photo © The Grotowski Center, Wrocław.

Shakespeare Company, but all within an impeccable aesthetic typical of Brook. He saw the play through an existential lens similar to that of Jan Kott. Kott compared the play to Beckett's *Endgame*, reading it as a depiction of the suffering of humanity in a world without hope of meaning and redemption (Kott 1964:87–124). He cut from the play the attempt of one character to prevent the gouging out of the eyes of the elderly Gloucester; he in fact located the scene downstage close to the audience and brought up the house lights for this inhuman scene to strip away any comfort that theatrical illusion might have afforded. Brook conducted theatre of cruelty experiments in 1964 with members of the Royal Shakespeare Company which culminated in their production of *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul*

Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Director of The Marquis de Sade, written by Peter Weiss. Weiss's verse text rendered a morally chaotic world in grim corporal imagery. The madness of the inmates was graphically physicalized by the actors in an intimate acting space. Charlotte Corday's murder of Marat in his bath was performed ritualistically. When a courtier's epilogue at the end of the inmates' play offered pompous platitudes about the glory of France and the progress of Enlightenment rationalism, its effect was to agitate the inmates into a frenzied march and threats to overtake the asylum. Insofar as the madness within the asylum seemed to have more to recommend it than the sanity without, the ending was to be read as a comment on the "civilized" Western political powers

who in the 1950s and 1960s seemed intent on destroying each other with nuclear weapons.

For Brook and others, theatre and society had to be revitalized, and a new relationship established between actors and audiences. In his manifesto *The Empty Space* (1968), he called for a “holy theatre,” marked by sincerity and authenticity, which would replace the packaging processes of the “deadly theatre” of a consumer society. Brook’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* with the Royal Shakespeare Company (1970) sought to achieve some of these goals with a bright, contemporary theatricality that

supplanted the long-defunct romantic stage traditions for this play. With its fairies on trapezes, its non-illusionistic white box setting, its flower-children young lovers, and its playful eroticism, the production embodied for many in the 1970s the work of imaginations liberated from a repressive and dishonest past (see Figure 12.3). It seemed to offer the promise of a new age of authentic young love born out of the youthful social revolution against an older order. The full text of the play, spoken with rare spontaneity, registered as fresh, but the performance itself became the ground of authenticity and the coequal of the text.



Figure 12.3

Oberon (Alan Howard) casts a spell on Titania (Sara Kestelman) in her “bower,” assisted by Puck (John Kane), in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, directed by Peter Brook with the Royal Shakespeare Company, 1970. Setting by Sally Jacobs.

Photo © Thomas F. Holte, courtesy Shakespeare Centre Library, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Brook's *Dream* was not the first to do this with Shakespeare (see the case study on global Shakespeare at the end of this chapter, p. 537), but its impact in an era of social upheaval and its mainstream visibility (it toured world capitals for three years) made it a reference point for performance practice for Shakespeare and other classics long after memories of its flower children had faded. It did more than make a case for "contemporizing" Shakespeare (although it spawned many superficial imitations). It altered popular notions of what productions of classics do. More and more, productions of classical plays were regarded as transactions between past and present, and, as Robert Weimann and others have noted, bound to generate new meanings (Williams 1997:213–233; Worthen 2003:28–58). Joseph Roach has characterized performance as an act of surrogation, recalling and performing the past in the form of the present (Roach 1996:221). From the 1970s forward, performance negotiations with the classics became commonplace – with varying degrees of aggressiveness and by directors and companies representing different points on an increasingly broad cultural spectrum. By the end of the century, this practice had reached the mainstream marketplace of film. Julie Taymor's film *Titus* (1999), based on Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, and Baz Luhrmann's film *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), were offering a postmodern dialectic between the historical pastness of these plays and a hyperreal contemporary present. These films juxtaposed the plays' Elizabethan verse with contemporary film's hyperspeed language of images, sometimes with dissonance, and sometimes with remarkable synergy. Costumes and settings were literally layered with conflicting remnants of the historical past and bold swatches from the contemporary world. In all, performance and text critiqued one another.

Among a new generation of Japanese theatre artists who sought to revitalize their theatre, especially important were the directors Terayama Shūji and Suzuki Tadashi, both considered in this chapter, and Ninagawa Yukio (1935–), whose work is discussed in the case study

on global Shakespeare at the end of this chapter. All emerged during Japan's Little Theatre movement (*angura* – underground) in the 1960s in which many directors and playwrights rebelled – in various ways – against the Western-derived drama and theatre practices in Japan (*shingeki*). Many were also involved in radical anti-Vietnam war and anti-government demonstrations. Overall, their work reflects Japan's vexed negotiations with its own past and its cultural longings to be a presence on the global stage as a modern nation after its defeat in World War II. How would it remain connected with its own pre-Western traditions and still find, after the American occupation, its own new identity? As Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei has noted, Japan's theatrical innovators attempted variously to destroy, redefine, or reinvent the nation's traditional theatre forms such as *nō*, *kyōgen*, *bunraku*, and *kabuki*. "Some aligned themselves with, or set themselves against, the Western avant-garde; and some searched for totally new modes of expression and identity" (Sorgenfrei 2005a:131).

Terayama Shūji's disquieting critique of theatrical convention

Terayama Shūji (1935–1983), playwright, poet, director, filmmaker, and essayist, led his experimental company, Tenjō Sajiki, from 1967 until his death at 47 in 1983. He created an arc of fresh, eclectic work that challenged theatrical conventions and left a reputation of legendary proportions in Japan. Early works written and directed by Terayama, such as *The Hunchback of Aomori* (*Aomori-ken no semushi otoko*, 1967), *The Dog God* (*Inugami*, 1967) or *Heretics* (*Jashūmon*, 1971) featured surreal evocations of Buddhist superstitions and old-time side-shows, coupled with psychedelic music and the discontent of post-war youth.

Some of Terayama's works might be characterized as "metatheatre," a term usually used to point to works that trigger audience awareness of the operations of theatrical invention. Plays such as *Opium War* (*Ahen sensō*, 1972) and *Blindman's Letter* (*Mōjin shokan*, 1973) forced audiences into terrifying total darkness;

black-robed, sword-wielding actors in *Heretics* literally assaulted audience members, resulting in hysteria, claustrophobia, and even violence.

From the early 1970s, Terayama also created outdoor “city dramas” that often involved unsuspecting citizens as audience or even as actors. For example, *Knock* (*Nokku*, 1975) consisted of sites and events spread across 27 locations throughout a district of Tokyo, to which spectators could journey over a 30-hour period. Critic Senda Akihiko wrote of following a map leading him to various sites, including a clock shop with an array of broken clocks lined up in front, a pile of broken toys in the window, and no one inside. Had it been so arranged for this event, or had it always looked that way? When Senda and others followed a married couple arguing their way loudly through the streets, what did bystanders make of the spectacle? Who were the actors? Who were spectators? What was Senda to make of the four people emerging from a manhole, swathed in bandages? The work seems akin to the “Happenings” in New York in the 1960s. By blurring the boundaries that audiences expect will separate their experience of art from other experiences, such projects hope to provoke reassessments of the processes by which theatres and spectators construct meaning. The experience led the critic Senda to a reappraisal of his own decoding processes (Senda 1997:56–60). Other major works written and staged by Terayama included such unorthodox plays as the sadomasochistic *Directions to Servants* (*Nuhikun*, 1979), or the similarly subversive *Lemmings* (*Remingu*, various versions 1979–1983).  Some plays incorporated a series of visually striking scenes in which the walls around people imprisoned in private pursuits of individuality dissolved, exposing them to random, sometimes violent experiences.

Suzuki Tadashi's Euripides

Suzuki Tadashi (1939–) founded a company in 1966 with playwright Betsuyaku Minoru (1937–), who had been influenced by Samuel Beckett's plays and who went on to write plays critical of the Japanese middle class. By 1970, Suzuki had become the sole director and was

constructing collages of texts and performances that privileged no one author. He developed a physical training method for actors now used internationally. Suzuki perceived the upper body as the origin of the conceptual and the conscious, the lower body as the physical and the unconscious, grounded in reality, and the two as always in tension. He devised acting exercises, influenced by *nō* and *kabuki* acting and Japanese martial arts, through which the actor is to create a powerful stage presence through highly energized but restrained physical motions. These include slow ritualized movements, rhythmic foot stamping, crouching, and tension-informed stances, sometimes combined with vocalizations (Carruthers and Takahashi 2004:70–97). All of these have become expressive parts of his productions.  Suzuki's “grammar of the feet” is his means of forcefully imprinting the presence of the body on the performance; it is an existential affirmation but one also rooted in *nō* traditions. Japanese critics sometimes have superficially – and incorrectly – characterized his work as neo-*nō*.

Suzuki Tadashi's radical adaptation of *The Trojan Women* in 1974  was the first time a Japanese director had not imitated Western staging conventions for a Greek classic – which is some indication of just how far Japan had gone from its attempt to assimilate Western theatre in its *shingeki* movement. From its opening in Tokyo in 1974 through its final performance in Helsinki in 1989, *The Trojan Women* played in 34 cities around the world, and some compared it for importance with Brecht's *Mother Courage* and Brook's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2004:124). Suzuki's production combined Euripides's play, in a Japanese translation by Matsudaira Chiaki, with commissioned pieces by the modern Japanese poet, Ōoka Makoto. For his vision of the ancient tragedy about the destruction of Troy and the suffering of its women, Suzuki resisted all conventional ideas of an ancient, noble classical world and created images evoking memories of the nuclear annihilation of Hiroshima, still fresh in the minds of the Japanese. A homeless elderly Japanese woman who had lost husband, sons, and daughters in the war, entered

carrying a small bundle of the remnants of her life and sat downstage, imagining/remembering the events taking place behind her, at one point delivering a requiem by Ōoka. In the premiere version, two well-known actors from *nō* and *shingeki* (respectively, Kanze Hisao as an old homeless person and Ichihara Etsuko as Cassandra and Andromache) worked in their acting styles alongside the Suzuki-trained Shiraishi Kayoko, playing the role of the homeless person who in the fantasy becomes Hecuba. Major characters were presented in a *kabuki*-style dumb-show (*danmarī*). They were led on stage by Jizō, Buddhist guardian deity of children, who then watched impassively, unable to intervene in the horrors of war. The chorus women were survivors of both Troy and Hiroshima; the Greek soldiers were *kabuki* samurai who violently raped Andromache and dismembered her son (a doll) on stage. At one point, the chorus of Trojan women circled in a slow, rhythmic dance, defiantly stamping their feet, lifting their knees to their chests. Suzuki experimented with various endings that disrupted any easy consolations. In the premiere, a group of Japanese tourists (including a giant Japanese soldier) appeared on a guided tour of the battlefield at Troy. In the 1979 touring version, the cast exited to leave the old homeless woman sorting through her few belongings and trying to sleep, somewhat reminiscent of a character from Beckett, watched over by Jizō (2004:124–153).

Suzuki also staged adaptations of Euripides's *The Bacchae*, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, Chekhov's *Ivanov*, and directed a notable revival of *John Silver* (*Jon Shirubā*, 1965) by Kara Jūrō (1940–), one of Japan's most important post-war playwrights, known for his non-linear, myth-like works. Suzuki is very clear about his role as an *auteur* director. Speaking of his freedoms with Shakespeare's text in his *Tale of Lear*, he said: "[T]he first responsibility of a director is to define what interests him the most, what resonates with his current concerns" (Mulryne 1998:84). From 1976 to 1999, much of Suzuki's work was done in the rural village of Toga, in the mountains of central Japan, six hours from Tokyo, to which he moved seeking greater artistic freedom.

With the help of government subsidies, Toga Art Park there became a large complex of theatres and rehearsal halls, providing a laboratory for experimental collaborations with international visiting artists and a pilgrimage destination for the tourists who came to its festivals. He renamed his troupe the Suzuki Company of Toga (SCOT). In 1996, he accepted the position of artistic director of the Shizuoka Performing Arts Center (SPAC), where the international theatre festival is now held. The theatres and laboratories at Toga are now devoted primarily to training young theatre artists, especially directors. Currently, the Toga center is under the artistic direction of visionary stage director Miyage Satoshi (1959–). Among Suzuki's recent passions is the creation of the BeSeTo Festival (Beijing-Seoul-Tokyo), meant to foster cultural awareness and greater understanding between China, South Korea, and Japan.

French negotiations with the classics: Roger Planchon's Molière

Molière began to be reworked in France in the midst of the student demonstrations against cultural institutions and the workers' strikes that peaked in 1968. French director Roger Planchon (1931–) led the French revolution in directing in the period, viewing the director as an equal of the author. Influenced by Artaud, Brecht, and Marx, Planchon is known both for his political commitment and his "scenic writing" (his term), that is, his creation of vivid stage images that convey his vision of a play (Bradby and Williams 1988:51–56).

In his staging of Molière's *Tartuffe* (1962) at his theatre in a working-class suburb of Lyon, Orgon's home was a kind of mini-Versailles palace. Orgon's devotion to the bogus cleric, Tartuffe, had an unconscious homosexual side, adding sexual confusion to blind religious devotion. The final scene, in which Orgon is saved at the last instant, was staged as a chilling demonstration of the absolute power of Louis XIV. In the 1973 version, Orgon's house seemed to be being dismantled room by room, and Orgon and his family were herded into a

dungeon beneath the stage floor before being released. There have been many interpretations of the original ending of Molière's play (see the Chapter 4 case study, p. 211); Planchon apparently was suggesting that the bourgeois Orgon was being stripped of far more than his delusions about Tartuffe. (The work of another, prominent postmodern French director, Ariane Mnouchkine, is taken up in Chapter 13 in the discussion of intercultural theatre.)

The United States: The Performance Group, La Mama, and The Wooster Group

Canonical texts from Euripides to Arthur Miller were reworked by radical United States theatre companies. *Dionysus in 69* (1968), was a rendering of Euripides's *The Bacchae* by Richard Schechner (1934–) with his Performance Group. Staged in a converted garage on Wooster Street in lower Manhattan, it combined narrative and extra-textual, faux-ritual scenes. Dionysian sexual freedom was set in conflict with repression, but with some suggestion of the dangers of unrestrained freedom. Orgiastic nude scenes, which audience members entered into, gave the production more notoriety than its aims. The group hoped the production would have some influence on the 1968 presidential election, which was taking place against a backdrop of protests against the Vietnam war, civil rights demonstrations, and the assassinations of civil rights leader Martin Luther King and presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy. Richard Nixon, who ran on a “law and order” theme, was ultimately elected over Hubert Humphrey. Schechner put into play his ideas of “environmental theatre”: no demarcation between actor and spectator space; multiple events competing with each other around the hall to diffuse any single focus; and actors interacting with audience members in character and personally (Aronson 2000:97–102). Amid the social turmoil, the interest in the communal event and any authenticity it might confer was the priority, not the text, and that interest characterized several of the American collective theatres in the 1960s.

The Romanian director, Andrei Serban (1943–), brought new rigor to the American experimental scene at Ellen Stewart's La Mama Experimental Theatre Club in the early 1970s. Artaud was the inspiration for his *Fragments of a Trilogy* (1974), composed of portions of Euripides's *Medea*, *Electra*, and *The Trojan Women*, which he developed over a three-year period. Serban had worked with Peter Brook on the non-verbal *Orghast* project in Iran in 1970–1971, and his chief objective here was to create a non-verbal, aural score to communicate the power and passion of the Greek plays. Fragments of Senecan Latin, Greek, and English, were woven together with primitive vocalizations of the actors and Elizabeth Swados's original score. The *Trilogy* was staged in spaces located throughout an empty, rectangular, galleried hall, much as Artaud had called for, and the audience moved to follow the action. Critics of a wide-range of sensibilities thought the basic emotions of the plays – fear, love, hate – were communicated powerfully in *Trilogy*, and it achieved nearly legendary status and was revived in 1999.

The Wooster Group became well known for radical reworkings of canonical works. This American company develops its pieces in collective improvisations and experiments, from which director Elizabeth LeCompte (1944–) shapes the final collage product. Departing from the quest for communal authenticity that was characteristic of the 1960s, the Wooster Group performs deconstructive critiques of the processes by which meaning is produced; it is keen to perform a skepticism about meaning-making in a postmodern, mediatized culture.  In the 1980s, the group deconstructed both *Our Town* (1938) by Thornton Wilder (1897–1975) and *The Crucible* (1953) by Arthur Miller. *Route 1 & 9* (1981) juxtaposed portions of *Our Town* with a recreation of a routine recorded in 1965 by black artist Pigmeat Martin, called “The Party,” and a sexually graphic film. The intent was to explode Wilder's picture of an all-white, small-town America as an embodiment of universal human experience. The routes in the title referred to the film's scenes of sexually explicit behavior during a van ride on highways running not through Wilder's Grover's Corners but through the industrial sites and oil refineries of urban New Jersey.

The Wooster Group frequently uses technology – videotaped segments, microphones, recorded music or voices, calling attention to how technologies affect meaning, and to the audience’s processes of interpreting a performance. Such self-reflexive strategies short-circuit any continuities in Wooster works. In *L.S.D. (. . . Just the High Points . . .)* (1984), the Wooster Group critiqued Miller’s play, a picture of hysteria over witchcraft in colonial America that Miller intended as a metaphor for the “red scare” of the McCarthy investigations into communists in America at mid-century. In the production’s four parts, numbers of devices were in play

in a discontinuous collage of scenes. In “Part Two – Salem,” portions of the dialog were read at a table with microphones, seeming to evoke and query both the infamous televised McCarthy hearings and Miller’s play itself as processes leading to truth (Figure 12.4). The women were dressed in historical costumes, suggesting their historical, gendered position. The men, by contrast, wore contemporary clothes and, unlike the women, were given microphones, tools of authority. This and other devices pointed to the limits of Miller’s play, which as Philip Auslander writes, seems “unable to represent the persecution of witches as the effort of a patriarchal



Figure 12.4

The *Crucible* sequence from The Wooster Group’s *L.S.D. (. . . Just the High Points . . .)*, directed by Elizabeth LeCompte. L-R: Matthew Hansell, Ron Vawter, Nancy Reilly, Peyton Smith, Elion Sacker, Kate Valk, and Anna Kohler.

Photo © Nancy Campbell.

society to suppress independent women” (Auslander 1992:92). The formidable white actress, Kate Valk, played Tituba, the black slave girl (Miller’s invention), blacked up in minstrel-style, with a fake “darky” accent. By invoking an American theatre tradition of racist representation in minstrel shows and Aunt Jemima figures (Rouse 1992:148–151), the performance sought to probe the authority of Miller’s representation of race in America.

Such summations of Wooster’s work always risk reducing to rationalized themes its flow of images, in which Wooster’s ultimate subject is meaning-making processes. With *L.S.D. (. . . Just the High Points . . .)*, the group was performing a deconstructive (and sometimes confusing) process of interrogating a play that had been written in a mode of realism and that was grounded in an American version of liberal humanism. (See the discussion of realism and liberal humanism in Chapter 9 and its case study on Ibsen’s *A Doll House*.)

The postmodern uses by these American directors of copyright-protected texts led to two notable legal confrontations and further debates over the new freedoms of aggressive directors. Postmodern performances that would deconstruct written works still protected by copyrights are, in effect, challenging property rights. Miller’s threat of legal action forced the closing of *L.S.D. (. . . Just the High Points . . .)*, even after the Wooster Group had eliminated Miller’s actual words. In 1984, Samuel Beckett and Grove Press threatened legal action against the American Repertory Theatre at Harvard University when director Joanne Akalitis (b. 1937) set Beckett’s *Endgame* in a subway station that suggested the action took place in the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust. Beckett’s text was spoken almost unaltered, but Akalitis did not follow the explicit stage directions of the playwright who is especially adept with stage images in his minimalist poetics. One critic sympathetic to the author asked, “Is a radical change in setting not *truly* a textual alteration?” (Oppenheim 1994:4). At the eleventh hour, the parties agreed to a program insert in which Beckett, deeply distressed, wrote: “Any production of *Endgame* which ignores my stage directions

is completely unacceptable to me. . . . Anybody who cares for the work couldn’t fail to be disgusted by it [the American Repertory Theatre production]” (Kalb 1989:79). Arguably, Akalitis’s setting reduced Beckett’s metaphor for humankind struggling in an endlessly meaningless world by giving the play a local habitation and attributing the human condition to one particular catastrophic cause. Jonathan Kalb notes that this was not the first time that directors had not followed Beckett’s stage directions scrupulously, but by 1984, instances of such directorial practice were numerous and becoming more visible. Kalb and others deplored Akalitis’s staging of *Endgame*, suggesting that the exercise of directorial authority of this kind was as imperialistic as the so-called “textual imperialism” that such directors were “paranoid” about (Kalb 1989:149–154).

Whatever one’s position on these cases, they highlight the differences between the modernist faith in the self-sufficiency of a classic text and the postmodernist insistence that negotiations with a text are the theatre’s natural work. These cases help us see the differences between a theatre practice in which the play text is seen as the source and controlling authority for all meaning in a performance and a practice that foregrounds the process of performance itself as a ground of authenticity – performance as at least the co-equal of the text. In the case of the Wooster Group, the effort is to translate the text into a performance event that critiques the usual meaning-making processes.

Theatre of images: Robert Wilson and others

This rubric is useful for the performance works of artists who, in the 1970s, began to create a multimedia theatre of visual and aural landscapes and choreographed movement, works no longer governed by the usual laws of artistic order, continuity, and time. The productions of Robert Wilson are considered here from among a field of such artists whose techniques vary widely. Dancers and choreographers were major contributors. Among other artists who may be described as theatrical imagists are Richard Foreman ,

Merce Cunningham, Meredith Monk, Martha Clarke, Ping Chong (discussed in Chapter 13), Pina Bausch, Laurie Anderson 🎭, Robert LePage 🎭, and Ahn Min Soo. The German playwright, Peter Handke (1942–) may be counted among them. His inquiries into the limits and possibilities of language led to his “play” *The Hour We Knew Nothing of Each Other* (1992), which consists of stage directions prescribing a wordless sequence of actions and images (Handke 1993:93–105).

The major image theatre productions of Robert Wilson (1944–) have offered surreal landscapes of discontinuous, dream-like images, encompassed by music and sound; the few words spoken are part of a trance-inducing aural score. 🎭 Meticulously choreographed performers move in and out of tableaux in front of giant projection screens on which may float clouds or everyday items in iconic size (a huge shoe). The images sometimes evoke comparisons with the surreal paintings of Belgian painter René Magritte (1898–1967), whose works often called attention to the processes of representation and perception, sometimes with hypnotic effect. Wilson’s performers move in slow, measured motions through everyday tasks to communicate Wilson’s notion of the “natural rhythms” of life. Spectators are to make whatever associations they please, meditate among the half-remembered archetypes as they wish, or perhaps reflect on their own perceptual processes. The refined visual aesthetic that governs the formal, modernist images works hand-in-glove with an earnest postmodern indeterminacy and irony. Wilson seeks to displace the usual expectations of traditional meaning-making and to stimulate freer processes. As Arnold Aronson has pointed out, Wilson’s spectacles require the spectator to develop “a new kind of watching” (Aronson 2000:125). Reviewing Wilson’s first major work, *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud* (1969), avant-garde director Richard Foreman described the new “non-manipulative aesthetic” of works that sought to create a “field” within which the spectator examines herself/himself as a “perceptor” in relation to the “discoveries the artist has made within his medium.

... Bodies and persons emerged as the impenetrable (holy) objects they really are, rather than the usual virtuoso tools used to project some play’s predetermined energies and meanings” (*Village Voice* January 1, 1970, cited in Carlson 1996:109).

Wilson’s *Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1973 was a 12-hour “opera” in seven acts, requiring 140 actors. The subject of his *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), written with composer Philip Glass, was Einstein the dreamer and scientist. Its repeated images of a train, a spaceship, and a trial seemed to raise issues about scientific progress. But it was the overall orchestration of images, trance music, and hypnotic movement that audiences found compelling. Wilson’s monumental *CIVIL warS* (1984) was more thematic though no more linear. It dealt generally with human conflict at many levels through evocative images and icons, among them battlefield gunfire and a pageant of historical and fictional figures that included King Lear, Marx, Abraham Lincoln, and an American Indian tribe.

Some of Wilson’s work has been very accessible to general audiences. In 2004, he collaborated in the creation of *The Temptation of St Anthony* with Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, scholar, civil rights activist, and founder of the widely admired female, African-American, *a capella* group, Sweet Honey in the Rock. This unlikely artistic partnership in their adaptation of Gustave Flaubert’s novel explored Anthony’s troubled journey to faith in a spectacular and musically rich production that combined African-American gospel and jazz with elegant scenic images by Wilson. Wilson also collaborated with the Comédie Française in 2005, designing a wry, amusing staging of Jean de la Fontaine’s *The Fables*. Wilson, American born, lives in Germany where many of his productions have been done and where state subsidies support his works, with their technologically advanced imaging and his meticulous lighting. 🎭

This chapter has explained the ways directors and actors forged new relationships between texts and performances in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The first case study below probes more



Figure 12.5

Processional scene from *The Temptation of St. Anthony* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music Howard Gilman Opera House, 2004. Adapted from Gustave Flaubert's novel. Directing, set design, and lighting concept by Robert Wilson, and libretto by Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon.

Photo by Richard Termine for the *New York Times*. Courtesy Eyevine.

deeply some of the reasons behind the changing theatre practice by examining Artaud's vision and a critique of it by Jacques Derrida that helps explain the crisis of representation. The second case study provides a survey of postmodern performances of Shakespearean plays globally that illustrates the changing theatre practice. It concludes with a study of *The Tempest* in the light of postcolonial criticism and production.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been

subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Grotowski, J. (1988) *Akropolis*. Video recording, based on scenes from the play by Stanislaw Wispianski, staged and directed by J. Grotowski. Film directed by James MacTaggart, New York: Arthur Cantor Films. Clips available on YouTube; see entry below.

Suzuki Tadashi. *Theatre in Japan: Yesterday and Today* (2000). Segment on his work in a 53-min video produced by Britain's Channel Four, available from Princeton: Films for the Humanities.

Suzuki Tadashi. *The Trojan Women (Toroia no Onna)*, directed by Suzuki and performed in Japanese by the Suzuki Company of Toga. Recorded at 1st International Theater Festival of Toga (1982). Volume 2 of *The Theater Goer's Collection, The Classics of Contemporary Japanese Theater*, DVDs published by Kazumo Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan.

Terayama Shūji. *Lemming*, performed in Japanese by the Tenjō Sajiki Company. The last play by Terayama himself just before his death in 1983. Volume 7 of *The Theater Goer's Collection, The Classics of Contemporary Japanese Theater*. DVDs published by Kazumo Co., Ltd., Tokyo, Japan.

The Wooster Group: <http://www.thewoostergroup.org/>.

For clips of works of the following artists, search YouTube for the artists and scroll to the titles.

Laurie Anderson. *Zero and One, National Anthem, Excellent Birds, Kokou*.

Peter Brook. *Mahabharata: Krishna Talks to Prince Arjuna. King Lear*, clips from the full length film, 1–10. (See also the listing of the film at the end of the case study of this production in Chapter 13.)

Richard Foreman. *Interview*.

Jerzy Grotowski. *Akropolis* de Grotowski.

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CASE STUDY: The crisis of representation and the authenticity of performance: Antonin Artaud and Jacques Derrida

By Gary Jay Williams

Antonin Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double* (first published in 1938) challenged the Western foundations of theatre, as we have seen in Chapter 12. At first, many

dismissed his work as that of a lunatic (he suffered from serious mental illness, and his family committed him to an asylum, where he spent nine years). However, Artaud gave a dramatic, even prophetic voice to what may be described as the crisis of representation perceived by

many twentieth-century philosophers and language theorists, most especially, Jacques Derrida (1930–2004). This French theorist, who was influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Edmund Husserl, Ferdinand Saussure, and Sigmund Freud, among others, profoundly critiqued Western concepts of language. From Derrida's theories came the influential critical operation known as “deconstruction,” a term often misunderstood and maligned. Deconstruction has been applied to plays, productions, or performances at large. This case study explains the concept and Derrida's sympathetic but penetrating critique of Artaud's writings, which I will loosely refer to as a deconstruction.

In order to explain what language is doing and what it does to us, theorists have had to develop some specialized semiotic terms. (For an explanation of semiotics, see the case study on Brecht's *Mother Courage* at the end of Chapter 10, p. 450.) However, our everyday experiences with language prepare us to deal with terms such as “sign” and “signified” or “transcendental signified.” We know that spoken language can be slippery and ambiguous. (Written language is unstable, too, of course, but it will be useful to use examples involving speech first.) The variable meanings of spoken language multiply when the expressive means of voice, gesture, and body come into play.

Our daily conversations are filled with phrases that indicate our recognition that oral communication is often problematic: “What does she want from me?” “You know what I'm sayin'?” We even act out puzzling transactions: “And he goes, ‘I am so not here’ . . . and I'm like, ‘What do I do with that?’” If one of your professors says, “The variables in this drama require your scrutiny,” he/she is, consciously or not, sending some signals in his/her choice of words that convey formality and probably some intimidating academic aloofness. The underlying message is different from that of the professor who asks: “Are you getting any mixed messages here?” Our messages are always colored by the language we use – whether on the page or in speech. Actors often explore interpretive possibilities (and their own sensibilities) by

experimenting with different “readings” of lines, changing meanings by altering the emphasis on words or by using different phrasing, inflection, pacing, or tone. (Try reading the opening phrase of Hamlet's soliloquy “To be or not to be, that is the question” as a meditative, philosophic inquiry. Then read it as if to say, “Big deal – what else is new? Can we move on?”)

To move to a deeper level, language is always fluid; it is never anchored in some fixed truth. A rose is not always the same rose. The meaning that is attached to it (the “signified”) can vary, depending on who is sending the rose and for what reason. The “signified” of a rose might be love, apology, or sympathy. Today we are well aware that our computers operate with different “programs” and “languages”; they work from different “platforms” that are built around the needs of certain tasks, similarly, human language always comes with ideologies – inherent beliefs, social practices, power structures – built into it. (For more on the term “ideology,” see the case study on Ibsen's *A Doll House* at the end of Chapter 9, p. 408.)

Derrida demonstrated that language is but a chain of signifiers, always in play, never stable, always disseminating an infinite number of possible meanings as each signifier operates within a dynamic chain of others. The “meaning” that a word has is produced by its difference from other signifiers. Language is a kind of dance around an absence of fixed meaning, a dance in which meaning is continually being deferred around the chain of signifiers. This led Derrida to recognize that there is no “outside” of language. The assumption that language returns us to some grounding principle outside of itself where eternal, stable truth resides, be that Plato's perfect Forms, God, or rationalism, is a false one. It is a “logocentric” notion. That is, Western ideas of how we deal with reality have been based on the assumption that language gives access to eternal, fixed truth. Derrida challenged this fundamental notion in a landmark paper in 1965, in which he observed that “the absence of a transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely” (Derrida 1986:84–85). That is, given that language is not

anchored in any transcendent source of meaning, it is always, eternally, a work in process.

Artaud, writing some 20 years earlier, was also challenging Western assumptions about language. At the root of the confusion of our times, he wrote, there is “a rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas and signs that are their representation” (Artaud 1958:7). Western theatre, Artaud believed, had long been diminished by being reduced to verbal language, to the words of the playwright. Theatre, by its nature as enfleshed performance, offered the possibility of being much more than an archive of literature. Theatre as only language and Aristotelian imitation could never provide adequate representation of human experience for Artaud. Language offered a mere second-hand report. Artaud called for a primordial, visceral, nonverbal

theatre that would affect the whole organism of the spectator, returning the spectator to some (ostensible) experience of the undivided self, the self before matter and materialization, to the experience of the unity of body and spirit prior to dissociation.

Artaud’s path to this vision included his founding in the 1920s of a theatre named after Alfred Jarry (1873–1907). Jarry’s *Ubu Roi* (*Ubu the King*, 1896) blows up the notions of elevated language, nobility, and humankind in general in a dark, grotesque, scatological comedy (see Chapter 10). King Ubu represents the monstrous stupidity and savagery of humankind that resurfaces throughout human history. Oversized blasphemous performance is essential to its realization. In Artaud’s ultimate vision, performance must be much more than the performance of words.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Deconstruction

Contrary to the opinion of some, deconstructing a poem, a play, a performance or an essay is not the work of some devilish demon of nihilistic destruction. It is a critical process that engages closely with a text to open up its possibilities rather than closing down a text to some comfortable notion of a single unified meaning. It assumes that texts, like language, are never stable. It can be useful for analyzing a theatrical performance, in which there are many “texts” at work – the script, the setting, costumes, the actors’ performances, the architecture of the theatre, and the occasion of the performance. A theatrical performance always presents us with multiple sign systems, simultaneously.

A deconstructive analysis seeks to: (1) unpack the array of meanings available in a text or a performance; (2) understand the processes and materials by which it generates meanings; and (3) understand the ways in which these might be at cross-purposes. The process, like any critical process, can help a student recognize that a text or a performance is not an object for passive consumption and that many meanings may be available. The deconstructive reading, so far from destroying or distorting a text, can help us understand its meaning-making operations. Deconstructive analysis is useful in many types of criticism, including feminist, materialist, and postcolonial studies.

The case study on Ibsen’s *A Doll House* at the end of Chapter 9 is a materialist critique that in effect deconstructs that play to show the contradiction between its idealistic ideological project of freeing Nora and the limits of

the play's realistic form for really addressing the material forces that confine her. To take another example, Catherine Belsey's valuable handbook, *Critical Practice*, considers the compelling final scene in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. In this scene, the statue of Hermione magically comes to life. This is followed by a reconciliation between her and Leontes, her once abusive, jealous husband, who believed her to be dead and is now repentant. Belsey shows that, on the one hand, the play asks for our belief in the miracle of art (the statue coming to life) that resolves the play in the final act. On the other hand, the play has surrounded this miracle with reminders of many kinds of implausible fictions and artistic constructions. Among them are multiple mentions of "old tales" – such as the play's title refers to – the love songs that an ever-opportunistic ballad-seller hawks to optimistic young lovers, and the reference to the skills of a famous Italian painter (Belsey 1980:98–102). With a little effort, spectators will hear and see the play doing two contradictory things: it asks for our faith in a statue of Hermione "magically" coming to life and the subsequent reunion of husband and wife. At the same time, the play calls attention to the construction of artistic fictions, its own being as improbable as any. There is "meaning" about the limits of art in the tension between these.

To take an example of deconstruction in a larger sphere, Edward Said has shown how colonizing language constructed the idea of the "Orient" in nineteenth-century Western discourse. He opens the first chapter of his landmark work, *Orientalism*, deconstructing the language of a member of the House of Commons to show that while he seems to have been speaking sympathetically of Egypt ("the problem" of Egypt), his discourse was embedded with colonialist assumptions (Said 1979:31–35). (This example is further explained in the next case study, p. 537.) Sue-Ellen Case has shown how Europeans tried to frame Sanskrit aesthetics within nineteenth-century Western paradigms, referring to Sanskrit, for example, as a "classical" language. One result has been that Indian drama has been compared to Greek tragedy, resulting in the suppression or misunderstanding of important attributes of a drama of a very different culture (Case 1991:111–127).

As we have seen in Chapter 12, many productions of the classics in the late twentieth century have been, in effect, deconstructing their texts. (Of course, a performance is not of the same systematic order as an intellectual critical analysis.) They embody the assumption that texts are not stable, in themselves or in our transactions with them. The director is now no longer seen as the author's proxy, taking protective custody of some (ostensible) single meaning. Because a variety of meanings may be available within any text and in the encounters between texts and different readers, the director's responsibility is for the authenticity of a particular performance as a transaction with a text by particular actors in a particular present. Brook, Suzuki, Mnouchkine, and their companies have staged their problematic relationships with classical texts, simultaneously occupying and displacing them, each offering this transaction as authentically theirs. Peter Brook's *King Lear* emphasized any possibilities the text afforded for an existential vision of an endlessly cruel, godless universe. Tadashi Suzuki's *The Trojan Women* imaged contemporary Japanese suffering and confusion, disrupting the conventional elevations of Greek tragedy even as his production evoked comparisons.

Here are some key questions one might ask in the process of deconstructing a play or performance.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 **What possible meanings are available in the work? From what events, sequences, or particular passages of language do you derive each of those meanings?**
- 2 **Are there available meanings that contradict each other? (If you wanted to make a case for a single meaning of the play, what evidence would you have to overlook or play down?) How strong, comparatively, is the evidence for one or the other?**
- 3 **Select a contemporary performance of a classic play, on stage or in a film, and identify what choices the directors or actors have made that you think give it “authenticity.”**

Derrida deconstructs Artaud

Derrida’s own characteristic procedure in deconstruction is to work through a sequence of close readings of an artistic work, as he does with Artaud’s *The Theatre and Its Double* and his other sometimes ecstatic, sometimes mystical writings, interweaving passages from Artaud with his own paraphrasing and elaborations. His two essays on Artaud offer the clearest philosophical critique of Artaud available. (Chapter 12 provides a summary of Artaud’s vision.) With some necessary brevity and risking oversimplification, we now go to the heart of the matter for Derrida: the issue of representation, on which Derrida finds Artaud is sometimes of two contradictory minds.

Citing Artaud’s renunciation of “the theatrical superstition of the text and the dictatorship of the writer,” Derrida sympathetically explains that this is a rejection of the representation of writing and of classical theatre. That is to say, it is a rejection of those “stages of representation [that] extend and liberate the play of the signifier, thus multiplying the places and moments of elusion [*sic*]” (Derrida 1978:191). Derrida explains that the stage is theological – under the rule of the “author-god” – for as long as it is dominated by speech. In such a theatre, directors and actors are “enslaved interpreters who represent characters who, primarily through what they say, more or less directly represent the thought of the creator” (1978:235). Released from the text and the

author-god, Artaud claims that the theatre would be returned to its creative and founding freedom. In Artaud’s theatre of cruelty, speech is not altogether abandoned, and the stage is not given over to anarchy. Artaud writes of “speech before words,” and, as we have seen in Chapter 12, calls for spectacles of dance, costumes, and symbolic gestures. He writes of “spectacle acting not as reflection but force.” Derrida explains that Artaud seeks, in effect, a theatre of “pure presence,” where there is only meaning itself, with no intervening language symbols, a theatre in which writing has not erased the body, where there are no deferring signifiers, where there is only the present (1978:237, 240, 247). Derrida compares Artaud to the metaphysical theorists who seek a fundamental unity, some “metaphysical plenitude,” as Marvin Carlson puts it, behind writing and representation, of which these are but a pale reflection (Carlson 1993:503). Like the old romantic poets, Artaud seeks the freedom of the spirit from the body and social repression, but unlike them has no faith in language alone to do this. Only a theatre of cruelty could take us to pure presence, to “the unity prior to dissociation.” “For what Artaud’s howls promise us,” Derrida writes:

articulating themselves under the headings of existence, flesh, life, theatre, cruelty, is the meaning of an art prior to madness *and* the work, an art which no longer yields works [of art], an

artist's existence which is no longer a route or an experience that gives access to something other than itself; Artaud promises the existence of a speech that is a body, of a body that is a theatre, of a theatre that is a text because it is no longer enslaved to writing.

(Derrida 1978:174)

As Derrida points out, fully understanding the crisis of representation for Artaud, "there is no theatre in the world today which fulfills Artaud's desire." A theatre without representation is not possible; achieving his vision would seem to mean the erasure of theatre. Director and theorist Herbert Blau also pointed to the problem in Artaud. "There is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated" (Blau 1983:143).

Artaud himself recognized the paradox inherent in the representation of pure presence. He offered suggestions for spectacles in material, practical terms. He even speaks of creating a written record of the results of the experimental processes: "all these groupings, researches, and shocks will culminate nevertheless in a work *written down* [his italics], fixed in its least details, and recorded by new means of notation" (Artaud 1958:111–112). Nevertheless, Derrida writes admiringly, Artaud worked at "the limit of theatrical possibility," knowing "that he simultaneously wanted to produce and to annihilate the stage" (Derrida 1978:249).

As we have seen in Chapter 12, however, Artaud's vision of an impossible theatre contributed to the process of a wide re-evaluation of the logocentric tradition of Western theatre and had a profound influence on directors. Artaud's intense vision ultimately moved theatre artists to probe the issue of the source of the authenticity of a performance. He also anticipated the work of the performance artists of the 1980s and 1990s, for whom the body becomes a text. (See the Introduction to Part IV.)

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Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available online at: www.theatrehistories.com.

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CASE STUDY: Global Shakespeare

By Gary Jay Williams

What country, friends, is this?

(Twelfth Night 1.2)

In his 1966 comedy, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, Tom Stoppard (1937–) provided not only an ironic modern view of the two minor characters in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, showing them adrift and helpless amidst the power game in Denmark. Stoppard tweaked the nose of the high-brow, establishment Shakespeare culture. But by the end of the twentieth century, the value of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) as cultural capital had reached global proportions. He had name recognition matched perhaps only by Elvis Presley or Coca-Cola™. Shakespeare had become – it should give one pause to consider – the most performed playwright on the planet. The plays have been translated into every major language. In 2009, a Google search resulted in fifty-one million Shakespearean entries. The scholarly *World Shakespeare Bibliography Online*, with coverage representing nearly every country in the world, now contains over 120,000 annotated entries for scholarly books, articles, editions of the plays, and stage and film productions since 1961, with 5,000 new entries being added every year.

Consider a few of the Shakespearean enterprises in the last 25 years. In Tokyo, the Panasonic Globe Theatre, a rough evocation of Shakespeare's, was built in 1988 to house the visiting Royal Shakespeare Company, touring in that decade as no company in the history of the theatre had ever toured. In 1990, 17 different productions of *Hamlet* were done in Tokyo, many of them at the new Globe. In China in 1986, 28 different productions of 18 of Shakespeare's plays were done in China's first Shakespeare Festival. (He had been banned during Mao's Cultural Revolution.) In London in 1997, a scrupulous replica of the Globe was built on the

South Bank, validated by recent excavations there of the remains of the original Globe and the nearby Rose Theatre, where some of Shakespeare's plays were also performed. (See the photograph of the Globe replica, Figure 4.12.) The Rose ruins were then encased for public viewing in a dark chamber beneath a new office building, like the crypt of St. Peter. In the United States, a replica of the Blackfriars Theatre, the indoor theatre where Shakespeare's company served the wealthy elite of London, was built not long after in the mountains of Virginia. A replica of the Rose is planned for Massachusetts. Over 100 American theatres are currently devoted primarily to Shakespeare. Several complete plays have been performed on websites. At least 25 major Shakespeare films were made in these years in Brazil, Britain, India, Japan, South Africa, and the United States, all designed for major markets. They include six directed by, and starring, British actor-director, Kenneth Branagh (1960–) – including *Henry V* and *Hamlet*; Richard Loncraine's *Richard III* (1995), in which Ian McKellen (1939–) rendered Richard as a louche Adolf Hitler; and Julie Taymor's visually extravagant *Titus* (1999) (Rothwell 1999:308–340). This count does not include the BBC filming of the complete plays for television (1978–1984), or derivatives such as *Shakespeare in Love* (1998).

All of this could be claimed as evidence of Shakespeare's universality, of the ease with which his plays (ostensibly) leap all historical, linguistic, and cultural boundaries. Such claims are often accompanied by the citation of the pretty line by Shakespeare's contemporary, Ben Jonson: "He was not for an age, but for all time!" Jonson might be said to have been thinking rather imperially, for the two lines that precede it are: "Triumph, my Britain, thou has one to show / To whom all scenes of Europe homage owe." Of course, when Jonson wrote those lines for his eulogizing poem in the First Folio (the 1623 collection of Shakespeare's

plays), he could not have imagined a world as culturally diverse and as interlocked as it is today, nearly four centuries later. The term “universality” wants some critical reflection.

As with Jonson, the idea of Shakespeare’s universality was framed and promoted by English-speakers, with the English language in mind. It also belongs to a Western tradition of aesthetics concentrating on art’s transcendent values. Shakespeare’s presence as an international writer has been the result not only of the power of his poetry but of the wealth and military power of his sponsors. Even in the West, each age and nation has, to a considerable degree, reinvented the Shakespeare it needed. This is especially evident in the always-public sphere of the theatre, as is clear from any culturally informed performance history of any one of the plays, from *Hamlet* to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. (See also the case study on David Garrick at the end of Chapter 5, p. 252.) Gary Taylor, culturally astute editor of Shakespeare’s plays, reveals the same thing in his history of the editing and literary criticism of the plays in the West (Taylor 1989: Chapters 1–6). This is not to debunk Shakespeare. To be sure, the poetry of the plays, their characters, their complex dialectics on the human condition and their ambiguities have proven irresistibly rich and malleable for reinventing. But this is to call attention to our always ongoing negotiations with his work, especially in the theatre. A facile notion of Shakespeare’s universality will not help us to fully understand the phenomenon of globalized Shakespeare.

Globalized Shakespeare is, among other things, a wide-screen version of Shakespeare’s long-standing presence as cultural capital, a readily recognized legacy with which nations, corporations, and foundations want to be associated. Globalized Shakespeare is the marketable prestige commodity, *Shakespeare™*, ready to be packaged and distributed by global capitalism through all its technological platforms. Global Shakespeare is Western modernity, to which developing nations aspire. Global Shakespeare is sometimes a problematic byproduct of colonialism.

Dependably, original artists in theatre and film, in their negotiations with Shakespeare, have drawn attention to these very issues in a shrinking world in which there are crossings of all kinds of boundaries and barriers – racial, national, cultural, and linguistic. As early as 1965, James Ivory and Ismail Merchant’s film, *Shakespeare Wallah*, told the story of a British theatre company touring in India with Shakespeare’s plays, validating British authority at the very time of the demise of the British Empire and the rise of the Indian film industry. To take the issue of images of commodified Shakespeare, they are seen everywhere in Baz Luhrmann’s film, *William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet* (1996). In its hypermodern “Verona Beach,” advertisements borrow Shakespearean lines (“Out Damned Spot Cleaners”). Romeo meets his friends in a poolhall called the Globe; and there is even “product placement,” with a copy of the Yale Shakespeare resting on Juliet’s nightstand. Luhrmann renders the beginning and ending of the play in a “News at Eleven” format, showing the tragedy being thoroughly mediated for consumption. The double suicide will be off the screen in time for the Late Night Show. Early in the film, Romeo and his friends visit a decaying seaside amusement center. There, at the edge of the sand, are the ruins of an old proscenium theatre, remnant of an older medium whose style of heroic representation is no long viable in this Verona. Romeo’s friend, the poetic Mercutio, dies there.

This case study now turns to Shakespearean translations, editions, and electronic conversions. It then examines intercultural productions of the plays and the issues these have raised. (Chapter 13 continues the discussion of interculturalism.) This case study concludes with a section on postcolonial approaches to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, the colonial resonance of which connects it to the discussion of intercultural theatre.

Shakespeare in other words

At the outset, let it be said that any production of a Shakespearean play might be described as a “translation.” Theatrical productions speak many languages besides

that of the text, including the visual languages of scenery, costumes, properties, gesture and facial expression, the languages of voices and music, and the language of the movement of the body in space. Productions in the twentieth century up to the 1960s usually sought to give the impression of seamless aesthetic harmony between the text and the scenic vocabulary. Productions thereafter, especially from the 1980s to the present, have, to varying degrees, registered dissonances and ruptures. In the more aggressively contemporary productions, this strategy reflects a suspicion of a harmonized, unified Shakespeare, impermeable to troubling contemporary questions. In a production, the language of the text is one of many the playgoer is processing.

Then again, we cannot really speak of *the* text of a Shakespeare play. The idea of a definitive text of each play was challenged in the late 1970s by a new generation of Shakespeare scholars, including Steven Urkowitz, Gary Taylor, Michael Warren, and Grace Ioppolo. They stressed the differences among the earliest editions of some of the plays (half of which were published in two or more versions between the 1590s and the 1620s). Previous editors had taken it as an imperative to use one early version of a play as a master text and take “variants” from any other version(s) to compile a conflated edition for modern readers, one that ostensibly best represented the master’s voice. But the earliest texts of *King Lear*, the 1608 “quarto” edition of the play (a small, inexpensive paperback at the time) and the version in the 1623 folio (an expensive large-format, deluxe collection of thirty-six of the plays), are different in substantive ways. For example, the 1608 edition has 300 lines (including one whole scene) that are not in the 1623 version, and the 1623 version has 100 lines not in the 1608 edition. Both versions have virtues; both are Shakespeare’s. It was not that Shakespeare could not make up his mind, as one younger scholar remarked, but that he made it up twice. (The existence of multiple versions of a play text is not an uncommon result of modern theatre practice; see the discussion of Tom Stoppard’s play *Jumpers*, in Gaskell 1978:245–262, or of Terayama Shūji’s *La Marie-Vison* in Sorgenfrei, 2005:88–94 and 127–133.) Editions

and productions of *King Lear* customarily have conflated the two versions of the play, offering in effect a version of it that no audience in Shakespeare’s time ever read or saw performed. There are also substantive differences between the early surviving texts of other Shakespeare plays. Any idea of an unstable text was very disturbing to those who required one true text of the one true Shakespeare. The new views were disseminated in the 1980s in the prestigious new Oxford Shakespeare editions, under the leadership of eminent Shakespearean Stanley Wells. Shortly after, the Oxford principles were packaged into W.W. Norton’s widely used textbook edition of the complete works. This included three versions of *King Lear* – quarto, first folio, and a modern conflation, a do-it-yourself *King Lear* kit for college backpacks.

Destabilized Shakespeare in print is only a part of a larger story. As film directors exploited the visual vocabularies of film more imaginatively, Shakespeare’s words were, in effect, decentered; images were, at the very least, as important. (It could be argued that this begins in nineteenth-century theatre’s romantic pictorialism.) Filmed Shakespeare, on videotape and compact discs, became widely available. By the turn of the century, it was possible to access the play texts from multiple online sources. (See our website bibliography.) Hypertext versions, on compact discs and online, allowed users to construct their own textual experience, to compare quartos and folios, to read a play while listening to music inspired by it, or to put scenes from past productions alongside the text. (See the websites *Internet Shakespeare Editions* at <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/index.html> and *The Interactive Shakespeare Project* at www.holycross.edu/departments/theatre/projects/isp/.) In these environments, Shakespeare’s texts have become as electronically fluid as any other text in the cybersphere, at once ever accessible, ever permeable, ever malleable. In these media, Shakespeare has become not only disseminated more widely than ever but more democratically – horizontally, rather than from the top down.

Shakespeare’s translation into foreign languages always involves cultural adaptation. As Dennis Kennedy points

out in his *Foreign Shakespeare*, Shakespeare in translation is always at a cultural remove from the Shakespeare that the Anglophone world claims is “universal” (Kennedy 1993:2). Kennedy also makes the point that the linguistic remove of foreign Shakespeare, together with the absence of literary protectionism that has surrounded Shakespeare in English, may account in part for the interpretive freedoms of foreign directors (1993:4–6).

For German-speaking peoples, the voice of Shakespeare from the early nineteenth century to the present, with a few exceptions, has been the voice of their German romantic poets, August W. Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck. Their combined translations (1839–1840) acquired the status of an original, “der deutsche Shakespeare” (Hortmann 1998:86). Few translations of any classic have had so long a shelflife. (The conventional wisdom is that new translations of the classics are necessary with every new generation.) In communist East Germany in the 1970s, where Marxist readings of Shakespeare prevailed, Maik Hamburger’s modern German translations were, Wilhelm Hortmann writes, “direct, dramatic, precise,” designed for actors and for “the immediacy of actional impact,” in the spirit of Brecht (1998:248). In 1990, director and playwright Heiner Müller staged a seven-hour *Hamlet/maschine* at Berlin’s Deutsches Theater, a hybrid of Shakespeare’s play and Müller’s own *Hamletmaschine* (1977). Müller’s production came amid the fall of communism and presented an ineffectual Hamlet who was facing a worn-out Europe, more irrevocably in ruins than it had been at the end of World War II (Hamburger 1998:428–434). The opening lines of Müller’s own play, now inserted into Shakespeare’s, are: “I was Hamlet. I stood at the shore and talked with the surf BLABLA, the ruins of Europe in back of me” (Müller 1984:53).

Directors of Shakespeare in France, Japan, and Russia have sought out new translations congenial to their approaches. In 1946, French director Jean-Louis Barrault was using André Gide’s translation of *Hamlet* in search of some rapport between Shakespearean language and classical French taste. By 1974, classical French would have been wholly inappropriate for Peter Brook’s

approach to *Timon of Athens*. Producing *Timon* in Paris for his International Center for Theatre Research, Brook directed Shakespeare’s play as a contemporary fable of a modern, young affluent liberal whose world has collapsed. He staged it simply and in the barren shell of an abandoned Victorian theatre, itself a symbol of the decline of the West. Brook commissioned film writer Jean-Claude Carrière to prepare a text in modern French, with the aim of making Shakespeare’s play as accessible to a contemporary French audience as a contemporary French play would be. The translation was clear and economical to the point of being prosaic, with a few select passages in verse (Williams 1979:182–184). (On Brook and his landmark staging of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 1970, see Chapter 12, pp. 519–522.)

Brook saw his French project as a corrective to the Anglocentric view of universal Shakespeare. In a foreign translation, some poetry will be lost. But the fact is that Shakespeare translated into a modern foreign language is more accessible to its audience than it is in King James English for modern English-speaking audiences. Dennis Kennedy makes this point about the Schlegel-Tieck translations, noting that they are still “infinitely closer to the language spoken on the street in Berlin or Zurich or Vienna than Shakespeare’s language is to that of London or Los Angeles or Melbourne” (Kennedy 1993:5). Hearing Boris Pasternak’s idiomatic Russian translation of *Hamlet* (1939), another translator said: “We have never been so intimately acquainted with the real persons of great tragedy. We had not even known that it was possible to be so closely acquainted with them” (Golub 1993:159). (Pasternak’s translation was also used by Grigory Kozintsev in his 1964 film of the play.)

When Yury Lyubimov staged *Hamlet* in 1971 at Moscow’s Taganka Theatre in the post-Stalin era (it played over a nine-year period, 1971–1980), he, too, used Boris Pasternak’s translation. Inherent in this translation is Pasternak’s concept of a suffering, Christ-like Hamlet, called to a fate beyond his control but enduring it with dignity. In Lyubimov’s production, Pasternak’s translation took on a localized, contemporary

dimension. Hamlet was played by Vladimir Vysotsky, who had been chronicling the difficulties of life in the Soviet Union since the 1960s in his songs and poems. This Hamlet, writes Spencer Golub, “recognized that in this life of struggle, the prisoner is punished for acting independently and for speaking his thoughts aloud” (Golub 1993:162).

Japan’s long interest in Shakespeare is tied in some part to the anxious formation of its national identity *vis à vis* the West. Shakespeare was imported in the Meiji era in the last half of the nineteenth century, when Japan was opening to Western influences. The first versions were *shimpa* adaptations meant to glorify Japan’s new colonial enterprise. For example, a version of *Othello* dealt with the annexation of Taiwan. These adaptations were based not on Shakespeare’s texts, but on Charles Lamb’s story summaries. Translations of Shakespeare began to appear early in the twentieth century, concurrent with the growth of the *shingeki* companies who were attempting to establish a modern, Western-influenced Japanese theatre, distinct from the traditions of *nō* and *kabuki*. Tsubouchi Shōyō’s translations, the last volumes of which were published in 1928, were widely used. James R. Brandon points out that Japanese translations were valorized by claims of being faithful to Shakespeare, bringing Western text-centered thinking to Japan, where the *kabuki* tradition, by contrast, allowed the actor considerable freedom (Brandon 2001:43). At Waseda University, the Tsubouchi Shōyō Memorial Library was built in 1928 featuring a façade based on an Elizabethan theatre; ironically, tucked behind the stage of this Western icon was, and still is a museum of various Japanese traditional and modern performance genres, including *kabuki*. After World War II, interest in Shakespeare grew, cultivated by the universities. Assimilating Shakespeare was seen as important to Japan’s cultural profile as a Western, modernized culture. From the 1960s to the 1990s, Japan saw a mounting wave of important Shakespearean productions, mainstream and then experimental. 📺

Translating Shakespeare’s language into Japanese is difficult by any account. In the 1970s, after the youth

movements of the 1960s and as Japan’s little theatre movement was developing, Odashima Yūshi (1930–) translated the plays into modern Japanese, treating them as though they were contemporary Japanese dramas (Senda 1998a:18–19). Even opponents of this modernizing, such as translator and scholar Anzai Tetsuo, acknowledged the difficulties of translating Shakespeare. To take one example, while Japanese can be powerful for emotionally expressive passages, the delivery of such passages in Japanese requires a deliberate stress on words and many pauses (which *kabuki* theatre capitalizes on), and this requires more time than their delivery in English (Anzai 1998:124–126).

It was probably in part to compensate for the translation dilemma that by the 1980s some Japanese directors were turning more to the theatre’s visual resources for staging Shakespeare. Kurosawa Akira’s films were the prelude to this, especially his internationally admired version of *Macbeth*, under the title (in English), *The Throne of Blood* (1957). The most notable stage examples were the visually complex productions of Ninagawa Yukio (1935–), a major figure in experimental and political theatre of the 1960s and early 1970s, who thereafter had many commercial successes. He set what he called the *Ninagawa Macbeth* (1980) in the Japan of the late sixteenth century, the era of samurai warriors, using scrupulously historical costumes, as had Kurosawa (Figure 12.6). He also used Odashima’s modern translation. Ninagawa’s setting was a full-stage version of the small Buddhist altar (*butsudan*) used in Japanese homes for prayers for the dead. The play took place inside of the oversize altar. Lady Macbeth was played by a female, but male impersonators in the *kabuki* tradition (*onnagata*) played the three witches, lending them sexual ambiguity. The porter was played as a laughable *kabuki* figure. Cherry petals fell in the scene when Burnham Wood advanced on Dunsinane. Critic Senda Akihiko notes that the altar, the blossoms (symbolizing both beauty and ephemerality for the Japanese), and the characterization of Macbeth as a sullen revolutionary who comes to power in a period of social upheaval signaled a contemporary political motif in

Ninagawa's staging. The nation and Ninagawa in particular had been horrified to learn, when the New Left youth movement collapsed in a military confrontation in 1972, that Japan's young, idealistic revolutionaries had lynched eleven of their own. The *Ninagawa Macbeth* was, Senda writes, "a requiem for the dead of his generation, who had failed in their struggle against the system" (Senda 1998a:233; Senda 1998b:23–25). Ninagawa's

visual vocabulary was a key part of his attempt to render the Shakespearean play about a Scottish king in a traditional Japanese world, albeit with contemporary Japanese overtones. There was some disagreement over whether Ninagawa's staging was simply a beautiful "Japanning" of Shakespeare, made for international export. Ninagawa's production was exported to the Edinburgh Festival in 1985 and the Royal National



Figure 12.6

Kurihara Komaki as Lady Macbeth and Tsukayama Masane as Macbeth in the *Ninagawa Macbeth*, directed by Ninagawa Yukio in Tokyo, 1980 (translation by Odashima Yūshi), seen here in a performance at the Lyttelton Theatre, Royal National Theatre, London, 1987 (International Theatre '87).

Photo © John Haynes. Courtesy Royal National Theatre.

Theatre in London in 1987, where surely some of the appeal to Western audiences was seeing Shakespeare in the exotic images of samurai Japan.

Shakespeare in other worlds

Intercultural productions of Shakespeare – the *Ninagawa Macbeth* is one example – have presented wonders and dilemmas amid globalization. As we will see in Chapter 13, intercultural theatre may be defined as the practice in which theatre artists use the texts, acting styles, music, costumes, masks, dance, or scenic vocabularies of one culture – the “source culture” – and adapt and modify them to be accessible to audiences of another culture – the “target culture.” For some, this has offered prospects of artistic exploration and improved understanding across cultural borders. For others, when a Western director adapts for Western audiences a text that is outside of the European or American traditions or appropriates non-European/American performance modes for the staging of Western classics, this raises the specter of colonialist exploitation. Such “appropriations” may seriously misrepresent both the theatre and the culture of the source culture, rendering the source culture as the exotic “Other” (explained further below). Peter Brook’s staging of an adaptation of the Indian epic the *Mahabharata* (1985), which toured the world, incurred this type of criticism. (See the case study in Chapter 13, p. 565.) Intercultural productions of other kinds, like Ninagawa’s, have raised other kinds of questions, as we shall see. Among other prominent Western directors of intercultural productions in the 1980s and 1990s were Ariane Mnouchkine (1940–) and Eugenio Barba (1936–).

In the 1980s, Ariane Mnouchkine borrowed, impressionistically, from the various traditional Asian theatres, including *kabuki* and *nō* theatre, for her staging of three of Shakespeare’s history plays. She set her *Twelfth Night* in India and drew impressionistically from Balinese and *kathakali* performance traditions. Her productions, then and now, evolve in lengthy collaborative company processes with her resident company, the *Théâtre du Soleil*, which in the 1980s enjoyed large

endowments from France’s socialist government. They are done on a vast stage created in an old carriage factory on the outskirts of Paris.

Mnouchkine believes that Shakespeare’s plays have been poorly served by Western realist traditions, from Shakespeare’s time forward. For her, Asian theatre forms offered vocabularies for doing theatre’s work of transforming reality into metaphor and achieving an intensity of effect that she believes impossible in Western realism. Her aim has been to vivify the Elizabethan plays with ceremonial size, stylized acting, dance, and music. In her productions of Shakespeare’s history plays, the courtiers were dressed in rich costumes that combined features of both Elizabeth and seventeenth-century Japanese court dress. Their faces were whitened or masked in styles influenced by *kabuki* or *nō* theatre. In the opening scenes of both *Henry IV* and *Richard II*, these courtiers entered running on to the *kabuki*-like stage from ramps – somewhat like the *kabuki hanamichi* – and they circled the large stage, samurai swords held high. In *Richard II*, when the court received the news of old John of Gaunt’s death (2.1.149–151), King Richard, dressed in an elegant white costume reminiscent of the heron in the famous *nō* play *Sagi*, did a ritualized high leap of power amid his flanking lords (Figure 12.7). When the king intervened in the scene of the trial by combat between Mowbray and Bolingbroke (1.3) to banish both lords, they lay prostrate on the ground at his feet. The text, in Mnouchkine’s own translation, was, Adrian Kiernander notes, “declaimed rhythmically and at high volume rather than just spoken,” and more often than not it was delivered directly to the audience (Kiernander 1993:113). In these ways, Mnouchkine hoped to avoid the usual absorption in individual psychology. (Mnouchkine has denied being influenced by Artaud – see the previous case study – but much of her work clearly has congenial interests.) Characters were to be defined in clear, precise visual strokes, the better to convey an archetypal world. Rendering Shakespeare as “our contemporary,” in any explicit way has not been Mnouchkine’s goal.

The *Ninagawa Macbeth* and Suzuki’s *The Tale of Lear* (1988 and after) present very different Japanese uses of



Figure 12.7

In *Richard II*, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine at the *Théâtre du Soleil*, Paris, 1982, King Richard (Georges Bigot, center) responds to the news of the death of old John of Gaunt with a dance-like leap, flanked by his lords.

Photograph © Martine Franck/Magnum Photos.

Shakespeare. Suzuki's best known version cut *King Lear* to about 100 minutes of playing time and, in effect, set the play in two intersecting/conflicting frames. One frame was the fantasy of an old man in a hospital or perhaps a nursing home, perhaps placed there by his daughters. Having read the play, he now identifies with Lear and acts out the play. As Takahashi Yasunari recounts the production, a nurse, picking up the play-book from the floor, begins to read it silently. The old man enacts the play, she reads, sometimes in tandem,

mostly not. She often cackles at what normally would be grim or tragic moments. Music from Handel and Tchaikovsky is sometimes heard. For the famous Dover scene, in which Lear is seen to be mad ("Let me have a surgeon, I am cut to the brains"), the nurse, functioning like Lear's fool, wheels this Lear figure on stage in a hospital trash cart. From there he delivers his lines, "When we are born we cry that we are come / To this great stage of fools" (4.5.172–173). When Lear dies, the nurse finishes her book at the

same time, bursting into unstoppable laughter (Takahashi 2001:113–118).

This is a landscape reminiscent of Beckett or of Jan Kott's Beckettian reading of *King Lear* (see Chapter 11). In Suzuki's contrasting frames of the old man's enactment and the nurse's laughter, Takahashi found "a dramaturgy that can both move us towards a tragic emotion and at the same time, cast a cold eye on it" (2001:116). In the *Ninagawa Macbeth*, the Japanese director would seem to have used the Western text to seek a unifying, archetypal tragic resonance. But in *The Tale of Lear*, Suzuki sought a Western tragic resonance in order to bring audiences to question its premises. Both productions toured internationally, Ninagawa's with a Japanese cast, performing in Edinburgh and London. One version of Suzuki's adaptation toured North America with an American cast performing in English. The version performed in London was played by a Japanese cast in Japanese.

Let us review the issues that intercultural Shakespearean productions raise. The debate over these has been extensive. (See "Key references" following this chapter, including Phillip B. Zarrilli's discussion of a *kathakali King Lear* – Zarrilli 1992:16–40.) Many Western Shakespeareans believe that the human complexities of Shakespeare's plays, available through their poetic language, are being lost amid the emphasis on borrowed visual vocabularies from various Eastern theatres. Critics from the cultures being borrowed from suggest that when the appropriated elements from the source culture are modified to be accessible to the target culture, these elements become distorted, and cultural differences, so far from being available, are actually erased. This makes it questionable to describe such productions as improving cross-cultural understandings. Are these productions more than the global marketing of the exotic? What meanings are available (or not) to the target audiences? For a Western audience in Paris or Los Angeles in the late twentieth century, what is the signified behind the signifiers borrowed by Mnouchkine from *nō* and *kabuki*? And how do such audiences relate these to the worlds in which Shakespeare's plays are set?

Doesn't all theatre have to be local? Some critics believe the West's mining of the East is a symptom of Western exhaustion. To take one final issue, Ninagawa's Japanese *Macbeth* seems to have sought a unifying, archetypal tragic resonance while Suzuki's *The Tale of Lear* was clearly calling into question the possibility of the classical Western tragic vision. But both were played for international audiences. This suggests that very different kinds of intercultural experience are available and points to the danger of generalizations about the reception of such productions. 📺

Given the increasing cross-cultural contact that globalization is likely to continue to bring, the debate over intercultural Shakespeare is likely to continue. Intercultural theatre in general is further explored in Chapter 13. (For a website archive on Shakespeare in Asia, see the listing in "Key references" at the end of this chapter.)

The Tempest and colonialism

In writing *The Tempest* (1610–1611), was Shakespeare bringing echoes of British imperialism to the Globe? It is possible that his imagination was nourished, in some part, by a contemporary account by William Strachey of a hurricane striking a British fleet headed for the Virginia colony at Jamestown in 1609, leaving one ship wrecked on an island in the Bermudas and its survivors struggling to govern themselves. Did Jacobean audiences see Prospero's slave, Caliban, as a native of America? The answer is probably not. While Shakespeare may well have read Strachey's account, the imaginary geography of Prospero's island seems to be somewhere between Milan (from which the play tells us that Prospero was exiled) and Algiers (from which, Prospero says, Caliban's mother, Sycorax, was banished). What can be said is that this play is charged with a consciousness of England's move under James I from nation toward empire in the early 1600s and questions about power. Certainly from the perspective of the last half century, *The Tempest* seems to prefigure the painful issues of colonization.

This resonance came to the forefront for modern critics, poets, and directors as the hold of European

nations over many colonies worldwide was rapidly dissolving in the 1960s when these colonies were seeking self-governance. Postcolonial criticism has had much interest in Prospero, the aristocrat who rules by coercive magic, and in Prospero's enforced servants: Ariel, the fabulous "airy spirit" who earns his freedom from

Prospero, and Caliban, the disturbing, unruly creature of the cave, in rebellion against Prospero. Whoever Caliban was to Jacobean, he has long intrigued artists, poets, directors, playwrights, and critics, as Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan have shown in their study of him (Vaughan and Vaughan 1991).

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Postcolonial criticism

Postcolonial criticism seeks to understand where in literature, the visual arts, music, and theatre we see the workings of, the mindsets behind, and the effects of colonial domination. It has been applied broadly to works reflecting colonialist attitudes but with special interest in works that register a critique of, or resistance to such domination. Postcolonial theatre of the kind that we examined in African nations in the Introduction to Part IV represents active critiques of, and resistance to imperialism.

Colonialist oppression was, and still is the result of the expansionism of wealthy nations and assumptions about the right of the powerful to control those who are less so. By the end of the nineteenth century, Britain, in pursuit of wealth and power, had extended its empire over one quarter of the earth's surface, including India, Ireland, Australia, and multiple territories in Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America. To the English and other Europeans, an important mark of those needing to be "civilized," was a skin color other than white. Colonial exploitation impoverished nations economically, subjugating local populations and exporting local wealth. Its patriarchal governments eroded the cultural identity and self-esteem of those they ruled. Britain's colonial empire, like that of other European powers, began to subside, slowly, only after World War II. Postcolonial criticism seeks to expose the effects of empire and of unequal power relationships between cultures, past and present, and with an activist agenda for related contemporary issues.

Colonialist attitudes become deeply embedded in language. Assumptions about the superiority of the West are evident today, for example, in the use of such terms as "First World" (highly developed, industrialized nations), and "Third World" ("developing" nations such as India and those of Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America). In his book, *Orientalism* (1978), which was influential in establishing the field of postcolonial criticism, Edward Said (1935–2003) begins with an analysis of colonialist language. Said deconstructs a speech given by Arthur James Balfour in 1910 to the British House of Commons on Britain's occupation of Egypt. Balfour's speech represents a discourse in which an educated Englishman can assume that what *he* knows about Egypt *is* Egypt, and that his is the superior vantage point for prescribing *for* Egypt. Balfour constructs Egypt chiefly in terms of a British project that will one day vindicate Western imperialism: "We are in Egypt not only for the sake of the Egyptians . . . but for Europe's sake" (Said 1978:31–39). Said's main argument is that the "Orient" is a Western construction. The West has imagined the Orient as the Other, projecting onto Arabia, India, or China, as convenient, such characteristics as dishonesty, promiscuity, cruelty, and dirtiness – the opposite of all that the Western mind regards as its own virtues. Paul Brown has offered the insight that we see in the language of colonial powers the constant, continual constructing of the Other to justify their continuing colonial domination (Brown 1985:48–70).

Postcolonial criticism, feminist criticism, and African-American criticism share some common concerns. In a patriarchal culture, women are defined and controlled by men. They are thought of as being intrinsically inferior, irrational, and incapable of self-governance. Seen as sexually threatening, they must be controlled as the property of men. Women without power to alter this ideology have difficulty defining their own independent identities. (See the case study on Ibsen's *A Doll House*, Chapter 9.) In a white racist culture, blacks are subjugated in the same way. Black women are in double jeopardy.

Postcolonial criticism points out that a double consciousness is common in colonized peoples. They may mimic the culture of their conquerors while at the same time trying to maintain their own. Some indigenous authors write in the language in which they were educated by their colonizers – English or French, for example. Some, like the Kenyan playwright, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, write in their own local languages (see the Introduction to Part IV). This double consciousness persists in de-colonized and migrating peoples, caught between cultures. Some critics, like Arjun Appadurai (see the Introduction to Part IV), suggest studying this landscape as a site of an inevitable and creative dynamism, in which there is an evolving hybridity, or syncretism, of indigenous and adopted cultures. Critic Homi Bhabha, in his *The Location of Culture*, suggests another kind of postcolonial strategy: investigating world literature to understand the ways in which cultures have experienced slavery, colonization, revolution, the loss of cultural identity, and other traumas (Bhabha 1994:12).

Postcolonial criticism may also be concerned with the neocolonialist pressures of multinational corporations that move into poor countries, or the “cultural imperialism” of global media (especially the American media), bombarding other cultures with the corrosive fantasies of a consumer culture.

These are some key questions that postcolonial critics might ask when analyzing a play or a performance.

KEY QUESTIONS

- 1 **Where are the instances in the play or performance in which one race, class, or gender has power over another or continually constructs it as the Other in order to maintain power?**
- 2 **Where in the play do we see double consciousness?**
- 3 **Where, if any, is there resistance to colonial ideology in the play? What is the result?**

Postcolonial critics would agree with Walter Cohen's assessment that “*The Tempest* uncovers, perhaps despite itself, the racist and imperial bases of English nationalism” (Cohen 1985:401). But the play has had symbolic relevance for postcolonialism in general. Ariel and Caliban were used as metaphors for oppressed peoples of the world in Octave Mannoni's 1964 study of colonization and revolt in Madagascar. In Latin America, where Shakespeare has not been much present, “Arielism” has

been an important anticolonialist concept, a dream of self-realization referring, of course, to Ariel, the bright native spirit of the island who yearns for his liberty from Prospero and who is the antithesis of the earth-bound Caliban. Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), poet, playwright, essayist, and politician born in Martinique in the Caribbean, reworked *The Tempest* in 1969 as “an adaptation for a black theatre.” Césaire was a progenitor of Negritude, a diasporic black pride movement, and

internationally known for his anticolonialism. His Ariel is a mulatto slave and his Caliban a black slave whose sentiments are much like those of a radical black intelligentsia educated under colonialism: “Prospero, you’re a great magician: / you’re an old hand at deception. / . . . Underdeveloped, in your words, undercompetent / that’s how you made me see myself” (Césaire 2002:61–62). In Césaire’s ending, Prospero remains on the island with Caliban.

Shakespeare’s Caliban has been played as black, although he probably was not so conceived. Prospero’s line “This thing of darkness / I acknowledge mine” (5.1.278–279), goes deeper than pigmentation. To the postcolonial critic, this line might suggest colonialism’s production of the Other. African-American actor, Canada Lee, played Caliban in Margaret Webster’s 1945 Theatre Guild production in New York, and African-Americans Earle Hyman and James Earl Jones did the role in 1960 and 1962, respectively. If the casting of these productions suggested anything about black-white power relations, it remained subtle, with little else reinforcing it. There have been more explicit stagings, such as Jonathan Miller’s in England in 1970, in which Prospero was colonial governor, Ariel his mulatto house slave, and Caliban his darker field slave. In a more general, heavy indictment, Liviu Ciulei’s staging at the Guthrie Center in Minneapolis in 1981 surrounded Prospero’s island with the decaying detritus of Western civilization. The Caliban in Giorgio Strehler’s 1978 production was an African noble savage, reduced to slavery. Strehler’s production did not aim at single-minded political critique, however; it was known more for its spirited theatricality and optimism.

We close, appropriately, on two important intercultural productions of *The Tempest* late in the twentieth century – those of Ninagawa Yukio (1987) and Peter Brook (1990). Ninagawa’s production was a rehearsal of a *nō* theatre version of the play, with a small *nō* theatre on the proscenium stage, and Prospero was its director. It was set on the remote Sado island, to which Zeami, founder of *nō* theatre, had once been banished. The play’s masque was done in *nō* costumes and masks,

its comic scenes in something like *kyōgen* style. Caliban wore *kabuki*-like makeup. But the language was contemporary, colloquial Japanese in the translation of Odashima Yūshi. The general modality of Brook’s production was African, with his customary international cast. Prospero, Ariel, and Antonio were portrayed by Africans and Caliban by a white German actor. All theatrical virtuosity was eschewed for spontaneity and simplicity in the acting. Neither of these intercultural stagings showed any interest in the resonance of colonialism in the play. Ninagawa’s seemed to have been a meditation on the nature of theatre, although it puzzled both Kishi Tetsuo, a Japanese scholar steeped in *nō* and *kabuki*, and Robert Hapgood, an American scholar steeped in Shakespeare in Western theatre (Sasayama *et al.* 1998:110–115, 251). The French scholar Patrice Pavis, known for largely aesthetic theoretical adjudications of intercultural theatre, approved of Brook’s “intercultural aesthetic” (Pavis 1992:281). Any explicit critique of colonialism was apparently put aside for the universalism and the interest in global harmony that has characterized Brook’s work at his International Center for Theatre Research.

Dennis Kennedy has speculated thoughtfully that theatre has been moving in recent decades from words and ideologies to images, and in this rapid development Ninagawa, Brook, and Mnouchkine turn to Shakespeare because his status is useful and his work a stable referent (Kennedy 1995:62–63). With all the codes in play in these intercultural productions, especially the visual ones saturated with cultural meanings, we are bound to be as challenged as Viola is in *Twelfth Night* as she emerges from her shipwreck on the coast of Illyria to ask, “What country, friends, is this?”

Key references

Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study).

Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Shakespeare's plays: The University of Virginia's *Electronic Text Center* provides e-texts of all the play texts from the 1623 folio and early quartos (limitations on access to modern texts): <http://etext.virginia.edu/shakespeare/>.

World Shakespeare Bibliography Online 1961–2009. Available to subscribers only, but available to students at many university and college libraries. This is the most extensive, scholarly bibliography of works on and by Shakespeare, edited by James L. Harner and published by the Folger Shakespeare Library: www.worldshakesbib.org/.

Shakespeare's Theatre: Website designed by Terry Gray for younger students, providing links to many Shakespeare websites, including links to the sites for London's Globe Theatre, research on the original Globe and Rose theatres, some texts of primary sources relating to Shakespeare's life and Elizabethan performances, a glossary, and materials relating to stage combat, costumes: <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/theatre.htm#Globe>.

Tsoubouchi Theatre Museum: Website on this museum modeled generally on the Elizabethan Fortune Theatre. *Kabuki* prints, notes on exhibits on all forms of Japanese theatre, traditional and modern. Text in English, French, Japanese, traditional and simple Chinese, and Korean: www.waseda.jp/enpaku/index.html.

Shakespeare Performance in Asia: An open-access online archive created by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Shakespeare Electronic Archive, this resource offers video clips of contemporary Asian Shakespeare productions with English subtitles, photos, texts, essays, glossaries and essays. Collaborators: Peter S. Donaldson, Alexander C.Y. Huang, Kobayashi Kaori, Robin Loon, and Young Li Lan: <http://web.mit.edu/shakespeare/asia/about/>.

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Interculturalism, hybridity, tourism: The performing world on new terms

By Gary Jay Williams

Globalization and cross-cultural negotiations in theatre

With globalization has come a variety of cross-cultural negotiations in theatre/performance. Scholars have developed a megabyte of terms to describe them including intercultural, intracultural, extracultural, transcultural, multicultural, transnational, and touristic. They all point to the fluidity of performance in a borderless world. As we noted in the introduction to these final chapters, theatre artists have been working at the junctures and disjunctures between cultures in this era, negotiating the border crossings, giving artistic expression to the dialectic between traditional communities and the forming of next-generation communities. This chapter and the case studies that follow illustrate some of these terms and relate them to the concepts of syncretism and hybridity. In the process, we take up a wide variety of kinds of performances, from that of the rock group, Queen, to a healing ceremony of a shaman in the Peruvian Andes; from Greek tragedy influenced by *kathakali* dance-drama to a contemporary Chinese play that draws on traditional Chinese performance modes; and from the puppet theatre of West Java to a production of *Wilhelm Tell* in a small town in Wisconsin

celebrating its “Swiss-ness.” Taken together, these cultural performances shed light on each other and on the particular phenomenon of cross-cultural theatre today. With the selection of these performances and the juxtapositions of them in this chapter, we hope to stimulate the reader to reflect on the dimensions of what we think of as theatrical and the variety of means by which we perform ourselves culturally.

Historical cross-cultural conversations

Cross-cultural conversations are not new in theatre history. The ancient Greek theatre came into being in the sixth century B.C.E. in the festival of Dionysus, the god of fertility who was probably imported from the Near East. Roman drama and theatre architecture were the godchildren of Greek forms. Japan was importing masked dance forms from Korea, China, and India between the sixth and eighth centuries C.E. When the Italian humanist academies of the sixteenth century attempted to resurrect Greek tragedy, it resulted in the fusion we know as opera. Many renaissance playwrights borrowed from the plays of ancient Greece and Rome. Spain’s Lope de Vega, England’s Shakespeare,

and France's Molière all borrowed from Plautus. The *kathakali* dance-drama, born in Kerala in the seventeenth century, was woven from strands of several indigenous performance traditions, including the Sanskrit temple dance-drama, *kutiyattam*. Japan's *shingeki* (new theatre) movement in the late nineteenth century, the result of the opening of Japan to the West, brought the influence of Western drama and acting to Japan. Irish playwright, William Butler Yeats, was influenced by Japanese *nō* drama. Bertolt Brecht's theory of estrangement in acting drew – somewhat mistakenly – on his observation of the Chinese actor, Mei Lanfang. Such historical perspective may be helpful amid the current postcolonial anxiety about the appropriation from other cultures in intercultural theatre. While intercultural productions now raise the familiar specter of colonialist exploitation, as we shall see, it would be a mistake to think of cultures as unified and static (see the Introduction to Part IV), or to suppose that traditional theatre forms (*kabuki*, for example) exist today pure and unchanging in some parallel universe of timeless authenticity.

Intercultural theatre

Intercultural theatre may be defined as the practice in which theatre artists use the texts, acting styles, music, costumes, masks, dance, or scenic vocabularies of one culture – the “source culture” – and adapt and modify them for audiences of another culture – the “target culture.” Productions of this kind have developed over the last three decades in the context of globalization, with its imbalances of power and wealth, and against the backdrop of historical colonialism. Such productions have often toured internationally, often to festival venues, their spectacle and music playing a large role in the endeavor to make them accessible to audiences of different cultures and languages. Many have been designed for such venues.

Productions in which Western artists have borrowed (some have said “kidnapped”) Asian performance modes have been of keen interest and hotly debated. They raise ethical concerns over the ostensible Western exploitation and misrepresentation of the source cultures. As we have

seen in the case study, “Global Shakespeare,” the French director Ariane Mnouchkine borrowed impressionistically from Japanese *kabuki* and *nō* for her experimental staging in her theatre on the outskirts of Paris of three of Shakespeare's history plays, including *Richard II*. She set Shakespeare's comedy, *Twelfth Night*, in India and drew from Balinese and *kathakali* performance traditions. As we will see in a case study following this chapter (p. 565), Peter Brook staged an adaptation of the Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, with his experimental company in Paris in 1985, which then toured internationally.

 All drew criticism for exploiting and distorting the materials of the source cultures but especially Brook. He was accused of insensitively reworking an Indian religious text into a Western theatre mode. This charge can be understood in the context of a long history of Western colonial subjugation. Indian critic and director Rustom Bharucha was the strongest critic of Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*. Intercultural theatre may be said to mirror some of the problems inherent in globalization – the forced encounter between powerful and less powerful cultures, it is feared, will erase the cultural identities of the poorer cultures of the world.

In one of the more elaborate and aesthetically refined intercultural productions to date, Mnouchkine again took inspiration from Asian theatre and dance for her staging of four Greek tragedies, collectively titled *Les Atrides* (*The House of Atreus*) in 1990–1993. For Mnouchkine and her *Théâtre du Soleil* company in Paris, a city long regarded as an international crossroads, this was an experiment in recovering the tragedies as works to be acted, danced, and sung. She hoped to liberate them from logocentric, literary scholarship and Western staging conventions (Williams 1999:186–194). Her approach to the plays also reflected a general feminist interest.

She began the cycle with Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in which Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter to the gods so they will expedite his army's assault on Troy. This familiarized audiences with the reason for Agamemnon's eventual murder by his wife, Clytemnestra. This in effect put Clytemnestra (played by Juliana

Carneiro da Cunha) at the center of the cycle (Salter 1993:59–65). The production then continued into Aeschylus's three-play cycle, *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *The Eumenides*. In these, Orestes avenges his father by killing his mother and her lover, Aegisthus. The web of revenge and suffering is finally broken by the god Apollo with a new covenant of justice for society. The production used new contemporary French translations by Jan Bollack, Mnouchkine, and Hélène Cixous.

For *Les Atrides*, one entered the auditorium of the hangar-like building that houses the *Théâtre du Soleil* by crossing a bridge over a simulation of the site of a recent archeological dig in China. It had uncovered thousands of life-size Chinese soldiers in terracotta protecting the burial chambers of China's first Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi (247–210 B.C.E.). The costumes of the principals in the Greek tragedies were influenced by those worn by the Chinese figures. Reconstructing the glories of ancient Greece – the usual Western humanistic mode of production – was not the point here. The wide playing area was no imitation of a Greek amphitheatre but reminiscent of a bullring, enclosed by shoulder-height walls of earthen-colored wood.

Each production began with a long crescendo from a large tier of ancient percussion instruments located on a large platform above stage left. Drums propelled the chorus on stage and drove the plays forward thereafter. The chorus dances were derived mostly from Indian *kathakali* dance-drama, as were their costumes of black tunics and white skirts over pantaloons and elaborate headdresses. Their faces were whitened and their eyes dramatically highlighted. Individual chorus members hovered around the action, peering over the walls and around panels in front of the bullring walls, intriguing, sometimes amusing creatures. The most affecting and memorable images of the staging of the plays came in their dances and the occasional dances of the principals. Emerging from gates up-center, the dancing chorus moved into ranks and files, filling the space, hands above their heads, stamping, kicking, whirling, and leaping high with their white skirts flying and their legs tucked

beneath them, reminiscent of *kathakali* dance theatre (Figure 13.1).

Their percussion-accompanied dances were marked with an ecstatic energy of a kind not seen in the conventional Western staging of the Greek tragedies, in which choruses are usually static, draped in stone-like robes, speaking in grey unison, freighted with gravitas. The chorus delivered their verses in between their dances. They and the principals delivered their lines in combinations of speech and chant.

One key dance in *Agamemnon* captured Mnouchkine's sense of the violence and extreme emotions in the play. After Orestes had killed his mother and her lover, he dragged their bodies on to the stage on a bloody mattress from a vomitorium (an entranceway from beneath the seating area) at house center. The energies of his savage murder of them then bled into an ecstatic but precise dance around their bodies, ending in his collapse as he came to recognize the reality of what he had done and the burden of his terrible guilt descended on him (Figure 13.2). His ecstatic dance was horrifying, the more so for seeming emotionally organic.

Mnouchkine's production was successful with audiences in France and on tour in Vienna, Montreal, and New York. Like some other intercultural Western productions, it was criticized for its Asian appropriations and ostensible Orientalism – the Western construction of the “Orient” as the Other, characterized as exotic or promiscuous or duplicitous – supposedly the opposite of the West. (Orientalism is further explained in the discussion of *The Tempest* in the Chapter 12 case study on Global Shakespeare – see p. 537.) Mnouchkine's production was less criticized than Brook's *Mahabharata* because Mnouchkine had not reworked an Eastern text. For some, her production's exotic, fable-like milieu sometimes seemed a remote cultural fantasy; for others Mnouchkine's vision was transcultural and epic, offering a god-like view of the human condition. As with other intercultural productions, its global touring life – with its Asian visual vocabulary and its performances always in French – raises the question of what meanings it made available to what audiences. In the experience of the



Figure 13.1

Dancing chorus members in Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in the *Les Atrides* cycle as staged by the *Théâtre du Soleil*, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine at the *Cartoucherie*, Paris, 1990.

Photo © Martine Franck/Magnum Photos.

writer of this case study, *Les Atrides* succeeded, as few intercultural productions have, in making clear how word-bound, how emotionally constrained, and how chained to individual psychology twentieth-century productions of the Greek classics in Western theatre had become.

Intercultural productions have not been limited to those originating in the West (as we saw in the Japanese Shakespeare productions described in the case study on Global Shakespeare). In New Delhi in 2004, director Amal Allana staged *Eréndira*, an adaptation of a

short story by Gabriel García Márquez (1928–), the Colombian Nobel Prize winner. Like Márquez's well-known novel, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (1981), his short novel, "The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother," is an example of "magical realism." In this genre, fable-like elements are woven into the fabric of a compelling tale. In its imaginary worlds and its blurring of the lines between fantasy and reality, magical realism reflects the double consciousness typical of postcolonial peoples, caught between the past and the future. It has become



Figure 13.2

Orestes (Simon Akarian) dances around the dead bodies of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, in the *Les Atrides* cycle of the *Théâtre du Soleil*, directed by Ariane Mnouchkine, *Cartoucherie*, Paris, 1990.

Photo © Martine Franck/Magnum Photos.

a medium of the culturally dislocated and marginalized in a globalized world; magical realism has given Márquez and other Latin American writers a medium that allows an exuberant voice. (Márquez collaborated on a film of the novel that was released in Mexico in 1983.) The New Delhi company clearly found familiar ground in Márquez's postcolonial sensibility and adapted the story into the Rajasthani dialect of Hindi.

In Márquez's story, a grandmother who was once a prostitute and who has pretensions to grandeur, is served, hand and foot, by her granddaughter, Eréndira

(Figure 13.3). Blaming Eréndira for a fire that destroys their home, the evil grandmother prostitutes her. She takes her, chained to her bed, on an epic journey lasting years, with men lining up for miles to enjoy the legendary Eréndira. The New Delhi company of six women and one man staged the journey in a sequence of striking visual images intended to function as correlatives of Márquez's verbally rich narrative. They used music, dance, and masks, drawing on Indian and Spanish sources, including Rajasthani folk music and Colombian carnivals. *Eréndira* toured in India and

played in Singapore and London, always using supertitles in English.

In the northern Indian state of Manipur, Ratan Thiyam (1948–), artistic director of the internationally recognized Chorus Repertory Theatre in Imphal, staged Sophocles's *Antigone* (1985). Thiyam drew on Manipuri performance traditions, including movement techniques from the traditional Manipuri martial art, *thang-ta*. Thiyam is well known for his spectacular staging of Indian epics derived from the *Mahabharata* that speak to the volatile political conditions in this region.

There has been a wide variety of approaches to intercultural theatre. Some works of Chinese-American director Ping Chong (1946–) might be described stylistically as image theatre (discussed in Chapter 12). Chong's theatre pieces and his films of the 1970s and 1980s were collaboratively developed, plotless, carefully choreographed, sometimes meditative works. They often involved themes of cultural and spiritual dislocation, deriving from Chong's own experiences as an outsider in America. 📺 In his amusing film, *Noiresque: The Fallen Angel* (1989), an Asian-American girl, a modern



Figure 13.3

The grandmother in *Eréndira*, an adaptation from Gabriel Márquez's short story, directed by Amal Allana, New Delhi, 2004. In this scene, several actresses play the granddaughter, Eréndira, bathing the grandmother.

Photograph © Kaushik Ramaswamy.

Alice in Wonderland, boards a train bound for an Orwellian technocracy that is inhabited by dehumanized, mechanized residents. Chong's *A.M./A.M. – the Articulated Man* (1982) took up the Frankenstein legend and featured a robot who, unable to become socialized, kills and flees into the city. In what seems to be a clear reference to the sense of spiritual dislocation of many Asian-Americans, Chong said of this production, "When human beings in a society fail to have a rich psychic life, then it's ripe for fascism" (Leiter 1994:62). His *Nosferatu* (1985) alternated portions of F.W. Murnau's early vampire film with scenes from the lives of a soulless yuppie couple in Manhattan who confront a vampire.

The Chinese composer, Tan Dun (1957–), whose music melds modernist styles and Eastern and Western classical traditions, recently collaborated with Chinese-American novelist, Ha Jin, on an opera, *First Emperor of China*, commissioned by New York's Metropolitan Opera and starring Spanish-born tenor, Plácido Domingo, as the Qin dynasty emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi.

In Japan, as we saw in the Chapter 12 case study on Global Shakespeare, director Ninagawa Yukio transferred Shakespeare's Scottish *Macbeth* to sixteenth-century, samurai Japan, and the production toured to Scotland and England. In Korea, at the Seoul International Theatre Festival in 1988, the Theatre Group *Ja-Yu* staged *Blood Wedding* by Spanish playwright, Federico García Lorca (1898–1936), using traditional Korean funeral ceremonies in the final act. For the New York Shakespeare Festival in 1988, director A.J. Antoon created an African-Brazilian world for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with bossa nova dances and voodoo spells. For Brazil's *Teatro Ornitórrinco* in 1991, director Cacá Rosset created an Amazonian world for the same play. In it, the Greek ruler, Theseus, presided over a Spanish colonial court amid the jungle. This production transferred to the New York Shakespeare Festival.

Features of intercultural theatre at a popular level were to be seen in the Broadway stage production of *The*

Lion King (1997), directed by Julie Taymor (1952–), and produced by the Disney Corporation. Taymor, who had created an international theatre company in Indonesia in the 1970s, drew on various Asian traditions of puppetry and masked dance theatre for the production's animal puppets, including lions, elephants, and giraffes (Figure 13.4). Its musical score included pieces by South African composer, Lebo M, including African chants and the song "Shadowland," which blends African and European rhythms and orchestration. The score also included rock songs by Elton John and Tim Rice. *Lion King's* accessible story and spectacle have made it globally popular. With ten touring companies, it played to 25 million people worldwide and remains on Broadway at this writing. Intercultural theatre productions in general have exploited the languages of the theatre – scenic spectacle, music, and dance – to be accessible to various international audiences.

Intracultural theatre

"Intracultural theatre" is a term that has been used to describe works combining performance modes from different cultural traditions or communities within nation-state boundaries, rather than across them. However, the term and the practice have been migrating toward something more complex, as we shall see.

In India, a major movement known as "theatre of roots" developed in the 1950s and extended into many cities. It sought to draw on rural Indian folk forms and performance styles for contemporary, cosmopolitan Indian theatre. Director K.N. Panikkar of Kerala (1928–) was a major figure in the movement. In recent years, it has declined, however, criticized for decontextualizing the traditions it has borrowed and reducing them to exotica. In New York, Mabou Mines, a New York theatre collective led by Lee Breuer (1937–), created *Gospel at Colonus* (1984), one of the group's most popular productions and one that could be described as intracultural. It crossed Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* (associated with a Western high art, white upper-class cultural tradition) with contemporary African-American gospel choir music (associated with popular art and a



Figure 13.4

The Lionesses from the original London company of Disney's *The Lion King*, directed by Julie Taymor, 1997.

Photograph: Catherine Ashmore © Disney.

black middle- and lower-class cultural tradition). As we saw in Chapter 12, Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon (1942–), African-American composer, civil rights activist, and founder of the women's gospel choir Sweet Honey in the Rock, collaborated on an original music-dance theatre work with director-designer, Robert Wilson, known for his postmodernist theatre of images and indeterminacy. In their *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (2004), based on Gustave Flaubert's novel of the same

name (1874), the African-American Anthony and a black choir sang gospel-influenced music inside Wilson's serene, elegant, postmodern, temple-like setting. They moved to African, rock, and jazz rhythms as Anthony went through his intense spiritual trials.

However, it would be problematic and very limiting if the term "intracultural theatre" were taken to signify only somewhat sweet, intramural cultural events in which the arts of minorities are blended into a homogenized

mode for the consumption of cosmopolitan audiences in wealthy nations. Also, the use of the term often seems to be based in conventional, Eurocentric notions of modern nation-state boundaries as a “natural” defining of unified cultural entities. The cultural realities are much more complex. For example, India – a nation in which there are 18 recognized languages and more than 1,500 different languages are spoken – cannot be accurately described in such terms, notwithstanding political mantras about “unity in diversity.” Indian-born cultural critic and theatre director Rustom Bharucha has written on his experiments with intracultural theatre in India (see Chapter 9, Figure 9.1). Bharucha suggests that the possibilities of intracultural theatre are best negotiated when the dialectics of cultures and cultural differences are acknowledged (Bharucha 2000:66). Such works should be open, he believes, to explorations of differences and expressions of dissent.

A case study follows this chapter (see p. 573) that deals with what may be described as an intracultural play and its reception in a complex, shifting political landscape in mainland China, one that also affects Chinese living outside of their “homeland” (a term always wanting scrutiny). *Wild Man* (1985) by the Nobel Prize winner, Gao Xingjian (1940–), gives voice to both China’s rural, traditional cultures and its new, urban social realities, and it draws on both traditional and contemporary performance modes. At the time of its premiere, in the era after the Cultural Revolution, and before the crackdown in Tiananmen Square in 1989, it corresponded to the new regime’s new narrative of nationhood. But within a short time that was no longer the case.

Syncretism and hybridity

The intercultural and intracultural performances described above are among the many manifestations of the syncretism and hybridity that have resulted from globalization. Syncretism refers to the merging of different systems of beliefs, social practices, or aesthetics, from sources inside and/or outside of cultures. The resulting hybrids or fusions may represent a disproportion of influence by

the dominant power; they sometimes represent an integration by the less powerful. Historically, syncretism has typically been the result of colonialism, with its military conquests, religious evangelism, settlement, and commerce. Ritual hybrids, such as a Roman Catholic mass with indigenous music, are common.

Let us consider an example of the merging of different cultures in a modern ritual performance that has roots in a centuries-old colonial context. In the Peruvian Andes near Cuzco, not far from the ancient Incan site of Machu Picchu, a middle-aged Andean man regularly performs an ancient Andean healing ritual for groups of foreign tourists. Dressed in the colorful, traditional costume of the rural people of the Andes, this *curandero* prays in the Quechuan language over a carefully prepared packet of herbs and healing plants. His ceremony is an amalgam of many influences, including ancient Incan folk medicine, Hippocrates, and modern beliefs about psychic phenomena. It culminates in the *curandero*’s prayer of blessing over individuals who wish to participate. This modern shaman is also Roman Catholic; he ends each blessing with the Catholic invocation, “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” His ritual combines strains from pre-colonial Incan culture, Spanish colonial culture, Roman Catholicism, and the traditional rural Andean culture, and it is performed for audiences of international tourists.

With the development of globalization, hybrids have evolved rapidly, to the extent that hybridity is becoming a global norm. This is in some part the result of the rapidity of globalization and of its horizontal processes, both of which distinguish it from the old colonialism. Globalization is often criticized as capitalistic imperialism that exploits less powerful cultures much as the older colonialism did. However, globalization is more complex; it has not been entirely vertical and hierarchical. Cross-cultural relations occur at an individual level every day in the globalized world, on a large scale. Migrations to urban centers have meant that the populations of the world’s cities have become much more culturally and racially complex than they were half a

century ago. International travel of the middle class of wealthier nations has become a major industry. In developed nations, international concert tours have become commonplace, as have educational exchanges. Above all, the electronic media – television, film, radio, video and audio recordings, and the Internet – have become key players in horizontal, cross-cultural relations, and negotiations of cultural change. Neither governments nor the corporate electronic media are wholly in control of these relations. (On these points, see the section “Globalization, media, theatre, and performance,” in the Introduction to Part IV.) Of course, many poor and remote peoples, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, are still not so globally linked.

Contemporary popular music, globally distributed through electronic media, presents many examples of the new hybridity and the horizontal processes of globalization. In 1977, the British rock group Queen recorded a song, now internationally known, whose beat they derived from the rhythms of a Muslim rite of self-flagellation practiced by Iranian males. “We Will Rock You” has become a thundering victory chant performed by fans at athletic events worldwide (the song title is the title of a 2002 musical about Queen that toured internationally). In the mid-1980s, American vocalist Paul Simon created a fusion of American popular songwriting with the music of the South African group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, led by Zulu South African, Joseph Shabalala. The music, which originated with poor black miners in South Africa, is known as *Isicathamiyu*. The group and the influence of this music was heard in Simon’s *Graceland* album (1986), including its hit songs such as “Under African Skies” and “Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes.” A subsequent album by Shabalala’s group alone achieved success, and the group collaborated with Chicago’s Steppenwolf Theatre on a Broadway musical in 1993, *The Song of Jacob Zulu*.

An extraordinary example of the merging of traditional cultures and the forces of globalization is the changing configuration of *wayang golek* – the highly popular puppet theatre of the province of West Java in Indonesia – as it moved into television. In *wayang golek*,

three-dimensional, carved and painted wooden puppets tell stories in the Sundanese language. It is related to *wayang kulit*, in which puppets made of thin hide perform in Javanese. It may date from the sixteenth century and was probably associated with the importation of Islam. Its repertoire of plays draws on the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Performances are in part improvisatory as the artists adapt to each audience’s responses, and the old tales may take on some contemporary resonance. Among *wayang golek*’s characters is an array of gods, warriors, ogres, clown servants, demons, knights, kings, queens, and princesses, all portrayed by puppets 15 to 30 inches high, manipulated with rods by a highly skilled, visible puppeteer (*dalang*) music for the performances comes from singers and an orchestra of gamelans (tuned kettle gongs), xylophone-like instruments, and drums. Most live performances are held in conjunction with a ritual at which food is served and prayers recited, such as a wedding, circumcision, or a ceremony dedicating a new building. Performances may last eight hours or more, from 8.30 in the evening to 4.30 in the morning.

Wayang golek has long been an entertainment integral to the social life of West Java (predominately Sundanese). Because of its popularity – live performances draw large crowds – and because of its cultural authority, *wayang golek* has been used by national governments to communicate ideologies and instruction, as Andrew N. Weintraub shows in his detailed account, *Power Plays*. From the Japanese occupation in World War II through the regimes of Presidents Sukarno (1945–1966) and Suharto (1967–1998), *wayang golek* has sometimes been allied with, and has sometimes been a site of resistance to government mandates as it has adapted to cultural sensibilities. It has been a dynamic medium reflecting the national imagining and re-imagining of an Indonesian nation state.

As Indonesia modernized and entered the global economy, *wayang golek* artists created hybrid forms that took advantage of the new communication technologies. In the 1970s, performers of this highly visual and essentially social art began to record and promote

performances on audio cassettes. In the mid-1980s, *wayang golek* moved onto the national television channel, where both the government agenda and the reframing for the media resulted in new variations. Broadcasts were limited to about 45 minutes. “Don’t play all night! Today’s spectators are busy,” said one government official (Weintraub 2004:196). This meant that plays intended to last as long as eight hours were drastically edited, compromising the performances of the tales whose elaborated epic form is essential to the metaphysical view of the human condition that the puppets represent. Some artists compensated by serializing their plays. They also learned how to exploit multiple camera angles to heighten scenes of spectacle, such as battles. The hybrid, televised *wayang golek* reached the same audiences as the live shows did, and it also suited the autocratic Suharto government well because the studio performances were done without live audiences. In the customary interactions with *wayang golek* performers, live audiences often registered their discontent with state messages or otherwise made a performance unpredictable.

However, in 1996, one well-known puppeteer, Asep Sundandar Sunarya, developed a new *wayang golek* derivative for television, a hybrid comic form featuring the traditional puppet character, Cepot. Weintraub describes Cepot as “a boisterous, outspoken country bumpkin whose obscene language and carnivalesque humor challenge elitist social conventions and class hierarchies” (Weintraub 2004:202). In daily programs that were part sketch and part sitcom, *The Asep Show* dealt with topical concerns in the final years of Suharto’s scandal-ridden regime – bank scandals, money laundering, narcotics, and crooked land-developing schemes. Cepot, the honest, earthy, regional figure with a simple lifestyle, became the foil to the wealth, sophistication, and corruption of Indonesian politics and business. Performances were given in the Indonesian language for a national audience, but with strong regional strains. Quite distinct from the spirit of the Suharto New Order, which emphasized national unity while at the same time compartmentalizing regions and

ethnicities, the television world of Cepot emphasized diversity, difference, and cross-cultural realities.

The hybrid *Asep Show* continued after the fall of Suharto and the collapse of the national economy in 1998, and through the ethnic and religious strife of the volatile years that followed. Cepot instructed listeners on such matters as the effects of a decline in investor confidence and continued to tell old tales with topical links. In the meantime, *wayang golek* continued to be performed in traditional style for live audiences in West Java, although affected by the new hybrids. One consequence is an ongoing debate over how explicitly political the art should be.

Tourism and performance

The desire to explore other lands and know other cultures is evident in the travel literature and travel pictures of many cultures over many centuries, which record pilgrimages to capital cities, religious shrines, and scenic natural wonders. Whether travelers are seeking historic/legacy sites and/or different cultures, they seek their own sensuous confirmation of the existence of the world they have imagined and anticipated, and they seek an experience of authenticity. Often, local performances of various kinds are an important part of their experience.

By the end of the seventeenth century in Europe, the “grand tour” to sites of classical monuments and to museums and galleries became a regular rite in the education and maturing of sons of aristocracy and gentry. With the development of the middle class, and “leisure” time, tourism grew, and tourist destinations responded with improved presentation of sites and added attractions. Today, national and international tourism is a major industry, serving a large middle class in developed nations. Sites once remote have become easily accessible via inexpensive air travel and package tours.

Travel to special performance events has become common. Sports events, such as the Olympics, draw thousands of tourists to their athletic performances and the related rituals and pageantry. Richard Schechner has

aptly described the Olympics as “Globalism’s signature performance” (Schechner 2002:238). The Olympics may be described as a utopian performance of cultural diversity within an imagined frame of world community, even while the competitive games are appealing to nationalistic fervor. Governments know that performing in the games will bring them recognition as respected members of the world community. Developing nations aspire to host the games, knowing that this will testify to a level of prosperity and stability that will assure long-range tourism. Internationally known architects are commissioned to design lavish stadiums that will become skyline signatures of Olympic cities aspiring to be tourist destinations. Orbiting around the Olympics in recent decades have been intercultural arts events, such as those spawned by the Los Angeles Olympics in the 1980s, and China’s Olympics in 2008 opened with a globally televised spectacle in which indigenous dance and music were put on display in vast, technologically advanced scenic environments.

As we have seen, theatre festivals have become destinations for pilgrimage audiences, some seeking the shrines of Shakespeare, some seeking adventurous artistic experiments (see Chapter 11). Suzuki Tadashi’s Toga Art Park in the mountains of central Japan, with its complex of theatres and its international festivals, became a tourist destination.  In recent years, New York City’s Lincoln Center has offered several weeks of intercultural performance events in a summer festival environment intended to draw tourists. It has included intercultural productions created by Robert Wilson, Ninagawa Yukio, and Ariane Mnouchkine, among many others.

Tourist companies and state agencies have helped develop performances or exhibitions for travelers that draw on indigenous cultures. Folkloric performances – usually music and dance – are staged for tourists in major world cities including Mexico City, Warsaw, Prague, Cuzco, and Marrakech. In India, Jaipur’s Rex Tours arranges for urbanized Rajasthanis and foreign visitors to observe “authentic” rural Indian life in a specially built village, where they watch craftsmen work

and enjoy traditional food, dance, and music. The tour company brochure invites the traveler to “take a peek into the lives of rural folk, their abodes, social setup [*sic*], religious beliefs, and innovative cuisine” (cited in Schechner 2002:236). In Ireland, one can visit a “real” Irish village near Shannon International Airport. We have already cited the Peruvian *curandero*, performing his healing rites for tourists in the Andes. In Kenya, tribal dances of the Maasai tribe have been staged for tourists. As the economic and racial gaps widen between the tourist and the people on display, such performances raise ethical questions. When do these performances become demeaning exhibitions for the consuming gaze of tourists? Do the historical villages and heritage tours create an appealing “eternal past” that spectators can view with comfortable detachment, even nostalgia, a past unconnected to any problems in the past or in the present? Is the tourist seeking escape, or will she/he have any opportunity to be active rather than passive and to ask questions about such issues?

Some performance artists have devised presentations for tourist settings that confront tourists with the very issue of the touristic gaze. Mexican–American performance artist, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, arranged such an event in 1992 in Madrid’s Columbus Square on the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of America. It was designed to help spectators recognize the ways in which “exotic peoples” have been exploited and conceptually colonized. Gómez-Peña and his then frequent collaborator, Coco Fusco, set up a 12-foot square golden cage in which they “played” recently discovered “primitive” Amerindians, the entirely fictive “Guatinauis,” supposedly from an island in the Gulf of Mexico.  The couple were dressed exotically, spoke gibberish, watched TV, and posed for photos (Figure 13.5). Ethnographic handouts described the “specimens” and their typical behavior. Spectators’ responses varied. Some believed they were seeing rare natives; some complained that the display was inhumane (Schechner 2002:261). (See the Part IV Introduction, “Key references”, for a website address



Figure 13.5

A tourist photographs the performance work, *Two Amerindians Visit*. Guillermo Gómez-Peña and Coco Fusco played fictive “Amerindians” as caged, exotic specimens in this performance piece, created in 1992 in Madrid’s Columbus Square on the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of America.

Photo © Coco Fusco.

for videos of other Gómez-Peña work; also see the Chapter 7 section on exhibition performances in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, p. 337).

For the Vienna Festival in the summer of 2000, German director Christoph Schlingensief (1960–) created a performance work that scandalized Austria, the more so for being set up next to the Vienna State Opera, a prime site for tourists, whom it was designed to reach. Entitled *Please Love Austria*, it employed a “residential container” in which 12 actual refugees (anonymous)

from different countries who were seeking asylum in Austria, stayed awaiting their fate. They were guarded and their daily routines filmed and shown on television screens in the plaza. Over the container was a slogan representative of the extreme right-wing politics of Austria’s Freedom Party and its leader, Jörg Haider, “*Ausländer raus*” (Foreigners Out). Schlingensief shouted extreme right-wing slogans from a nearby rooftop and shocked tourists in the plaza below by welcoming them to Austria, “the Nazi factory.” As Gitta Honegger

explains, “The container installation was the simulation of a culture that had absorbed Haider’s extremist rhetoric” (Honegger 2001:5).

In our final case study (p. 580), we see a small town community theatrical production in the United States, which is part of a representation of community identity for both local residents and tourists. In 1938, a small town in Wisconsin with historical Swiss origins and a long history of celebrating its ethnicity, began what became the annual staging of Friedrich Schiller’s play, *Wilhelm Tell*. Schiller’s play, often performed in Europe in the nineteenth century, celebrates the legendary Swiss figure as a hero embodying the freedom and independence of the human spirit. Today, the residents of New Glarus offer the play as both a self-conscious performance of the village’s historical Swiss ties and ethnic identity, and as a collective (re)invention intended to attract tourists. Here, tourism, ethnicity, and community identity intersect in a continual re-imagining of social relations.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Brook, P. (director) *The Mahabharata*: 312-minute film made in 1989, on two DVDs, a reworking of the stage production. Clips available on YouTube. Search Peter Brook, then the title.

Gómez-Peña, G. and Coco Fusco: *Two Amerindians Visit* (1992). A 30-minute video tape, available from Data Bank in Chicago: Info@ydb.org, or +1 800 634 8544. Photos of this and other performances are available on Fusco’s website: www.thing.net/~cocofusco/.

Ping Chong Company: <http://www.pingchong.org>. See also its Facebook entry.

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CASE STUDY: Whose *Mahabharata* is it, anyway? The ethics and aesthetics of intercultural performance

By Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei

On July 7, 1985, the international theatre world witnessed the debut of one of the most theatrically brilliant yet controversial productions of the late twentieth century: director Peter Brook's nine-hour, three-play adaptation of the Hindu epic, *Mahabharata*

(Figure 13.6). That first performance (in French) in an abandoned stone quarry as part of the 29th Avignon Festival was followed by an English language world tour in 1987–1988. A 330-minute English language film was released (and broadcast on television) in 1989. 📺 According to director Brook, he and playwright Jean-Claude Carrière were “not presuming



Figure 13.6

In Peter Brook's *The Mahabharata*, the archery tournament for the young cousins, in *Part I: The Game of Dice*, from the 1986 production at the Bouffes du Nord, Paris.

Photo © Gilles Abegg.

to present the symbolism of Hindu philosophy” but trying to “suggest the flavor of India without pretending to be what we are not.” They were “trying to celebrate a work which only India could have created but which carries echoes for all mankind” (Carrière 1987:xvi).

In addition to adapting a sacred Hindu text said to be 15 times longer than the Bible, the authors borrowed and adapted a wide variety of spectacular performance styles, exotic music, and visual aesthetics, derived from India and other non-European cultures. Supported by a huge budget, the international, multi-racial, and multi-lingual cast spent several years in research and rehearsal (including travel to India). The resulting piece, coming in the midst of increasing awareness of colonialism’s injustices, provoked both extreme praise and extreme condemnation.

Here, chosen from among many, are examples of the opposing views, offered by respected theatre scholars. First, a criticism from Indian critic, Rustom Bharucha:

Peter Brook’s *Mahabharata* exemplifies one of the most blatant (and accomplished) appropriations of Indian culture in recent years. Very different in tone from the Raj revivals, it nonetheless suggests the bad old days of the British Raj . . . through the very enterprise of the work itself [and] its appropriation and reordering of non-western material within an Orientalist framework of thought and action, which has been specifically designed for the international market. . . . [Brook] does not merely take our commodities and textiles and transform them into costumes and props. He has taken one of our most significant

texts and decontextualized it from its history in order to “sell” it to audiences in the West.

(Bharucha 1993 (1990):68)

In contrast, a specialist in international theatre and performance, Maria Shevtsova, praises the work:

[U]niversal theatre [is] represented as never before by Brook’s *Mahabharata* . . . Its aesthetic is driven by a vision set on eroding hierarchies between nationals, races, castes or classes, or any other socially determined privileges [sic]. In this respect, too, Brook creates in *The Mahabharata* a totally new theatrical genre for which existing names are inadequate. By modeling its own features, this genre both anticipates coeval audiences and presupposes it can help create them . . . [T]he notion of “world community” underpinning Brook’s work is [close] to the spirit of synthesis and, for that matter, to the humanist perspective . . . not to mention its humanitarian and even utopian impulse.

(Shevtsova 1991:221–222)

Two decades after its premiere, Brook’s *Mahabharata* continues to be a touchstone for heated debates regarding the ethics and aesthetics of a genre variously termed “intercultural,” “cross-cultural,” “transcultural,” “multicultural,” or “syncretic.” For the sake of simplicity, this case study will use the term “intercultural” theatre. (See the definition in Chapter 13 above, and for discussions of alternative terms, see Lo and Gilbert [2002] and Pavis [1996].)

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: The historian between two views of intercultural performance

Bharucha and Shevtsova were responding in opposite ways to issues raised by Edward Said in his influential book *Orientalism* (1979), which helped shape postcolonial criticism. We have already seen some of the ways postcolonial criticism works (see the Chapter 12 case study, “Global Shakespeare”). Here, we consider both sides of the

particular issue that postcolonial critics often describe as the “appropriation” of indigenous cultural properties by artists from an outside culture. Said notes that Western artists, like politicians and soldiers, have often seen non-European cultures (such as those of India, Japan, China, Africa, or the Middle East) as objects that are available for their use, rather than as important and equal civilizations. Like colonizers or conquerors, artists have power. By labeling the “Other” as exotic, childlike, primitive, dangerous, or incomprehensible, the artist or colonizer can justify “controlling” or “appropriating” cultural properties. Said does not suggest that the intent is always destructive or even profit-oriented. Artists have often “appropriated” aspects of the art of other cultures to enrich or rejuvenate their own, and benevolent efforts have been made by outsiders to preserve or protect works of ancient cultures that seem in danger of disappearing.

American director Peter Sellars believes that intercultural artistic encounters can have positive results:

Each human operates across cultural lines – between ourselves, between other cultures. . . . The most profound encounters still take the form of the Homeric journey, the quest where you go abroad and come back transformed. That journey doesn’t always need to be imperialistic. . . . We are all of us travelers, strangers, visitors, even at home.

(Quoted in Sorgenfrei 1995:52)

The issue of appropriating or representing another culture in an artwork, however, can be problematic, as Said points out in discussing Orientalism:

The things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances, *not* the correctness of the representation or its fidelity to some great original. The exteriority of the representation is always governed by some version of the truism that if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient.

(Said 1979:21)

To come then to the issue of intercultural theatre, we offer a basic definition by Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert:

Put simply, intercultural theatre is a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions. It is primarily a western-based tradition with a lineage of modernist experimentation through the work of Tairov, Meyerhold, Brecht, Artaud, and Grotowski. More recently, intercultural theatre has been associated with the works of Richard Schechner, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, Ariane Mnouchkine, Robert Wilson, Suzuki Tadashi, and Ong Keng Sen. Even when intercultural exchanges take place within the “non-West,” they are often mediated through western culture and/or economics.

(Lo and Gilbert 2002:36–37)

Some of the cultural elements that might be transported between cultures (or fused into new genres) include narratives, rituals, myths, philosophical or religious concepts, music, language, settings, costumes, properties, makeup, staging, and training methods of performers. When done thoughtfully, the results have been aesthetically satisfying for many audiences. For example, *The Lion King*, a hit musical in London, New York, and on tour, directed by Julie Taymor and based on the Disney animated film, featured puppetry, music, scenic design, costumes and masks derived from various African, Indonesian, and Japanese performance genres (Figure 13.7; see also Figure 13.4).



Figure 13.7

Roger Wright as Simba in the original London company production of Disney's *The Lion King*. The costumes designed by director Julie Taymor and the masks and puppets designed by Taymor with Michael Curry show the influences of various African, Indonesian, and Japanese performance genres.

Photo Catherine Ashmore, © Disney.

Japanese director Ninagawa Yukio's acclaimed production of Euripides's *Medea* employed Japanese *kabuki* acting, ancient Greek and Cretan costuming, and classical European music (Figure 13.8). French director Ariane Mnouchkine and her company, the *Théâtre du Soleil*, have produced critically acclaimed intercultural productions of Shakespeare and the ancient Greeks (see the Chapter 12 case study, "Global Shakespeare," and Chapter 13), as well as of original plays.

Despite the pleasure many find in such works, some scholars feel that intercultural productions raise ethical questions. Does an artist have a right to use whatever she is inspired by, regardless of its source? Are certain subjects or cultural products (such as sacred rituals) off-limits? Does using cultural elements out of context promote stereotypes? Does it aid in understanding and appreciating other cultures? Is it possible to create and/or evaluate a work of art without considering the social or political implications? In other words, is there such a thing as "art for art's sake?"



Figure 13.8

Ninagawa Yukio's *Medea*, at Tokyo International Theatre, 1987. Costume designs fuse Japanese *kabuki* with Greek/Cretan elements, such as the ram's horns headdress shown here.

Photo © Maurizio Buscarino.

Evaluating the intercultural performance

Lo and Gilbert acknowledge the wide differences in artists' goals and methods. They suggest imagining intercultural theatre as an elastic dialog between cultures, a kind of "two-way flow" that sometimes pulls one way, and sometimes the other. To judge a work, they recommend the spectator consider (1) the artistic and sociological/anthropological/political elements of the "source" culture or cultures; and (2) those same elements of the proposed "target" culture or cultures (the assumed audience). They note that each case will be distinct, due to the specific circumstances of its creation and performance. The elastic pull might be more towards aesthetics or more towards social/political/cultural context. In judging any intercultural work, then, one must determine, according to one's own priorities as a spectator, whether there is an acceptable balance.

Before analyzing Brook's *Mahabharata*, it will be useful to consider how this production fits into Brook's work at the International Center of Theatre Research in Paris. (See Chapter 12 for an overview of Brook's career.)

Peter Brook and the International Center of Theatre Research

Brook has been one of the most visible practitioners of "intercultural" theatre at least since 1970, when he helped found (with financial backing from the Ford Foundation, UNESCO and other sources) the International Center of Theatre Research in Paris (as of 1974, the International Center for Theatre Creations (CICT)). With actors, dancers, mimes, musicians, acrobats and other artistic collaborators from around the world, the Center attempts theatrical creation and experimentation that transcends national boundaries and commercial considerations. Plays are often rehearsed for over a year; productions occur only when (and if) they are ready. The Paris theatre that is home to the Center is the *Bouffes du Nord*.

The history of CICT suggests the path that led to the *Mahabharata*. Brook sought to create "performance texts" by emphasizing those elements traditionally considered secondary (gesture, movement, vocal tone, spatial relationships, etc.) and de-emphasizing the written text, traditionally elevated to greatest importance. In its

first three years, the company undertook extensive "fieldwork" research in such places as Iran, Africa, and America. The goal was to provide a collective experience that would bind the company together, open them up as artists, and transform them by confronting the unknown. They did not attempt to learn new techniques, but to unlearn old ones, to reveal intuitive or "authentic" responses in the actor's body, and to rediscover a kind of imagined purity or innocence. This idea is similar to the *via negativa* advocated by Jerzy Grotowski (see Chapter 12).

CICT's first production was *Orghast*, performed in 1971 at the Shiraz/Persepolis Festival in Iran. It was an experiment in non-representational, abstract music and poetry inspired by the myth of Prometheus. It was performed in an invented language composed of over 2,000 word-sounds derived from musical phonemes, ancient Greek, Latin and Avestan. Playwright Ted Hughes described his goal: "If you imagine music buried in the earth for a few thousand years, decayed back to its sources, not the perfectly structured thing we know as music, that is what we tried to unearth" (Williams 1991:5). *Orghast* attempted to communicate on a pre-rational level; it presumed and sought to reach some common emotional core in the audience without social, linguistic or cultural barriers.

Orghast was followed by other experiments, such as *The Conference of the Birds* (1972–1973). Based on the twelfth-century Sufi poem by the Persian Farid Uddin

'Attar of Nishapur, the play was developed through improvisation during a three-month trek in jeeps across the Sahara desert and northwest Africa, and later during residencies in California with Luis Valdez's *El Teatro Campesino*, at a Chippewa reservation in Minnesota and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Analyzing Brook's *Mahabharata* as intercultural performance

Brook's goals and methods have been both praised and criticized, as we have seen. In regard to *The Conference of the Birds*, David Williams reported that "the lack of any verifiable evidence that the group's foray into African culture involved a real exchange enraged [some people], who immediately wrote off the entire exercise as symptomatic of a radical utopianism, even of a neo-colonial ethos" (Williams 1991:7). While Williams acknowledges that such criticism may result from taking the work out of context, he also emphasizes that:

[T]he Centre's initial work was structured around a series of questions that intrigued Brook. They are avowedly essentialist and humanist – idealist in formulation and concern, signaling Brook's intuitive sympathy with Jung's foregrounding of a mythopoeic sensibility, to the detriment of a rationalist or materialist discourse.

(Williams 1991:4)

By "essentialist," Williams means that Brook (like psychologist Carl Jung) believes that all people share a common, unchanging core or essence. "Humanism" is a set of values that has been embedded in Western thought since the Renaissance. In general, it placed the emphasis on human potential, putting life more at the center of human concerns than the Christian afterlife (although still Christian). Both concepts have been challenged in recent years as the creations of an elite class of European males. Critics of these terms consider the ways in which such concepts are the constructions of historical conditions flowing from such material factors

as class, race, ethnicity, and gender ("rationalist and materialist discourse").

Said suggests that one method of evaluating an artistic work is to examine its narrative structure. In their *Mahabharata*, Brook and Carrière transformed a cyclical, digressive, religious narrative into a linear, secular one. Cyclical narratives tend to distribute their focus across disparate tales and characters and to spread out philosophical considerations rather than zeroing in on a singular topic or issue. They are typically lyrical, dream-like, non-logical and ambiguous. In contrast, a linear, forward-moving narrative emphasizes an orderly or logical progression, for example from ignorance to knowledge. Linear progression is deeply embedded in Judeo-Christian philosophy and forms the rationale for traditional European dramatic structure, beginning with the ancient Greeks. For the *Mahabharata*, Brook and Carrière wanted to shorten and concentrate their work, so they eliminated aspects they thought unrelated to a main action. They divided the rest into three parts, creating a trilogy reminiscent of Greek tragedies or the three-act play structure, and, in effect, seemed to follow the linear concept of Aristotle's definition that a tragedy must have a "beginning, middle, and end." They created a framing device by having the tale told to an Indian child. Did such choices suggest an incoherent or incomprehensible original? Did they imply that the audience was like a child who needed difficult ideas explained in familiar ways? As Said noted: ". . . if the Orient could represent itself, it would; since it cannot, the representation does the job, for the West, and *faute de mieux*, for the poor Orient" (Said 1978:21).

Similarly, if we look at the episodes they chose for inclusion, we notice many that emphasize bizarre or supernatural sex. Examples include 100 brothers born from a giant iron ball that only emerges from their mother's womb after her stomach is beaten, and two wives who summon various gods to impregnate them because their joint husband has been cursed to die if he has intercourse. The adapters selected the stories of five brothers married to a single wife and the sexual encounter of a human with a demon. All of these

elements exist in the original but with stories of different kinds. Were these selected primarily for exotic appeal, or did they help audiences discover the original narrative's "interior" meaning?

Such questions require us to examine any particular performance in detail, aesthetically and ethically. We must assess that elastic pull between aesthetic pleasure and social value and between the source and target cultures. There is no simple "score card" with which to assess the extent to which a work is a troubling, Orientalist appropriation. One must assess one's own sensibilities together with an awareness of the possible moral implications of the work. Some may find this comment of Peter Brook's helpful (he was speaking to actors, but his words are relevant to audiences).

The only thing I can say that may be of some use is that there are two ways of making theatre. One can make theatre . . . to create things that improve on life. . . . The other possibility is to use one's contact with theatre to live in a better way. . . . All one can do is pursue the kind of work that opens one up and makes one available. . . . One can say that theatre is good or bad. And how does one feel that? By tasting it. The proof is in the pudding.

(Williams 1991:278)

Ultimately, it is up to the individual spectator – and the historian – to determine, which careful reading and viewing can help.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites

should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

Brook, P. (director) (1989) *The Mahabharata (Part 1: The Game of Dice; Part II: Exile in the Forest; Part III: The War)*. A 312-minute film made in 1989, on two DVDs, a reworking of the stage production. Available for purchase from Parabola Video Lab or Insight Media. Clips available on YouTube: search "Peter Brook" then the title.

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CASE STUDY: Imagining contemporary China: Gao Xingjian's *Wild Man* in post-Cultural Revolution China

By Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei

After the disastrous, anti-intellectual Cultural Revolution in mainland China (PRC, the People's Republic of China), during which many people were brutalized or killed (1966–1976), China underwent rapid economic and social Westernization. (On the Cultural Revolution, see Chapter 10.) Today, especially in major cities such as Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai, theatre is relatively vital, albeit there is still selective government repression and cautious self-censorship to avoid confrontation. Experimental performances break the boundaries that once separated traditional sung drama (*xiqu*) from Western-style spoken drama (*huaju*). (For a discussion of several important contemporary Chinese dramatists, see the Introduction to Part IV.)

As Claire Conceison notes, a number of recent dramas feature Western characters and deal with cross-cultural themes (Conceison 2004). For example, the married couple, Sun Huizhu (William Sun, 1951–) and Fei Chunfang (Faye C. Fei, 1957–), are co-authors of plays interrogating Chinese identity. They lived for many years in the United States, but have since returned to Shanghai. *China Dream* (*Zhongguo meng*, 1987) and *Swing* (*Qiuqian qingren*, 2002) chronicle the complex dilemmas, dreams and memories plaguing Chinese women living in America, including what it might mean to marry a foreigner. Taiwanese playwright/director Lai Shengchuan (Stan Lai, 1954–) was born in Washington, D.C. and has spent his life shuttling between Taiwan and the West. His *Secret Love in Peach Blossom Land* (*Anlian Taohuayuan*, 1986; film, 1992) is considered the first important modern drama of Taiwan – the Republic of China. It questions Taiwanese identity in relation to the People's Republic by showing two theatre companies – one *jingxi*, one *huaju* – crossing paths when both are scheduled to rehearse plays at the same time and place.

The stage play has been performed many times to huge crowds in both Taiwan and the PRC. In 2007, Lai directed his own English translation at Stanford University. 🖨️

In such works we can see what Una Chaudhuri identifies as the concept of “geopathology”: “the characterization of place as problem.” In a number of recent Chinese plays, we often find that personal identity is constructed as a “negotiation with the power of place” (Chaudhuri 1995:213). How is national identity created and defined? What does it mean to be Chinese if you no longer live in China? Or if the Chinese government seeks to change China fundamentally? The current case study considers a single Chinese dramatist. It is not meant to suggest that he is representative of all Chinese drama. In fact, as we hope to make clear, his case is unique. But in his career we can see an example of the issue Chaudhuri describes.

In 2000, playwright/novelist/painter Gao Xingjian (1940–), who lives as a self-defined exile in Paris, became the first Chinese-language author to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Rather than celebrating this achievement as a national victory, Chinese newspapers were reluctant to carry the news. Many officials and intellectuals lamented the choice of Gao over Chinese writers still residing in mainland China. To understand the reasons behind this response, we must consider both the history of spoken drama (*huaju*) in China and the particular political conditions of contemporary mainland China.

China's culture extends back thousands of years. The written language unites over 300 distinct ethnicities and vernacular languages. For centuries, Chinese writing (print culture) and Confucian ideology were the dominant influences in East Asia, especially in Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. To be educated or to enter government, non-Chinese speakers needed to learn to read

Chinese. Often they journeyed to China's capital to gain knowledge and culture. The power of the written Chinese language is one reason why China, which called itself "the Middle Kingdom," was the center and model for many realms.

Foreign colonization and imperialism eroded Chinese domination and independence. European nations forced a militarily-weakened China to accept unfair trade

agreements; the British importation of opium (traded for items such as tea) enfeebled many Chinese who unwittingly became addicts. From the late nineteenth through the middle of the twentieth century, various Chinese military and political factions fought each other as well as European and Japanese colonialists.

During the mid-twentieth century, both the nationalists (led by Chiang Kai-shek) and the communists (led

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Theories of national identity

In his *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that nationalism or "nation-ness" (the sense of belonging to a unique nation) results from forces set in motion in the eighteenth century, several of which we have considered earlier (see Chapter 4 and its case studies). Among these are the rise of print-capitalism, the establishment or re-definition of national borders, the inclusion or exclusion of groups based on imagined classifications such as race, religion, social class, or language, and the invention of national mythologies of antiquity and legitimacy.

Anderson maintains that nations are always created by an abrupt rupture with the past that redefines both time and space – for example, by invasions, revolutions, civil wars, declarations of independence, coups, or the dismantling of empires. All members of the nation share a national narrative (or history) that is "remembered" (and sometimes "forgotten" or revised) by everyone, although outsiders may "remember" a different version.

Governments develop and support cultural and natural monuments, education, arts, literature, museums and archeological sites (which are often also valuable economic assets) that help define and "legitimize" the nation and the national narrative. For example, the Grand Canyon, once imagined as a vast, barren chasm that created a barrier to American expansion, is today a national park visited by countless international tourists, and it appears on stamps and postcards as emblematic of the United States' natural beauty and bountiful resources. In Cambodia, the medieval Buddhist monuments of Angkor, lost for centuries in jungle overgrowth, are now important international tourist destinations. Images of the restored temples and palaces appear on the national flag, suggesting an ancient, powerful and eternal realm (despite a recent history of widely-divergent political regimes and the fact that the restoration was instigated and originally funded by colonial France).

In her *The National Stage*, Loren Kruger suggests the ways in which theatre is sometimes used to create national legitimacy. She maintains that official notions often conflict with how "the people" see themselves. Theatre can become a "battleground" for this often contradictory relationship. Play texts and the location of performances can help determine legitimacy. For example, in Elizabethan England and Edo Japan, theatre "for the masses" took place in special districts that were across a river and outside the city limits. In contrast, elegant courtly entertainments were presented within the ruler's palace. These aristocratic performances suggested the sovereign's absolute power, and only these were shown to visiting dignitaries.

Governments have often felt the need to transform, tame or confine public theatrical events. For Kruger, an analysis of theatre's varied artistic, political and economic "spheres" can help us understand the often contradictory relationships between national self-image and the practice of national power.

by Mao Zedong) supported reinventing “China” as a “modern nation.” Eventually, the communist forces defeated the nationalists, who retreated to the island of Taiwan where they established the Republic of China, imagined as the legitimate government of all China. In contrast, the government of the mainland People’s Republic of China (established in 1949) claims hegemony over Taiwan, which it sees as a renegade Chinese province. The issue is further complicated by the desire of some residents of Taiwan to form a separate nation unrelated to the mainland, while others seek reunification of Taiwan with the mainland.

Both “Chinas” created national narratives that are deployed to support legitimacy. For example, when the nationalists fled to Taiwan, they took many priceless works of art. These are displayed in the National Museum in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan. To some citizens of Taiwan, this act suggests the government’s concern for protecting the ancient Chinese cultural heritage from wanton destruction; to others and to the Chinese on the mainland, it represents the act of a bandit regime that plundered national treasures. The issue of these treasures continues to be highly sensitive on all sides.

The development of “modern” Chinese theatre

In the early twentieth century, after the humiliations of European imperialism, military defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, and the shift toward Western culture (“The May Fourth Movement”), China reversed the ancient practice of cultural pilgrimage, and progressive Chinese students went to universities in Japan. There, a student group called the Spring Willow Society (*Chunliu she*) produced the first Chinese language spoken drama, *The Black Slave’s Cry to Heaven* (*Heinu yutian lu*, 1907), based on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. For these culturally colonized Chinese students, the theme of freedom (and the spoken style of modern Western drama) resonated deeply. Thus, the first Chinese spoken drama (*huaju*) – and the first Chinese play to grapple with modern

national identity – had its source outside China. To celebrate the hundredth anniversary of this event, a new play called *Cry to Heaven* (*Yutian*) was written in 2007 by Yu Rongjun (Nick Yu, 1971–). According to the play’s translator, the juxtaposition of Chinese *huaju* history with scenes from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and American songs related to slavery makes “the American slaves’ struggle for freedom a metaphor for Chinese dramatists’ efforts to achieve their own” (Yu 2009:1) (Figure 13.9)

Western models fueled early *huaju* such as Cao Yu’s (1910–1996) influential *Thunderstorm* (*Leiyu*, 1934), a psychologically based family drama. However, such realism was deplored during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), which called for the elimination of everything considered decadent, obscene, or otherwise somehow opposed to public welfare. In theatre, this meant rewriting or “forgetting” the past by eradicating the “feudal” stories and performance styles of “Chinese Opera” (*xiqu*, a term referring to all types of traditional theatre, of which the most well known is *jingxi*, or Beijing Opera). Optimistic socialist realism was preferred, but most other foreign influences were forbidden. Mao Zedong’s wife, Jiang Qing, a former actress who had once played Nora in Ibsen’s *A Doll House*, was a central figure in the Cultural Revolution. She advocated a new style of musical drama to be performed by newly trained actors, dancers and singers, permitting only eight “model works” (*yangbanxi*), composed of five “revolutionary operas,” two ballets, and a symphony. *Yangbanxi* such as *Hongdengji* (*The Story of the Red Lantern*, 1964, a *jingxi*) or *Hongse niangzijun* (*The Red Detachment of Women*, 1964, a ballet) featured proletarian heroes and heroines, approved ideology, and contemporary themes, costumes and scenery. The melodramatic, relatively realistic style was, ironically, somewhat akin to both Western movie musicals and Russian ballets.

Professional *jingxi* and *huaju* actors, as well as doctors, intellectuals, teachers, and others, were beaten, imprisoned, or sent to the countryside to be “re-educated.” Among these was Gao Xingjian, who spent



Figure 13.9

Cry to Heaven (Yutian, 2007) by Yu Rongjun (Nick Yu), written in celebration of the 100th anniversary of the creation of *huaju* (Chinese spoken drama). This work features key scenes from *huaju* history and scenes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Photo courtesy of Claire Conscison and Yu Rongjun.

six years in southwestern China after “volunteering” to destroy a suitcase filled with his early manuscripts.

Gao's forced sojourn in the provinces exposed him to the culture of China's ethnic minorities. Despite communism's official atheism, many rural peoples practiced the ancient *wu* religion – pre-Confucian shamanism featuring spirit possession, exorcism, and ritualized, theatrical performances using brightly painted wooden masks, dance, drama, and song (for more on

shamanistic performance, see Chapter 1). Such influences – as well as a deep concern for the welfare of the environment and a strong, nostalgic connection to a specific place – are evident in Gao's 1985 play *Wild Man (Yeren)*.

Brecht modified for China

With the end of the Cultural Revolution came a period of intellectual openness and artistic experimentation.

Many artists sought ways to combine Chinese “tradition” and “modernity.” Gao and other contemporary theatre artists, including Sun Huizhu, Sha Yexin, Wang Peigong and Ma Zhongjun, attempted a reimportation and reinterpretation of styles and theories attributed to Bertolt Brecht. As noted in the Introduction to Part IV, director/theorist Huang Zuolin had first introduced Brecht’s ideas and plays to China in the 1930s. Nearly half a century later, these ideas were being rediscovered by a new generation.

Brecht claimed that his theories were partially inspired by seeing performances by *jingxi* star, Mei Lanfang (1894–1961), in Europe and Russia in the 1930s. For Brecht, Chinese Opera seemed so unrealistic that he assumed that both actor and audience were distanced from emotional involvement and freed for critical, rational analysis (his major interest). However, Mei Lanfang felt his art was “realistic”; what seemed strange and unemotional to Brecht was moving and believable to the Chinese. As noted in the Chapter 3 case study on Japanese *nō* drama, Western feminists such as Elin Diamond have suggested adapting Brechtian acting to oppose the power of male-dominated theatre. Similarly, many Chinese theatre artists and theorists advocate a frontal, presentational acting style, episodic structure, the dialectical juxtaposition of disparate ideas and elements, and a clear awareness of theatre as theatre (manifest in such strategies as stylized gestures, mime, on stage musicians, direct address to the audience, song). Aspects of Brecht’s Marxism also coincide with mainland Chinese political philosophy.

Wild Man combines Brechtian elements with ritual, shamanistic performances of rural ethnic minorities. Gao’s most famous previous work was *Bus Stop* (*Chezhan*, 1983), inspired by Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*. Unlike Beckett’s play, *Bus Stop* offered a social message, suggesting that people must actively take charge of their own lives, not passively wait for a savior. Nevertheless, the play was criticized as being “too Western” and contributing to “spiritual pollution.” Playwrights wishing to experiment were ordered to turn to Chinese models. Although the excesses of the

Cultural Revolution were over, the government dictated (and continues to dictate) approved ways for theatre to represent the nation.

Gao’s *Wild Man*

Wild Man is about an ecologist assigned to teach forest conservation to peasants in a remote river valley. The play features conflicts between ecological conservation and local economic/social realities, and between “factual” science and “superstitious” belief. Specifically, the urbanized, educated ecologist refuses to believe in a “mythical” forest creature that the locals revere. Deforestation and the resulting severe flooding are consequences of China’s rapid industrialization. For example, due to increased education, by 1990 the academic publishing industry required more than twice as much paper (made from trees) as it needed in 1985. Gao poses questions about rapid modernization in a society where many rural people still practice ancient rituals and customs, but he offers no solutions.

Wild Man has 41 characters, plus singers, musicians, and 12 separate groups of crowds. Each actor portrays many characters. Scenes flow into and are juxtaposed against each other; time is not chronological. Multiple scenes are performed simultaneously, and locales shift through creative use of sound, lighting and other theatrical or cinematic effects. A traditional singer and his assistant “narrate” the action. Ancient *wu* rituals are performed, including the sacrifice of a live rooster, and local styles of ethnic minority performances alternate with psychologically motivated acting.

Gao and others who have re-invented Brecht for use in China maintain that they have avoided Brecht’s tendency to exoticize the Orient by employing Chinese performance styles. However, it can be argued that turning to ancient Chinese rituals and traditional “Chinese Opera” actually presents these internal genres as “exotic” or “primitive,” further marginalizing the rural population and suggesting that traditional performance genres are dead (or nearly dead) “museum pieces” in need of preservation (Sorgenfrei 1991).

Gao's career after Tiananmen Square

Gao's work and the course of his career were changed dramatically, again, by the course of political events in China. After the mid-1980s campaign against "spiritual pollution" (a reaction against the liberalization following the end of the Cultural Revolution), a period of political liberalization and artistic experimentation ensued. However, fears that this liberalization was excessive led to another government crackdown. On June 4, 1989, the Chinese government sent troops and tanks into Beijing's Tiananmen Square to clear students and intellectuals who were demanding greater democracy and artistic freedom. Public protests had begun in April and persisted until June 4, at times reaching numbers exceeding one million citizens. The events were watched on global television by millions. (See the Introduction to Part IV on the famous televised confrontation of one lone protester with a tank.) The concluding military attack resulted in an as-yet unspecified number of fatalities, though some estimates were in the thousands. Some dissidents fled the country, fearing a return of totalitarianism. Gao had already emigrated to France in 1987 because of negative government reactions to his work, but today many foreign advocates of human rights view him and other Chinese exiles as post-Tiananmen exemplars of the need for changes in the Chinese government. Gao's 1990 play *Escape* (*Taowang*, 1990) was a direct response to Chinese politics, specifically the events at Tiananmen Square. *Escape* sealed the Chinese ban on Gao's works in China. Since 1993, though, Gao's plays have not dealt with China or Chinese politics.

Official Chinese versions of the events at Tiananmen Square in 1989 vary considerably from other versions – from inside and outside China. Official Chinese sources estimate far fewer deaths there than Western sources report. However, in 2009, a memoir by Zhao Ziyang, a former Premier and head of the Chinese Communist Party who had opposed the crackdown, was published. Written while Zhao was under house arrest for his dissenting views, the account contradicts the official

record, criticizes the government, and is certain to renew controversy. The event is a sensitive one for Chinese today, just as are the complex histories of the Cultural Revolution and the vexed relationship between mainland China and Taiwan. Some Chinese would prefer to look to the future. (Writing history as it happens often does not afford the historian the perspective one would like.) What the historian *can* consider fruitfully is the playing out of such dilemmas, and for this the work of theatre artists is ideal (as we have seen often in this book). The theatre historian can explore the ways in which the Chinese theatre artists are negotiating those changes – Chinese of varying cultural perspectives, inside and outside of mainland China, changes that are related to the issues of Chaudhuri's concept of the problem of place and to national identity.

Let us, then, return to the lukewarm reaction in China to Gao's Nobel Prize in 2000. The reason may well be that official China sees the award as a Western attempt to influence internal Chinese policies. Gao, who now lives in Paris, may be imagined by some as a person who has abandoned his homeland; indeed, some Chinese intellectuals and artists suggest that he has successfully manipulated Western intelligentsia for his own benefit. From this perspective, Gao's work may be seen to fail to represent current Chinese concerns and even current artistic strategies. To them, Gao Xingjian's plays (five of which were written in French) are no longer imagined as part of China's quest for a sense of nation-ness in the contemporary world. Rather, they are seen as products of a primarily European imagination. As the ban on Gao's work loosens in China and his works become more available in the future, it will be intriguing to see if that view changes.

Key references



Audio-visual resources

The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study).

Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

Discussion questions for many of our case studies are available on our supporting website.

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CASE STUDY: Backstage/frontstage: Ethnic tourist performances and identity in “America’s Little Switzerland”

By Phillip B. Zarrilli

Ladies and Gentlemen, with the *Wilhelm Tell Overture* serving as an introduction, we are about to begin the . . . annual presentation of Schiller’s classic drama, *Wilhelm Tell*. Welcome again to historic and picturesque New Glarus, named after Glarus, Switzerland. New Glarus is the home of *Wilhelm Tell*, and this drama depicts the story of the famous Swiss struggle for the God-given rights of independence and freedom. It contains a message which is relevant for our times. The Wilhelm Tell Guild would like to request that you do not leave the seating sections with your cameras. All members of the cast will be happy to pose for your pictures at the close of today’s performance. Thank you.

(Opening announcement: New Glarus community performance of *Wilhelm Tell*, 1981)

Each Labor Day weekend in September, one mile from the small town of New Glarus, Wisconsin (population 1,800) on Green Country Road W, at the crest of a hill overlooking the village, members of the American Legion, Fire Department, and Lion’s Club direct cars and buses toward a grass parking lot. They are arriving for the annual outdoor community performance of Friedrich Schiller’s (1759–1805) *Wilhelm Tell* – English performances on Saturday and Monday, and the original German on Sunday.

The walk to the outdoor Tell grounds takes visitors down a long shaded pathway through a thick forest. Toward the bottom of the hill, to the left through the trees, parts of the “backstage” area can be seen: horses are saddled and ready, waiting to take their places. Spectators are greeted by teenage ushers dressed in

“authentic” hand-sewn reproductions of thirteenth-century Swiss costumes. A lush green field opens up at the bottom of the hill. A row of loudspeakers separates the main aisle from the huge performance area. The boundaries of the playing space are irregularly formed by the thick forest – a backstage area with eight entrance pathways (Figure 13.10).

As the audience is seated – numbering between the hundreds (German performance) and several thousand (English performance) – pre-play entertainment begins with the Swiss Miss Folk Dancers. After the announcement above and Gioachini Rossini’s famous *Overture*, alpenhorn players with their 15-foot-long horns emerge from backstage to call home the herds of brown Swiss cattle and goats from the mountains before winter. In response to the plaintive calls of the alpenhorns, young boys and men appear herding raucous, often unmanageable goats and cows (Figure 13.11). Peasant women, children, and elders from the “village” gather to welcome the herders home. Traditional Swiss songs and yodeling intermingle with the lowing of the cattle, their clanging bells, and the bleating of goats. As the songs conclude, the cast of over 100 disappears into the forest. The audience applauds the opening spectacle. Thus begins the annual performance of *Wilhelm Tell* as it builds toward the climax when Tell shoots the apple off his son’s head. What the audience has witnessed is a literal realization of the pastoral scene described in Schiller’s text:

. . . high rocky shore of Lake Lucerne. . . Across the lake one sees the green meadows, villages, and farms of Schwyz, lying in the bright sunshine . . . one hears the cowherd’s tune and the harmonious ringing of the herd-bells.

(Schiller 1954:7)

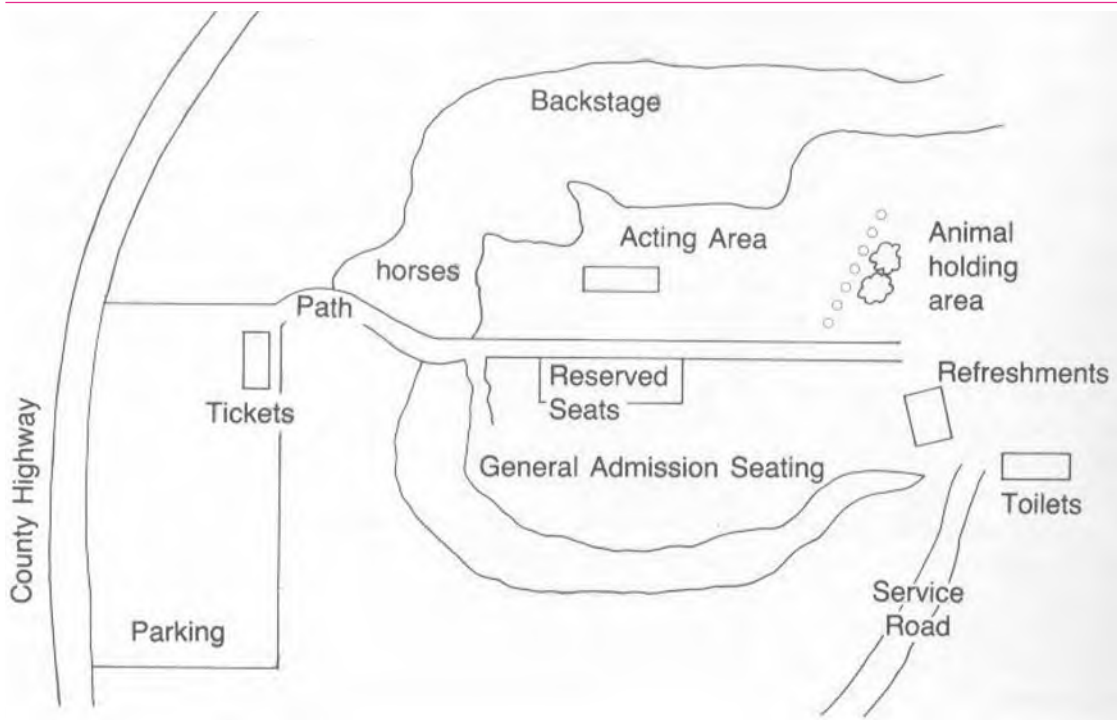


Figure 13.10

Diagram of the grounds for the performance of *Wilhelm Tell*, located just outside the village of New Glarus, Wisconsin.

© Phillip B. Zarrilli.

Since the play's first performance in German in 1938, this small mid-western community annually garners its collective human resources (over 200 people) to stage *Wilhelm Tell*. Before and after the production, the swell of visitors nearly overwhelms the village. Some will order Swiss specialties such as *Kaesecheuchle* (baked cheese pie) in local restaurants such as the Glarnerstube (Glarner is the original Swiss-German dialect of the village), order a Glarnerbier, dance a polka, browse the gift shops stocked with Swiss cuckoo-clocks and cassettes featuring local Swiss music, or visit one or more of its tourist attractions – the Chalet of the Golden Fleece (1937), or the Swiss Historical (pioneer) Village. Overt trappings of “Swissness” dress the town:

“Swiss Miss Lace Factory,” “Swiss Lanes,” Swiss-style architecture, the Wilhelm Tell crest, colorful Swiss family shields on lampposts, and the omnipresent red and white Swiss flag on menus, wallpaper, outside buildings, or as a swizzle stick. New Glarus represents itself today as “America’s Little Switzerland.” This case study considers how New Glarus provides one site for considering the historical interaction between performance, tourism, ethnicity, and identity. The study is based in methods of ethnography and sociological theories of tourism. (For an explanation of ethnography, see the Chapter 3 case study on *kathakali*, p. 143.) This case study is based on original research undertaken by the author in collaboration with Deborah Neff between 1981 and 1984.



Figure 13.11

Opening scene of *Wilhelm Tell* in New Glarus, with “villagers” herding the Swiss cattle down from the “mountains.”

Photo © Phillip B. Zarrilli.

INTERPRETIVE APPROACH: Sociological theories of tourism and everyday performance

In *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, Dean MacCannell examines “actual” tourists, that is, the mainly middle-class sightseers scouring the world “in search of experience,” and the “tourist” as a meta-sociological model through which to examine the totalizing experience of modernism. The contemporary middle class “systematically scavenges the earth for new experiences to be woven into a collective, touristic version of other peoples and other places,” writes MacCannell (1976:13). Sightseeing is an attempt to overcome the discontinuity of modern experience by creating the illusion of a unified experience – an impossibility since “even as it tries to construct totalities, it celebrates differentiation” (MacCannell 1976:13). Indeed, the differentiations created by the modern world are structurally similar to tourist attractions in that “elements dislodged from their original



Figure 13.12

The Tell production in Interlaken, Switzerland (from 1912). One model for the creation of New Glarus's production.

Photo courtesy Marilyn Christiansen, Tell Guild, New Glarus.

natural, historical and cultural contexts" are fitted together with other displaced, modernized things and people. "The differentiations *are* the attractions" (1976:13). Sightseeing allows the tourist to construct totalities from his different experiences. "Thus, his life and his society can appear to him as an orderly series of formal representations, like snapshots in a family album" (1976:15). For MacCannell, tourism becomes a primary ground for the production of new cultural forms as it reshapes "culture and nature to its own needs" (MacCannell 1992:1).

Tourism engages the tourist and her/his hosts in a series of face-to-face interactions that are by definition formulaic and time-limited. Sociologist Erving Goffman developed a "dramaturgical model" of the commonplace conventions that govern the performance of face-to-face interactions in contemporary everyday life (Goffman 1959). Whether one is in a doctor's reception room, an airplane, or on tour, one is in a context that has a "front" and "backstage." In "front" the "setting," "costumes," and behavior are carefully staged. Conduct and emotions may require training (Hochschild 1983). What is said is often circumscribed or "scripted." In contrast, "backstage," the social roles and conventions governing behavior and interaction can be dropped, knowingly contradicted, or parodied.

Frontstage at Plimoth Plantation and in New Glarus

Some tourist attractions, such as Colonial Williamsburg (1930s) and Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts (1959) self-consciously constructed their “fronts” as recreated historical villages. Plimoth Plantation became a “living museum” in 1969 when it attempted to replicate as seamlessly as possible the “actual” life of the pilgrims of the Plimoth of 1627 by having full-time professional first-person interpreters role-play, “in character,” scenes from everyday life “as if” they were the actual pilgrims (Snow 1993). Tourists today encounter a variety of pilgrim characters throughout the village in semi-improvised everyday life and activities – from marriages to a “Court Day,” where culprits are brought before the Magistrate.

New Glarus is not a living museum of Swiss or Swiss-American life, but performs its ethnicity while remaining what it is – an economically and increasingly diverse, primarily middle-class, semi-rural small town. Its “Swiss” “front” is not seamless and has been built piecemeal over the years. Residents know that their self-conscious performance of the village’s Swiss origins and “identity” has some basis in historical fact, but that it is also a collective (re)invention intended to attract tourists. Local historian Millard Tschudy explains without a trace of irony that New Glarus is a “for-real community” in that it developed its early performances for itself rather than for outsiders, but once outsiders started coming to see “the Swiss” in great numbers in the 1960s, the community “naturally” provided them with all the signs of Swissness that outsiders wanted to see.

New Glarus before Tell: Early celebrations for itself and others

New Glarus’s self-conscious ethnic identification as “America’s Little Switzerland” has its basis in historical fact. The original immigrants – 193 men, women, and children – those most affected by a failed local economy – left their native canton of Glarus, Switzerland, on

April 16, 1845, to make the arduous journey to the New World. Organized by the Glarus Emigration Association, they were preceded by advance scouts who procured 1,280 acres of land by the Little Sugar River in Wisconsin. On August 17, 108 of the original group arrived and divided the land by communal lot. After a difficult first winter and within four years, the community thrived by growing wheat. When wheat prices plunged in the 1860s, the community diversified, turning to dairy farming and cheese-making – quintessentially Swiss occupations. After 1910, the single most important non-agricultural employer was a milk-condensing company (originally Helvetia, later Pet Milk), employing 80–140 workers and serving 300 local farms.

Throughout the nineteenth century in Europe, crop failures and unemployment caused by rapid industrialization brought immigrants to the U.S. in unprecedented numbers. Throughout the upper mid-west, new communities formed a patchwork ethnic quilt juxtaposing Germans, Norwegians, Irish, Swiss, and Dutch. Customs and traditions from “home” were maintained through dance, music, language, and key symbols – markers of identity to insiders and a curiosity to outsiders. An Irish woman residing in “Irish Hollow” recorded how she and her family decided to go and “look at the Swiss” on July 4, 1853:

The two families had decided to spend the Fourth . . . at Belleville. . . . However, on the morning of the Fourth, Uncle’s horses could not be located . . . It was noon before we [found them and] had them hitched to the wagon . . . Then someone remembered it was a long drive – eight miles – to Belleville.

“Let’s stay home like sensible folk,” suggested Mary.

“No, do let us go some place,” said Aunt. “It is only five miles to New Glarus; we can look at the Swiss, if we can’t understand them.”

“I hate to be beat,” acknowledged Uncle Alex. “Let us take a look at the Dutch.”

Deciding on “the Swiss” rather than “the Dutch,” the diarist describes the celebration:

New Glarus was celebrating the Fourth of July, but it was a Swiss celebration. Gessler was there and William Tell, to shoot the apple from his son’s head. There were Swiss wrestlers and Swiss dancers in the dining room of the hotel, where a Swiss music box with weights was wound up . . . Round and round the couples would glide while at certain intervals in the music the men would stamp their feet and emit wild whoops.
(Wallace and Maynard 1925)

The Swiss immigrants readily associated the celebration of American independence with the commemoration of a battle that delivered their ancestors from the tyranny of their Austrian oppressors on April 9, 1388. As early as eight years after the founding of the community, Tell was already a key symbol mediating Swiss and American identities, and providing entertainment for others.

A variety of local accounts confirm how key symbols of Swiss identity remained integral to local celebrations. An 1891 newspaper report on the 600th anniversary celebration of the birth of Switzerland notes that over 6,000 visitors traveled by special train to New Glarus for speeches, eating, dancing, and the parade with living-picture tableaux featuring Wilhelm Tell, Lincoln freeing the slaves, and Helvetia and Columbia – the “Swiss and American goddesses of liberty” (Neff and Zarrilli 1987:6). In 1928, the Men’s Choir (*Maennerchor*) sponsored the first annual celebration of Swiss independence – the *Volksfest* – with song, dance, competitions, and food.

For the 90th anniversary celebration in 1935, the grandest community-wide celebration of its history and identity saw a fully mounted production of an historical drama authored by prominent local citizen, Dr. Schindler (Wallace and Maynard 1925:6). A dramatic commemoration of the village’s settlement, it was translated into the Glarner dialect for performances in English and *Glarnerdeutsch*. The cast included the first settlers and their families, dancers, yodelers, Civil War

veterans, Helvetia, and Uncle Sam. Thematically, the play emphasized the courage, endurance, and cooperation of the early community, admonished the audience to be proud to be Swiss while enduring the hardships of life, and emphasized the virtues of strength, courageousness, unity, freedom, love, and industriousness. The text contrasted the settlers and heroes with the Italian Blackshirts, the German Brownshirts, and the Russian Redshirts. It urged caution against “dictatorship, fascism, and Communism in our own land.” In contrast, the “truly American shirt was the Buckskin – standing for steadfastness of purpose, firmness of action, and clarity of union.” The play concluded with the entrance of Helvetia and Uncle Sam from separate ends of the stage. The three-day celebration was presided over by Governor P.F. LaFollette.

Tell comes to New Glarus

The festivals and commemorations described above were celebrations of the community’s dual Swiss-ethnic and American identities, undertaken in and of themselves. The first steps toward a more self-conscious (re)construction of the community as “Swiss” for outsiders were prompted by an “inside-outsider” – Mr. Edwin Barlow (1885–1957). Although “related” to the community by birth (his mother was Madelena Streiff), Barlow was raised after the death of his parents in nearby Monticello by his aunt and uncle (Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Figi). He attended college in Washington D.C., served in World War I, and lived in New York where he was involved in minor theatrical activities. After being adopted by a New York socialite and distant relative, he traveled Europe and spent nine years in Lausanne, Switzerland.

During the 1930s, Barlow visited New Glarus and Monticello where he experienced the *Volksfest*, and perhaps the 1935 commemorative drama. Inspired by his residence in Switzerland, Barlow decided to build an authentic Swiss chalet for his aunt – an architectural anomaly at the time. When Mrs. Figi died before the “Chalet of the Golden Fleece” was completed in 1937, Barlow made it his home.

Remembered by community members as being “different,” “highly dramatic and theatrical” (Neff and Zarrilli 1987:9), Barlow introduced his plan early in 1938 for the community to stage its own outdoor pageant production of Schiller’s *Tell*. Barlow was inspired to do so by his experience of the Swiss festival-productions of *Tell* at Altdorf (bi-annually from 1899) and Interlaken (annually outdoors from 1912) – the productions which immortalized Tell “as the Swiss national ‘hero.’” Barlow was persuasive. Key community leaders were convinced, and the town was mobilized. On September 4/5, 1938, with a cast and crew of between 120 and 140, the first two performances in German played to audiences of approximately 1,500 on the 4th, and “several hundred” on the 5th, who braved cold, drizzly conditions. With a profit of US\$535.44, the Tell pageant became, as hoped, “one of the traditions of New Glarus” (1938 program). By 1941, the numbers directly involved in the productions (then German and English) had grown from approximately 140 to 290, plus crew. The Tell Festival had quickly become an integral part of the community’s social and institutional fabric; the “Tell Guild” was formed to manage the production, invest proceeds in community projects, and interact with other community organizations like the Chamber of Commerce.

Barlow directed the productions between 1938 and 1945/6 when he turned direction over to his assistant, Mrs. Fred Streiff. In 1954 Barlow gifted the Chalet and its contents to the village “with the stipulation that it be maintained as a museum.” Barlow died in 1957.

We know from as early as the 1853 Irish diarist that at least some outsiders always attended New Glarus’s festivals, but the annual Tell productions attracted a steady stream of tourists. With the closing of the major local non-agricultural employer (Pet Milk) in 1962, village leaders and entrepreneurs saw tourism as a possible year-round economic boon – and a self-conscious, if gradual village remake began. In 1965, the New Glarus Hotel (built 1853) was renovated into “an authentic Swiss-style restaurant,” with “pure basic . . . Bernese-style architecture.” Swiss-style store-fronts

(*Glärnerstube*) were erected. Additional “authentic” Swiss architecture (Chalet Landhaus Hotel; Schocoladen) followed later. To the traditional *Maennerchor* were added numerous new folk-dance and music groups – Roger Bright and his Orchestra, the Edelweiss Stars, the Swiss Miss Dancers, and others. New annual festivals – the Heidi Festival (June 1965) and Little Switzerland Festival (winter 1985) – were added to *Volksfest* (August) and Tell (September), attracting tourists year-round.

Backstage

In Goffman’s terms, what has a “frontstage” always has a “backstage.” Both New Glarus and Plimoth Plantation “stage” their authenticity, but do so in different ways and with a very different relationship between “front” and “back.” At Plimoth Plantation, there is a formal division of front and back as the actor/historians clock in and out, and/or take breaks where they step “backstage” into the “goathouse” to have a cigarette. It is transgressive for both when a tourist accidentally wanders backstage and sees a performer out of role. Plimoth Plantation reportedly “works” best when there is a constant sense of “playful deceit” between the actor/historians and their visitors (Snow 1993:172).

In New Glarus there is no “seamless” front, no “authentic” historical roles to play, and front and back constantly bleed into one another. There is still a sense of “playful deceit” at work, but the deceit is the tourist’s conceit – whether he wishes to see, acknowledge, or document the unhidden “back.” It is tourists who stage New Glarus’s authentic “Swissness” when their cameras focus selectively on Swiss-style buildings, performances, and costumes and leave out of the frame the ranch-style home next to the Chalet.

Within the community’s “backstage,” enthusiasm over Tell and Swissness is not universal. Some “don’t want to be Swiss.” But for many, the annual experience resonates with what Francis Hsu calls the “intimate layer” of social and cultural life – those places, people, things, or activities by means of which a person develops “strong feelings of attachment” (1985:29). For the New Glarus residents and their families who participate in the



Figure 13.13

In New Glarus, one of the ushers holding the American flag at the conclusion of the performance of *Wilhelm Tell* when the cast poses for photographs.

Photo by Phillip B. Zarrilli.

Tell play, it is a family affair – literally a picnic, and therefore a time when status and interpersonal differences are suspended to a much greater degree than usual while the community plays at making Swiss “history.” As one resident said:

It’s something people grow up with here. They need you to be there. That’s a part of it. Then you get new people into town and they get involved. There is a spirit there.

(Neff and Zarrilli 1987:34)

Once involved, families commit themselves to the production year-in-year-out. Paul Grossenbacher played the original Gessler in 1938 and continued in the role for 24 years before taking over direction of the German production. Gilbert Ott, who with Ed Vollenweider created the first Tell, took the role in the 1941 English version and continued until 1961. He died several weeks after his final performance. Many adults began

their involvement as children progressing through such non-speaking roles as choirboys, goatherders, dancers, soldiers, townspeople, and then to speaking roles. Their children, in turn, are playing roles they once played. From this “backstage” perspective, involvement allows residents to experience and (re)fashion their individual, familial, and/or collective identities; explore their relationship to “real” or “imagined” Swiss and middle-American sentiments and values embedded in their performances; stimulate the local economy; and serve their community by raising funds. Tourism, identity, and ethnicity meet and are constantly (re)imagined as New Glarus performs its Swiss/American “cultural heritage.”

But there is a second, more problematic “backstage” to New Glarus’s performance. In the construction of itself through this representation as the quintessential little Switzerland in the United States, the residents and the tourists are co-creating an illusion of New Glarus’s Swiss-ness as a unified/unifying experience, much like

that which Dean MacCannell has described. The invitation to “become Swiss for a day” is as much a fantasy as those offered at Disneyland. The celebration of the Tell festival is equally a moment of remembering for some in the community, as well as of collective forgetting.

Key references



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The online resources listed below (and others) can be accessed by going to our supporting website: www.theatrehistories.com and clicking on the address you want (under the appropriate chapter or case study). Data and opinions on websites may not have been subject to review by experts. Material on websites should always be checked against scholarly books and articles such as those cited below.

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“Backstage Frontstage”: *Wilhelm Tell in America’s “Little Switzerland,”* DVD-video (50 minutes). Documentary of the *Wilhelm Tell* play and its production in New Glarus. Deborah Neff and Phillip Zarrilli, research; edited by Sharon Grady. Produced by the Folklore Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Available from: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Folklore Program, Ingraham Hall, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.

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Glossary

By John Agee Ball and Bruce McConachie

Absolutism. The concentration of all political authority and state power in the person of the monarch. It is primarily associated with seventeenth-century France and Spain, although historical monarchies in China and Japan had features of absolutist rule. It is associated with **neoclassicism**.

Absurd, Theatre of. An expression coined by the critic Martin Esslin in 1961 to categorize plays by Arthur Adamov, Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Jean Genet. Relating them all to the existentialist philosophy of Albert Camus (1913–1960), Esslin presented these playwrights as unified in their portrayal of the human condition as meaningless. Once influential, this narrow interpretation is in declining usage.

Acting modes. From the perspective of **phenomenology**, there are three modes through which the audience encounters the actor in performance: the “self-expressive mode” (the actor operates in the first person, speaking as an “I”), the “collaborative mode” (the actor addresses the audience in the second person, as “you”), and the “representational mode” (the actor represents the character).

Actor-managers. Actors, often ones playing lead roles, who also owned and managed an entire theatre company. They emerged in Europe during the 1550s, as potential for producing commercial theatre expanded during the Renaissance. One of the first actor-managers was Lope de Rueda of Spain.

Aesthetics. A branch of philosophy concerned with artistic meaning and perception. In theatre studies, the term usually refers to the ways in which dramatic performances deliver particular kinds of pleasures for particular audiences through specific sets of theatrical conventions. Historical examples of original statements of theatre aesthetics include Aristotle’s *Poetics* and the *Nāṭyaśāstra* by Bharata.

Agit-prop theatre. Shortened from “agitation-propaganda,” this form of didactic theatre originated in the Soviet Union. As performed by touring ensembles such as the Blue Blouse troupes, these were anti-naturalistic revues designed to instruct illiterate peasants and workers in the basic ideas of communism. The term “agit-prop” is also employed more broadly to identify (often pejoratively) overtly ideological types of performance.

Agonothetes. Professional “arrangers of contests” whose effect was to diminish the communal and dialogical nature of ancient Greek drama after the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War (404 B.C.E.).

Alphabetic writing. A system of writing developed by the Phoenicians and introduced to Greece around 850 B.C.E. Since it separates meaning from sounds and opens up the possibility of difference between the two, alphabetic writing invites debate, which became central to Athenian culture.

Animism. The belief that all things (such as animals, plants, and places) have a living, spiritual identity or “soul.”

Antiquarianism. The practice of staging plays with (ostensibly) historically accurate scenery and costumes. It is primarily associated with nineteenth-century British productions of Shakespeare by Charles Kemble, William Macready, and Charles Kean, who attempted to immerse spectators in the spirit of the English national past. Antiquarian staging practices also informed “orientalist” melodramas set in the Middle East and other exotic locations of the British Empire after the 1880s. See **Orientalism**.

Apartheid. Literally meaning “apartness,” this was the Afrikaans name for the policy of racial segregation South African whites imposed on that country’s black majority and other ethnic groups from 1948 to 1994.

Aragoto. The “rough-house” style of *kabuki* acting. These actors wear striking, non-realistic make-up and greatly exaggerated costumes while also employing powerful gestures, such as the *mie*.

Archaeology. The scientific study of human societies through the recovery and interpretation of ancient material remains, such as architecture, relics, and manipulated landscapes (e.g., Neolithic henges). Archaeologists have provided theatre scholars with evidence about

a wide array of historical performance traditions, particularly those before the rise of print cultures.

Aside. A dramatic convention in which a character directly addresses an audience who, in turn, understand that the other characters in the play do not hear these remarks. See **Metatheatre**.

Audiophony. A term that covers a range of audiophonic communication and performance made possible by the invention of the telephone (1876) and the phonograph (1877). While photography, film, and television eventually led to the dominance of visual media, the more inward and immaterial experience of audiophonic cues (music, vocal, and special effects) continued to shape a range of modernist theatre and cinematic practices.

Auteur director. A figure who takes author-like control of all the elements of stage or film production.

Authorship. Refers to an arrangement in which the self-employed author retains some economic and artistic control over his or her work.

Automatic writing. A technique of composition expounded by André Breton (1896–1963) in which the writer embraced chance, spontaneity, and the unconscious to achieve a dreamlike state for the purpose of discovering the source of aesthetic truth. See **Surrealism**.

Avant-garde. Borrowing a French military term referring to the forward line of soldiers in battle, various groups of artists since the 1880s have likewise thought of themselves as the front ranks of artistic progress, fighting the propriety of the bourgeoisie, and inventing new aesthetic strategies in the service of utopian change. Examples of *avant-garde* movements are **symbolism**, **futurism**, **dadaism**, **expressionism**, and **surrealism**.

Balinese puppet theatre. A type of shamanic performance that employs shadow puppets in complex

and, often, humorous ways for the purposes of healing and **exorcism**.

Bardic performance. Pre-Christian Celtic singers of praise poetry and satire.

Baroque aesthetics. A late seventeenth-century orientation, especially popular in the Catholic courts of Europe, that celebrated allegory, metamorphosis, sensuality, and playfulness. In contrast with **neoclassicism**, it reasserted the centrality of visual and oral culture.

Baroque opera. Seventeenth-century European court musical entertainment that made elaborate use of Italianate scenery.

Bhakti. In Indian theatre, an audience's deep devotional experience of the divine.

Bhāva. The actor's embodiment of a character's state of mind/being/doing. A key element of Indian aesthetic theory.

Biomechanics. A mode of training actors originated by the Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874–1940) designed to produce performers who could combine the arts of characterization, singing, dancing, and acrobatics with precise physical and vocal expression.

Blackface. A long tradition of Western performance in which masks, cosmetics or other forms of make-up are used to give white performers the appearance of being street rowdies, circus clowns, and, in nineteenth-century American **minstrel shows**, African-Americans. Although often racist in intent, blackface has also served a variety of other purposes.

Bourgeoisie. The property-owning and professional urban class that gradually supplanted royal sovereigns and landed aristocrats as rulers in Western Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Boy actors. The convention of cross-dressing boys to play women's roles, common throughout medieval and early Renaissance Europe.

Bunraku. Also known as *ningyo jōruri*, this is the traditional puppet theatre of Japan. Originating in the 1680s, it is distinguished by the use of dolls that are expertly manipulated by a trio of visible puppeteers and voiced by a chorus of musician/chanters.

Burlesque. A form of variety theatre, particularly in the United States, that featured male comics, comic sketches, dance acts, musical pieces, plus scantily clad females in all of the numbers. It achieved the peak of its popularity in the early twentieth century.

Burletta. Satirical operatic sketches popular in England after 1740.

Café chantants. French variety shows that gained wide popularity in Paris after 1789.

Calligraphy. The art of decorative writing and the illumination of texts, such as found in historical traditions of reproducing the Qur'an.

Capitalism. A complex system of economic organization based on the private ownership of property, the production of commodities for profit, and the loose regulation of supply and demand by market forces. It also functions as an **ideology** that is usually hostile to **socialism** and **communism**.

Carnavalesque humor. As theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin, a type of humor that originated in the European carnival tradition and similar cultural performances like **medicine shows**. Its chief characteristic is concern with the material base of reality, such as daily labor or the functions of the body.

Censorship. The employment of state regulatory power to control, contain, or abolish political and ethical

performances, especially those deemed to subvert the authority of powerful social groups.

Chariot-and-pole system. Stage machinery for quickly changing scenic “flats” riding on substage trolleys, invented by Giacomo Torelli in the 1640s.

Chorus. An organized group of performers who may either sing, dance, and/or speak dialogue. Examples of choric performance are those of ancient Greece (the **dithyramb**, tragedy, and **Old Comedy**) and the Japanese **nō** theatre.

Clown. Both a stock character and a type of comic performance. Although there are traditions of clowning in many cultures, the Western version has roots in the medieval carnival during which mockery and **parody** had a critical, if constrained, social function. The fun-loving, hard-drinking, and mischievous German fairground character of Hanswurst is one enduring image of the clown. The brightly costumed, pantomimic figure of Harlequin, particularly as performed by David Garrick in the eighteenth-century Harlequinade, is another. See **Carnavalesque humor**.

Cognitive studies. The science of how the mind/brain perceives the world, engages emotionally with it, and, mostly on an unconscious level, makes meaning from these experiences.

Commedia dell'arte. A form of street theatre that originated in Italy during the 1540s. Professional troupes of 8–12 actors specialized in performing stock characters (indicated by grotesque half-masks and specific dialects), pre-arranged comic business (*lazzi*), and improvisations based on scenarios primarily drawn from the plays of Plautus and Terence.

Commedia erudita. Sixteenth-century European academic comedies for aristocratic patrons based on the texts of Plautus and Terence.

Commemorative drama. “Dramas” re-enacting some mythological, quasi-historical or cosmic event, created to enhance the relationship of a community of believers to the divine, understood as primarily religious in intent. Examples are the Egyptian Osiris ritual-drama and the Persian **Ta'ziyeh**.

Communism. A radical form of **socialism** inaugurated by the Russian Revolution (1917) that advocates the violent overthrow of **capitalism** in order to create a classless society. Historically, communist governments have eschewed democracy in favor of single-party rule and state control over all social spheres, from the economy to the arts.

Community-based theatre. Theatres dependent upon ongoing dialog between artists and spectators, usually for the purpose of exploring ways in which the social agency of a local audience can be maximized. It has been a worldwide phenomenon since 1980 due, in part, to the success of groups like Mexico's *Nuevo Teatro Popular*.

Concert party theatre. A form of performance popular in Ghana that mixes elements of American black vaudeville and African story-telling traditions.

Constructivism. The artistic synthesis of **retrospectivism** and **futurism** achieved by Russian director Vsevolod Meyerhold in the 1920s. It incorporated his acting experiments with biomechanics, and is best represented by Lyubov Popova's set designs consisting of elaborate ramps, slides, ladders, and moving wheels that allowed actors to demonstrate how human beings could use their emotions and machines to produce engaging art and a more productive life. Stalin censored these techniques during the 1930s in favor of promoting “socialist realism.”

Consumerism. An **ideology** in which people primarily view themselves as consumers of capitalist marketing techniques rather than as citizens who have a responsibility to participate in democratic politics.

Copyright. A legal protection extended to authors giving them control over the publication and performance of their work. The first comprehensive copyright law was enacted by France in 1790.

Cult of sincerity. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) belief that people, contrary to the ethics of **rationalism**, should be natural, sincere, and unencumbered by social masks. See **Sentimentalism**.

Cultural hegemony. Antonio Gramsci's theory of how powerful social groups shape culture to legitimate their dominance.

Cuneiform. A form of writing scratched on clay tablets invented by the Sumerians around 3000 B.C.E.

Cycle plays. Sets of medieval European plays based on key biblical episodes that provided a historical version of Christian salvation.

Dadaism. An *avant-garde* movement initiated in Switzerland during World War I that employed cabaret sketches to experiment with the chance ordering of sounds, simultaneous poetry, and movement pieces that mocked the absurdity of Western notions of logic and harmony.

Deconstruction. An interpretive approach developed by Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) that seeks to unpack the array of meanings available in a text or performance, examine the processes and materials by which it generates those meanings, and understand the ways in which these meanings may be self-contradictory. See **Logocentric theory**.

Decorum. The precept of neoclassicism that there are specific behaviors appropriate for different social classes. See **Verisimilitude**.

Dengaku. Literally “field music,” a form of Japanese performance connected to Shinto fertility rites. Associated

in the fourteenth century with political turmoil and bouts of mass hysteria. For a time, it was a rival to *sarugaku*, the precursor to **nō**, for the *shogun*'s patronage.

Deus ex machina. Literally “god from the machine,” the expression both refers to a crane that may have lowered actors playing gods into an acting area in the ancient Greek theatre and the use of any dramatic device that miraculously resolves matters in the last act of a play.

Dialogic drama. This term can be applied to any performance event in which competing views are brought to bear on some issue, and audiences are either implicitly or explicitly enjoined to debate. An example of this is the drama of the Athenian **Great Dionysia**.

Discourse theory. An interpretive approach drawing on the theoretical work of Michel Foucault (1926–1984) that explores the relationships among discourses (what counts as “knowledge” in a given era).

Dithyrambs. Choral songs and dances in honor of Dionysus performed at Athens's **Great Dionysia** and elsewhere in ancient Greece.

Dixi. Chinese traditional performances based on the ancient *Wu* religion that make extensive use of shamanic masks.

Documentary theatre. Plays that employ dialogue taken directly from newspapers, government reports, court transcripts, and other fact-based texts.

Drama. Derived from the Greek word meaning to do or to act, the term “drama” can be applied to written plays intended for performance. It tells a story through the action.

Early modernism. An orientation to the European stage between 1880 and 1910 that simultaneously employed and critiqued the conventions of photographic realism to dramatize the conflict between the individual's

search for transformational self-fulfillment and the material realities of the era. Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906) and Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) were exemplary figures. See **Modernism**.

Empathy. A concept whose implications for modernist theatre practice were most thoroughly elaborated by Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938). In this context, the word refers both to the actor's work on the character through "empathetic projection" (the actor sees the circumstances and actions of the character through that character's eyes and responds accordingly) and the desired reception by the audience (who is pulled into the problems of the characters and induced to empathize with their plight).

Enlightenment. An eighteenth-century European intellectual movement that asserted that human progress could only be achieved on the basis of political liberty, individual freedoms, and the rights of private property. See **Rationalism** and **Liberal Humanism**.

Environmental theatre. Richard Schechner's (1934–) name for staging in which there is no demarcation between actor and spectator space, multiple events compete with each other to diffuse any single focus, and actors interact with audience members both in character and personally.

Episodic communication. In the evolution of human speech, the earliest phase of communication characterized by speakers who are exclusively situated in the here-and-now.

Equestrian drama. A British popular entertainment displaying elaborate feats of horsemanship that originated with Philip Astley's invention of the modern circus in 1768 and assumed the scale of grand, nationalistic spectacles in the 1820s.

Eurhythmics. A system of movement training for actors and dancers developed by Émile Jacques Dalcroze

(1865–1960) that linked physical exercise to a variety of musical rhythms.

Evolution. The theory established by Charles Darwin that plants and animals flourish, mutate, or become extinct over time based solely on the process of natural selection.

Exorcism. A ritual performance, common to many cultures, that addresses and expels demonic forces in order to heal an individual or a community. See **Balinese puppet theatre**.

Expressionism. An *avant-garde* movement that flourished in Germany after World War I. Expressionist plays called for such anti-realist techniques as grotesquely painted scenery, exaggerated acting, and "telegraphic" dialogue. They frequently invited spectators to view the distorted dramatic action through the fevered eyes of the protagonist.

***Fabula palliata*.** Literally "plays in Greek dress." The Roman term for the comedies of Plautus and Terence.

Fascism. An extreme form of nationalism that emerged in Europe after World War I (1914–1918). This ideology rejected Enlightenment universalism and liberal democracy in favor of racial "purity" and violent authoritarian rule.

Feminism. An umbrella term for a range of interpretive approaches that address the experience of women, often as a critique of the restrictive gender roles applied to them by historical cultures. (See **Patriarchy**.) In theatre studies, feminist scholarship considers the way women have been represented in performance and also seeks to recover neglected activities of female playwrights, actors, managers, directors, critics, and designers.

Festival theatre. Invited gatherings of several theatre companies in a limited area for a limited time, usually less than a month. For theatre-goers, festivals offer the

opportunity to see a number of critically acclaimed productions in a few days, often in cities that offer other opportunities for **tourism**.

Formalism. The precept that the activities of producing and responding to works of art must be understood on their own, autonomous terms, not in relation to issues of historical reception or cultural context. See **Kantian aesthetics**.

Fourth wall. The realist convention of an imaginary “wall” across the proscenium opening enclosing an interior room in a box set in which actors perform and spectators observe, ostensibly as if neither knew of the other’s presence. See **Realism**.

Freaks. This word primarily refers to a subset of “spectacular bodies” marked as abnormal and historically displayed by nineteenth-century variety theatres and museums, such as those operated by P.T. Barnum (1810–1891). While strongmen, contortionists and exotic dancers were sometimes labeled “freaks,” this category is mostly associated with figures such as bearded ladies, “Siamese” twins, and the dwarf Charles Stratton, better known as “Tom Thumb.”

Freudianism. The circulation of Sigmund Freud’s theories as “pop psychology.” Sensationalized as a **discourse** positing the primitive nature of sexual desire, it had a major influence on both **avant-garde** and **high modernist** theatre, particularly in the 1920s.

Fringe theatre. Often small and experimental troupes that perform in the same cities hosting major international theatre events, but are not on the official program. The most famous sites for fringe theatre are the Edinburgh and Avignon festivals.

Futurism. An **avant-garde** movement that was launched in Italy with the publication of a manifesto by F.T. Marinetti (1876–1944) in 1909 damning the art of the past and advocating new forms exalting the

dynamism of the machine age. Russian futurists, led by Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893–1930), attempted to align this movement with the Soviet revolution until the onset of Stalinist persecution. See **Constructivism**.

Gay theatre. An umbrella term for a range of “alternative” theatres focused on the experience of Gay and Lesbian communities in the United States since the 1960s.

Geju. A form of national drama, or song-opera, which flourished in China after the 1949 communist revolution.

Género Chico. The most popular form of entertainment in Buenos Aires, Argentina, after World War I (1914–1918). It consisted of one-act skits written as comedies or melodramas, presenting familiar characters, local color, and light satire.

Gesamtkunstwerk. Richard Wagner’s (1813–1883) influential term for a total, synthesized art work in which all elements of a theatrical production are controlled by the vision of a single master-artist. See **Auteur director**.

Gestus. Bertolt Brecht’s term for the expressive means an actor can employ – such as a way of standing, or moving, or a pattern of behavior – that indicates to the audience the social position or condition of the character the actor is playing. See **Verfremdungseffekt**.

Gigaku. Japanese Buddhist masked dance-drama imported from China in the early seventh century C.E.

Globalization. The ongoing process of widespread and accelerating transnational engagement in which frequent interaction with other cultures has become commonplace.

Great Dionysia. An annual Athenian civic/religious festival in honor of Dionysus at which dramas were first

performed (possibly by Thespis in 534 B.C.E.). The five-day event consisted of sacrificial rituals, competitions in dithyrambs, tragedies, and comedies.

Guilds. Medieval European trade unions that regulated wages, trained apprentices, and undertook charitable projects such as the sponsorship of **cycle plays**.

Happenings. Performance events designed to blur the boundaries between the experience of art and commonplace experiences that were created in New York and elsewhere in the 1960s.

Heightened realism. A stage orientation of **late modernism** that mixed close attention to the language of a play, a generally spare but distinctive use of design elements, and carefully crafted, often forceful movement. British director Peter Hall (1930–) established the conventions of this style with notable productions of plays by Shakespeare, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter.

High modernism. An orientation to the European stage prominent between 1910 and 1940 that emphasized written dialogue and frequently employed the techniques of **metatheatre** and the minimization of the actor's physical presence to create a theatre that would move people to transcend the material realities of the modern world. Exemplary figures were William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936). See **Modernism**.

Holy theatre. Director Peter Brook's (1925–) vision of a theatre marked by sincerity and authenticity, which he opposed to the "deadly theatre" produced by **consumerism**.

Huaju. Chinese spoken drama based on Western models of **realism**. The first play in this style was written in 1907.

Humanism. Central to Western thought since the Renaissance, it places an emphasis on human potential, putting life in this world more at the center of concern than the Christian afterlife. It assumes that all people everywhere, in all times, share a common essence. See **Liberal humanism**.

Ideology. A term that encompasses the implicit and explicit ideas, theories, and assumptions that inform the human subject's consideration and interpretation of his/her condition.

Imperialism. The ideology and action of creating and maintaining empires. During the nineteenth century, European imperialist countries preferred to expand the control of their states over conquered peoples by establishing colonies – subordinate political entities that were subjected to ruthless exploitation. Imperialist countries usually justified this by claiming that white, "civilized" nations had the right to rule over "inferior" cultures.

Industrial Revolution. The late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century process of rapidly expanding **capitalism**, urbanization, and technology breakthroughs, particularly in the areas of manufacturing, transportation, and communications.

Interculturalism. The practice in which theatre artists use the texts, acting styles, music, costumes, masks, dance, or scenic vocabularies of one culture – the "source culture" – and adapt and modify them for audiences of another culture – the "target culture." Productions of this kind have developed over the last three decades in the context of **globalization**.

Interludes. Significantly revised **morality plays** and other entertainments that were performed by small companies of professional actors at banquets in sixteenth-century England.

Interpretive community. A historical group of interpreters, such as theatre critics, who share certain

cultural expectations and, hence, assign shared meanings to a work of art. See **Reception theory**.

Intraculturalism. In the context of **globalization**, a term describing works combining performance modes drawn from different cultural traditions within nation-state boundaries, rather than across them. An early example is the Indian “theatre of roots” developed in the 1950s.

Jinxi. The Chinese term for what is known elsewhere as “Beijing Opera.” Created in 1790, it is a form of musical theatre that relates mostly romantic and melodramatic stories through a mix of song, stylized speech, spectacular dance, pantomimed action, acrobatics, and orchestral music consisting of stringed and percussive instruments. Also known as *jingju*.

Kabuki. A still-popular form of traditional Japanese theatre noted for its lavish use of scenic display, costumes, and make-up; the physical and emotional style of its actors; and its repertoire of plays involving conflicts between the merchant and **samurai** classes, often involving painful romantic complications. It originated in 1600 as a mode of dance that reflected the chic social fashions (and clothing) of the time, but later restrictions required *kabuki* troupes to be male-only. See **Onnagata**.

Kachina dances. North American Puebloan ceremonies performed with large masks to appease the spirits of the dead, bring rain, and enforce social laws. See **Commemorative drama**.

Kantian aesthetics. The Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant’s (1724–1804) view that the experience of art is a mental activity distinct from either making ethical judgments or engaging in scientific reasoning. Rather, aesthetics is the realm of bodily and purely subjective feeling with no connection to conceptual thought.

Kathakali. Literally “story” (*katha*), “dance” or “play,” this form of Indian dance-drama is distinguished by a highly physicalized style of performance based on traditional martial arts and its complex use of both gesture and expression to communicate the emotions/actions of a character. Shortened performances have been created for tourists in the Indian state of Kerala. See **Tourism**.

Kōken. In both the Japanese *nō* and *kabuki* theatres, these are stage assistants who visibly, but unobtrusively, handle props, straighten costumes, and prompt actors.

Kunqu. A type of Chinese musical drama favored by elite Confucian audiences during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

Kusemai. Secular entertainments mainly performed by women dressed in male clothing that were popular in fourteenth-century Japan. Also the main dance in *nō*.

Kut. A Korean ritual performed by shamans to appease the dead, heal the sick, or to obtain good fortune.

Kutiyattam. A style of staging late-Sanskrit drama in the Indian state of Kerala that employs Sanskrit and Pakrit as well as the local language, and takes place within a specific type of temple architecture.

Kyōgen. Short farcical interludes performed with Japanese *nō* plays.

Late modernism. In the final phase of this stage orientation (1940–1970), theatre directors largely embraced filmic realism and applied its techniques, or developed analogues for its effects, to both contemporary and classical plays. **Psychological realism**, **heightened realism**, and **lyrical abstraction** were the major styles within this period.

Liberal humanism. The notion that every individual has the potential, unimpeded by any material barriers,

to achieve self-fulfillment. While flourishing alongside the ascendancy of capitalism in the nineteenth century, it is also an **ideology** that obscures the material conditions that limit the scope of individual agency.

Liberalism. A political orientation that declares the right of individuals to pursue their own interests unrestrained by aristocratic privileges or state regulations. Classical liberalism is also meritocratic, emphasizing the necessity of individuals to earn their economic security through their own efforts.

Lila. The Hindu concept of “divine play” or joyful intervention of the gods into the human sphere.

Lion comique. A loquacious and swaggering lower-class character in the English music hall tradition.

Logocentric theory. A rubric that can be applied to a range of thought that holds that language is capable of representing stable and eternal truth. Postmodern theorists have generally claimed this idea to be a unique characteristic of the Western intellectual tradition. See **Deconstruction**.

Low Other. A minority group that has been classified by a mainstream culture as immoral, dirty, noisy, and/or unworthy. A dominant culture engages in this practice to create an image of itself as morally superior but often remains fascinated and attracted to the group they have tried to exclude.

Ludi. “Games” to mark the observance of Roman public holidays as well as great funerals, military victories, and other state occasions. These eclectic festivities presented chariot racing, boxing, gladiatorial contests as well as dramatic performances. The most important of these events were the *Ludi Romani* in honor of the god Jupiter. See **Munera**.

Lyrical abstraction. A style of theatre pioneered by Jacques Copeau (1879–1949) that adapted the reality

effects of radio drama for the French stage. Its key markers were the use of emblematic characters, a universal theme, an appeal to an imagined past, intimate staging, and an action that verges on allegory.

Machine plays. European court entertainments that, to the accompaniment of orchestral music, featured Giacomo Torelli’s **chariot-and-pole system**’s ability to effect instant scene transformations.

Magic lantern shows. An optical entertainment that featured projections of photographic images and painted glass slides onto a screen.

Mansion. Elevated platforms representing different scene locations in medieval Christian dramas. Arranged around an open space within a cathedral (see **Platea**), or perhaps outdoors in ancient earthen rounds, mansions offered allegorical, rather than illusionistic, depictions of places within the Christian imagination, such as Eden and Hell.

Masques. Lavish court spectacles, often employing perspective scenery, that celebrated the nobility of seventeenth-century England, France and Spain as powerful mythological figures. These expensive entertainments allegorically supported the prerogatives of **absolutism**. See also **Cultural hegemony**.

Materialism. Derives from (but is not limited to) the economic and cultural theories of Marxism that claim that a society’s thinking and institutions are determined by its basic economic organization. It is opposed to Idealism.

Medicine shows. A tradition of comic street theatre in which hawkers sell potions of dubious medicinal value. These **carnavalesque** events were popular in early modern Europe as well as in the nineteenth-century United States.

Melodrama. A form of theatre that dramatizes social morality: it names the “good guys” and “bad guys,” helping audiences negotiate such problems as political power, economic justice, and racial inequality.

Metatheatre. Works that trigger audience awareness of the make-believe quality of a performance, or the operations of dramatic invention, usually for the purpose of provoking audiences to reassess the processes by which they construct meaning. Pirandello’s *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is an example of a play that uses metatheatre.

Method acting. A twentieth-century style of American acting that marries the personality of the actor to the character she or he is playing through psychological techniques of extreme **empathy**.

Mie. A fierce pose struck by a **kabuki** actor. At climactic moments of a play, he may toss his head, raise his leg and stamp his foot, pose with open, outreached hand, grunt, and freeze his face in a cross-eyed grimace. See **Aragoto**.

Mimesis. Aristotle’s term in the *Poetics* (c.353 B.C.E.) for the direct imitation of reality, an operation that is uniquely the property of **drama**.

Mimetic excess. Michael Taussig’s term for a defensive strategy of representation by which colonized people fashion performances that simultaneously imitate and **parody** their colonizers.

Minstrel shows. A form of blackface performance popular in the United States from the 1840s until the rise of **vaudeville** in the 1880s. These variety show acts consisted of white male performers imitating slave festivities in the South, musical numbers, and **parody**.

Mnemonics. Memory aids, particularly those techniques central to oral cultures such as knot records and pictographs.

Model-book. Detailed photographic records of Bertolt Brecht’s plays in production that he published to instruct future directors and designers in their “authorized” staging.

Modernism. A general orientation to the stage that emphasized the written texts of the playwright, questioned the representational basis of the theatre (often through the use of **metatheatre**), and generally applied **Kantian aesthetics** to posit the existence of an ideal realm that transcended the anguish of material conditions, such as the perceived chaos of the modern city. Spanning the years from 1880 to 1970, this orientation has three phases: **Early modernism**, **High modernism**, and **Late modernism**.

Monodrama. A form of drama performed by a single actor focused on externalizing the consciousness of the protagonist.

Monologic drama. Performance that seeks to assert a single viewpoint rather than invite reflexive engagement. An early example of this is the ritual drama of Osiris at Abydos.

Monomane. The **nō** actor’s revelation of the fictional character’s “invisible body” or essence.

Montage. A film technique employing rapid sequences of thematically related scenes or images.

Moral sense philosophy. As articulated by John Locke (1632–1704) and others, the belief that humanity has an inherent sense of right and wrong, and that doing the right thing is the product of emotional sensitivity rather than abstract reasoning. See **Sentimentalism**.

Morality plays. Late medieval Christian allegories usually focused on an “everyman” figure faced with a choice between good and bad behavior.

Mudang. Korean shamans (mostly female) who perform danced rituals that link the material and spiritual realms, such as the ceremony of *kut*.

Mummers plays. Christianized versions of pagan rituals designed to ensure the return of spring, often featuring a white knight combating a blackened Turk. See **Low Other**.

Munera. Gladiatorial contests in ancient Rome.

Music hall. Although an English Victorian term, it may be used to designate any type of variety theatre that features a series of unconnected entertainments on an indoor stage. See **Café chantants**.

Myth. A culture's stories expressing its understanding of the world in its earliest oral texts and performances, such as epic/heroic tales that may involve deities, ancestors, imaginary creatures, or quasi-historical events.

Naturalism. An *avant-garde* movement, which flourished between 1880 and 1914, that portrayed heredity and environmental factors as the primary causes of human behavior through the accurate rendition of external realities.

Nāṭyaśāstra. An encyclopedic work on all aspects of drama attributed to the sage Bharata, authored or collected between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E. See **Sanskrit drama**.

Naumachiae. Sea battle reenactments based upon episodes from Greek history that were staged as lavish public spectacles in ancient Rome.

Negritude. A diasporic black pride movement associated with the Martinique-born Aimé Césaire (1913–2008). See **Postcolonial criticism**.

Neoclassicism. A development in the Renaissance recovery of classical ideals and practices in art and literature and the rationalist elaboration of them, especially in the service of the absolutist monarchy in France in the

mid- to late seventeenth century, when **verisimilitude**, **decorum**, and **poetic justice** were emphasized.

Niche marketing. The practice of marketing a theatre performance to a well defined “target” audience on the basis of such demographic factors as age, race, gender, level of income, geographic location and other factors.

Ningyō buri. Literally “puppet imitation,” this refers to moments when a *kabuki* actor assumes the embodiment of a *bunraku* doll.

Nō. A traditional form of Japanese theatre that was developed in the fourteenth century with multiple origins in Shinto ritual, Buddhist philosophy, and *Kusemai* dance. Among its distinctive features are its stage architecture, finely wrought masks, delicate movement and dance, and the use of a seated chorus of musicians who also vocalize dialogue. The dramatic texts of its greatest playwright, Zeami (c.1363–1443), borrow plots often from historical epics or novels and sometimes feature characters of supernatural origin.

Not-for-profit theatres. American theatres exempt from U.S. taxes.

Old Comedy. Satirical commentaries on socio-political problems, sometimes employing **phallic humor**, that were performed in ancient Athens. The only surviving examples are the comedies of Aristophanes (c.448–380 B.C.E.).

Onnagata. A male *kabuki* actor who specializes in female roles.

Operetta. Light operatic entertainments that emerged in the nineteenth century in Vienna, Paris, and London to amuse mostly bourgeois spectators.

Orchestra. Literally “dancing place,” the flat playing area of ancient Greek theatres. Later, a group of musicians or the area in a modern theatre reserved for musicians and some spectators.

Orientalism. Edward Said's term for the way Western countries represented the "oriental" East, a vast territory that was imagined to stretch from the modern Middle East to China, and which was largely subjected to European imperialism in the nineteenth century. "Orientals" were depicted as weak, cunning, inscrutable, culturally backward, feminine, dangerous and, above all, exotic.

Pageant wagons. Mobile stages that were used in processional routes and sometimes gathered in fixed arrangements in a playing area for the performance of **cycle plays**.

Panoramas. Optical entertainments popular in the nineteenth century that told dramatic stories through long, unrolling cylinders of painted canvas.

Paradoi. Entrance/exit passages for the chorus in the theatres of ancient Greece.

Parody. The comic imitation of another's socially typical speech, behavior, thinking, or deepest principles. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), carnival parody uncrowned the old order and simultaneously made a place for the new, unlike modern satire, which can be terminally negative.

Parsi theatre. A form of Indian melodramatic popular theatre that combined English and South Asian stage conventions to present traditional Hindu stories to different language groups.

Passion Play. Dramas depicting Christ's sufferings that originated in medieval Europe and, in some places, remain in production, such as the *Oberammergau Passion Play*.

Patents. A license granting a company or an individual the privilege to pursue an activity that is otherwise subjected to restriction. Historically, governments, such as that of the English King Charles II (1630–1685), have

made theatrical performances subject to a patenting process as a form of **censorship**.

Patriarchy. The belief that males have the inherent right to superior social and political positions. See **Ideology**.

Patronage. Support extended by a powerful individual or an elite to an arts-producing entity. Examples include legal permission to perform, financial subsidy, and protection from competing social groups. See **Patents**.

Performance art. A contemporary expression of the *avant-garde* consisting of either solo works or larger spectacles that always seek to break through the separation of art and life. Often taking up social and political concerns, performance artists typically use their own lives as subjects and their own bodies as instruments.

Periodization. In writing historical narratives, the strategy of organizing human events and practices into shared categories of time, or "periods."

Phallic humor. Refers both to the literal employment of penis-shaped costume pieces in the oldest of Western comic forms, such as the **satyr play**, and more broadly to humor derived from the physical actions of the male body.

Phenomenology. A method of philosophical inquiry concerned with describing how we encounter, experience, think about, and come to "know" the world.

Platea. In the staging of medieval European biblical drama, an open "place," such as the nave of a cathedral, used as a neutral, unlocalized playing area that could be whatever location the text required at a given moment. See **Mansion**.

Poetic justice. A criterion of neoclassical aesthetics requiring that evil characters should be punished and good ones rewarded.

Poor theatre. Jerzy Grotowski's (1934–1999) conception of a theatre stripped of elaborate production elements and dedicated to the performance of “holy actors” athletically embodying the sufferings and ecstasies of the human spirit.

Positivism. The theory that objective knowledge is possible through the dispassionate observation and collection of discrete data or “facts.”

Postcolonial criticism. An interpretive approach that seeks to understand the impact of colonial domination on literature, art, music and theatre, with a special interest in works in which such domination is critiqued. See **Orientalism**.

Postmodernism. A much-debated term that gained wide currency in the 1980s and has many theorists. Generally, it can be conceived as an ongoing set of responses to Jacques Derrida's initial critique of **structuralism** over the question of whether meaning can be determined and/or communicated in a stable manner. (See **Deconstruction**.) Postmodern theatre and performance artists tend to emphasize a deep skepticism toward **modernism**'s desire to wrap experience in a single, unified, pleasingly cohesive vision. See also **Discourse theory** and **Relativism**.

Primary orality. A term for those peoples whose entire worldview is untouched by any form of writing. Most of human history has been spent communicating in this mode.

Proscenium Arch. First created in the Renaissance, visible and, often, highly ornate frame around the stage that is a permanent architectural element of some theatres. See **Triumphal arch**.

Prototype effect. The tendency for spectators to make generalizations about members of an entire group on the basis of a selected character or group of characters.

An example of a prototype is the character of Christy Mahon in J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*.

Psalmody. Melodies attached to medieval Christian liturgical texts consisting of plain chant and question-and-answer responsorial.

Psychoanalysis. A therapeutic technique invented by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) in which patients are urged to delve into their personal history to reveal unconscious motives, confess their past problems and deep desires, and find ways to act with greater freedom in the future.

Psychological realism. An orientation to stage practice that effectively became the national style of the United States during the 1950s. Its hallmarks are the incorporation of filmic reality effects, psychologically attuned directing, fluid scenography, and variations on **method acting**.

Pūrāṇas. Encyclopedic collections of traditional Indian stories, including many about the life of the god Krishna.

Queer theory. An interpretive approach that examines how historical cultures have constructed sexuality, with a special emphasis on expressions of homoerotic desire.

Rāmīlā. An Indian commemorative drama that allows its participants immediate access to an encounter with the Hindu god Ram. It is celebrated as a pluralistic, open-air event that features re-enactments of episodes from Ram's life.

Rasa. An ideal aesthetic experience in Sanskrit drama, compared to the various “tastes” savored at a meal. The concept, along with **Bhāva**, is central to Indian aesthetic theory.

Rationalism. A philosophy deriving from the ideas of René Descartes (1596–1650) that proposed that reason

alone, independent of experience, is the source of truth. See **Enlightenment**.

Realism. Also referred to as “stage realism,” this was a stage orientation that originated largely in response to the emerging technology of photography. Its hallmark was the presentation of scrupulously observed material realities. Initially employed in the commercial theatre by producer-directors who appealed to the public’s desire for **antiquarianism** and **melodrama**, this style was later adapted for use by the naturalists. The application of this style’s major conventions (such as the **fourth wall** and historically accurate costumes and **box sets**) to **psychological realism** was pioneered by Konstantin Stanislavsky’s direction of plays at the Moscow Art Theatre.

Reception theory. See **Interpretive community**.

Reification. Literally “thing-ification.” The term refers to the fallacy of treating an abstract idea as a concrete thing or entity.

Relativism. The philosophical position that there is no objective truth, only a variety of human languages and experiences.

Renaissance. Literally “rebirth,” this is a traditional category of **periodization** for European history from, roughly, the fourteenth century to the seventeenth century. The word reflects the growing interest taken by European elites in the “classical” cultures of the ancient world, such as Greek and Roman drama. This period also produced the ideologies of **Humanism** and **Absolutism**.

Retrospectivism. A stage orientation that arose in pre-revolutionary Russia in reaction to **symbolism**. Retrospectivists like Nikolai Evreinov (1879–1953) aimed to recover older forms of theatre as a means of injecting their playful energy into contemporary life.

Riots. Noisemaking and fighting, sometimes accompanied by destruction of property, police action and loss

of life. Theatre riots have a long history in the West as legitimate forms of social protest.

Ritual performance. Performances that are on special occasions, that form and re-form self and social identity, and are understood to be efficacious, i.e., their participants understand these events as having real consequences, such as a cure for a disease. Masking, costuming, impersonation, dance, music, narrative, and humor are all recurrent features of ritual performance.

Roman pantomime. Solo performances to musical accompaniment that silently enacted all of the characters of a drama using a series of costumes and masks.

Romanticism. A European aesthetic movement (1790–1840) that prized the subjectivity of genius, looked to nature for inspiration, elevated strong emotions above reasonable restraint, and often sought to embody universal conflicts within individual figures.

Rūpaka. The Sanskrit term for a form of poetry intended specifically for stage performance rather than for reading or recitation.

Samurai. Japanese warriors who constituted the ruling elite of Japan during the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1868). Samurai rulers censored the ***kabuki*** theatre of the period and made ***nō*** a state ritual.

Sanskrit drama. An umbrella term for a rich variety of Sanskrit and Prakrit languages theatre practices that date back at least to 300 B.C.E. in what is modern-day India. See ***Nāṭyaśāstra***.

Satyr plays. Farcical renditions of Greek myth performed at the **Great Dionysia** after a day’s program of tragedies.

Scrim. A painted fabric employed in proscenium theatres that presents the illusion of solidity (such as a

wall) or transparency, depending on the direction of the lighting.

Semiotics. The study of signs and signification practices. For semioticians, everything presented on the stage, such as a gesture or a costume, is a signifier conveying meaning.

Sentimentalism. During the eighteenth century, this was a positive term for a social philosophy in which the intellect, emotions, and morality were harmoniously integrated. Playwright/theorists Denis Diderot (1713–1784) and Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781) emphasized virtuous decision-making and tearful reconciliations in their sentimental plays. See **Moral sense philosophy**.

Shaman. The Siberian Tungus word for “one who is excited, moved, raised.” The term can be applied broadly to a range of traditional specialists in **ritual performance**. Shamans are usually attributed with possessing specific powers (curing illness, counteracting misfortune) and they are typically able to access the spirit world after entering a trance.

Shimpa. Literally “new style,” the term refers to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fashion of adapting Western dramatic forms, such as the “**well-made play**,” to Japanese tastes.

Skene. A multi-purpose wooden structure located behind the **orchestra** of the ancient Greek theatre that facilitated entrances/exits of the actors, provided an offstage area for changing costumes, and a roof which could be used both as site for technical effects and an additional acting area.

Social Darwinism. The discredited assumption that cultures, like species, have evolved, and can be viewed hierarchically from the “primitive” cultures on the bottom to the “great civilizations” at the top.

Socialism. A political orientation that draws on Karl Marx’s arguments about the inherent class conflict between workers and capitalists. Unlike **communism**, socialists have historically sought to promote economic justice through reform rather than violent revolution.

Spatiality. One of the primary conceptual categories of the human mind/brain. Some of the concepts that derive from the experience of spatiality include inside/outside, near/far, and source-path-goal. See **Cognitive studies**.

Speech act theory. The analysis of language as the performance of actions. Examples of “speech acts” include making promises and issuing commands such as “shut the door!”

Structuralism. A twentieth-century literary theory that claimed that language is a stable system of references to stable meanings. See **Deconstruction**.

Surrealism. An *avant-garde* movement that emphasized spontaneity, shock effects, and psychological imagery such as dreams.

Symbolism. An *avant-garde* movement that rejected **naturalism** in order to concretize the unseen spiritual realities that shape human fate.

Syncretism. The merging of different systems of beliefs, social practices, or aesthetics, from sources inside and/or outside of cultures.

Synesthesia. The phenomenon of cross-sensory perception in which, for example, a sound produces the mental experience of an image. This was a key aesthetic precept of **symbolism**.

Ta’ziyeh. An Islamic/Persian commemorative mourning drama dedicated to Husayn ibn Ali, who was martyred at the Battle of Karbala (680 C.E.). *Ta’ziyeh* plays chronicle each episode of the event over the course of ten days.

Theatre in the round. A stage that is surrounded on all sides by an audience. Used in many village performances, this stage orientation also defines the Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., and other modern, Western playhouses.

Theatre of cruelty. This was the visionary French director Antonin Artaud's (1896–1948) title for a theatre that would “break through language” to access the mysteries and darker forces of life left untouched by literary masterpieces. Artaud's theories, published as *The Theatre and Its Double* (1938), were influenced by **surrealism**.

Thymele. A flat stone embedded in the orchestra of Greek theatres that probably served as the central axis for the movement of the chorus.

Totalitarianism. A system of government typically characterized by single party rule and the total constriction of individual rights as enforced by a terror network of “secret police” and political prisons. The term was coined early in the cold war to present fascism and communism as ideologically equivalent.

Tourism. The activity of traveling to other places and exploring different cultures as well as their performances. The Western tradition of the “grand tour” dates back to the end of the seventeenth century.

Tragedy, Aristotle's definition of. As discussed in his *Poetics* (c.330 B.C.E.), it is a fairly uniform dramatic structure that plots the actions of highborn characters struggling with weighty moral issues who, through some flaw, fall into a state of suffering that paradoxically affirms the potential of human beings under duress.

Triumphal arch. A freestanding stone archway constructed to commemorate a military victory or some other exploit of a country or political leader.

The first proscenium arches in theatres were patterned on these structures and usually sported some glorifying motif at the top center of the arch.

Übermarionette. Large puppets that, according to Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966), should replace live performers because they would be easier to control than actors and more effective at evoking spiritual realities. See **Gesamtkunstwerk**.

Utopia. Literally “no place,” the term and its adjective “utopian” refer to ideas, practices, and performances that offer a vision of bliss and that would require an advocate to seek revolutionary change in the social order.

Variety theatre. A major form of popular performance that proliferated after 1850 that consisted of light entertainments unconnected by any overriding theme, story, or major star. See **Vaudeville**.

Vaudeville. A form of **variety theatre** that gradually replaced (and absorbed) the **minstrel show** in the United States during the 1880s. Representative acts included skits, comics who specialized in ethnic humor, trained animals, singers, dancers, and acrobats. Vaudeville declined during the 1920s as many of its performers began working in the new media of radio and film.

Vedic chanting. An oral mode of transmitting the sacred Vedic texts of India involving prodigious memorization that has been performed for over 3,000 years.

Verfremdungseffekt. Bertolt Brecht's term for the process of providing spectators of his productions with some distance and insight, by rendering their past and present worlds strange and unusual for them, thus preparing them to accept his own vision of events. The term is sometimes mistranslated as “alienation effect.”

Verisimilitude. The quality of dramatic probability which neoclassicism held to be a virtue of plays composed according to the three unities of time, place, and action. See **Decorum**.

Vitalism. A spiritualized concept of evolving life processes and personal development thought to be informed by a vital impulse, or “*élan vital*,” that works for perfection in ways that science and materialism cannot explain.

Völkgeist. Literally meaning the “spirit of the nation.” The German historian Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) employed this **romantic** belief to affirm that all nations possess highly distinct identities to counter **Enlightenment** notions of the potential universality of historical interpretation. Herder’s ideas about history shaped most discussions about cultural nationalism during the nineteenth century.

Vortex of behavior. Theatre districts and other urban areas dedicated to performance like Times Square in New York City, that pull performers and audiences together and transform everyday behavior into performances that nurture and validate a culture.

Wayang Golek. The Sudanese-language puppet theatre of West Java. Since the 1970s, a hybrid comic form of it has been regularly performed on Indonesian television.

Wayang Kulit. The traditional shadow puppet theatre of Java.

Well-made play. A form of drama pioneered by French playwright Eugene Scribe (1791–1861) that cleverly manipulates plot to reveal a secret whose disclosure in an “obligatory scene” is key to resolving the play’s central conflict.

Wing-and-groove system. The British counterpart to the continental “chariot-and-pole” system for rapidly changing perspective scenery during the early eighteenth century, it operated by using flats that slid in grooves built on the stage floor and in supporting tracks behind the borders above.

Women’s theatre. Since the 1960s, this form of “alternative” theatre has served as a forum for women playwrights, like Cuban-born María Irene Fornés (1930–), and performance groups like Spiderwoman, which has created pieces derived from the lives of Native American women, lesbians, sisters, and older women. Dedicated women’s theatre companies include the Lilith Theatre in San Francisco. See **Feminism**.

World fairs. Urban carnivals that became potent entertainments to legitimate the capitalist-industrial order in the pre-1914 era, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. The first world fair was the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London in 1851.

Xiqu. A Chinese word that encompasses all types of traditional sung drama, of which the best known is *jingxi*.

Yangge. Communist agit-prop musical theatre that was created in the 1930s to dramatize abusive social conditions in rural pre-revolutionary China.

Yügen. A deep, quiet, mysterious beauty tinged with sadness produced by *nô* dramas.

Zaju. A Chinese variety theatre consisting of song, dance, monologues and farce popular during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644).

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