

SEVENTH EDITION

OSCAR G. BROCKETT WITH ROBERT J. BALL



THE ESSENTIAL THEATRE

Seventh Edition

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with

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Preface

Behind this edition lies thirty-five years of publication; although *The Essential Theatre* was published first in 1976, it began as an abridged version of another book, *The Theatre: An Introduction*, which first appeared in 1964. *The Essential Theatre* has since taken on an identity of its own and is now in its seventh edition.

Like the earlier versions, this edition is divided into three parts. Within those parts, however, a number of changes have been made. In Part One, Chapter 2, "Performance, Audience, and Critic," has been considerably rewritten to address several issues more effectively, and the sample reviews have been omitted. In the chapters that make up Part Two, three of the plays discussed at length are new choices, and, although all of the chapters have been brought up to date, the final two chapters have had new material added. In Part Three, all the chapters have been partially rewritten and bolstered with new material to sharpen discussions and to respond to reactions from previous users. Many new illustrations have been added and integrated into the text. Along with updates to the bibliography, alterations have been made to the boxed materials that are scattered throughout the book. These boxes are used to give special emphasis to topics and/or pertinent persons, as well as to provide additional concrete details. Several of the boxes have been replaced by new ones; others have been revised or enlarged; and many additional boxes have been added.

We have assumed that those who use this book will both read plays and attend theatrical performances. Ideally, students should be able to read a script and then see a performance of that script. This is not always possible, but reading a play and seeing a performance, even if both are not of the same script, illustrate the differences between text on the printed page and the enacted script on the stage—the difference between drama and theatre.

Since students typically will not have read a wide range of plays, fourteen examples cited in *The Essential Theatre*, Seventh Edition, are also included in a companion anthology titled *Plays for the Theatre*, Seventh Edition, edited by Oscar G. Brockett with Robert Ball and published by Harcourt Brace College Publishers. These scripts serve as foundations for discussions of various types of theatrical experience and include Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, the anonymously-composed *Noah and His Sons*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters*, Molière's *Tartuffe*, Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, O'Neill's "*The Hairy Ape*," Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Beckett's *Happy Days*, Wolfe's *The Colored Museum*, Gotanda's *Yankee Dawg You Die*, Sanchez-Scott's *Roosters*, and Wasserstein's *An American Daughter*. Those who prefer to read different but parallel selections may wish to consider *World Drama*, edited by Oscar G. Brockett and Mark Pape and also published by Harcourt Brace College Publishers, which includes seventeen additional plays: Sophocles' *Antigone*, Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Plautus' *Pseudolus*, the anonymous *Everyman*, Kan'ami's

Matsukaze, Shakespeare's King Lear, Molière's The School for Wives, Farquhar's The Recruiting Officer, Aiken's Uncle Tom's Cabin, Ibsen's A Doll's House, Shaw's Major Barbara, Hellman's The Little Foxes, Brecht's Life of Galileo, Beckett's Krapp's Last Tape, Soyinka's The Strong Breed, Baraka's Slave Ship, and Shepard's Buried Child.

As with the previous editions, *The Essential Theatre* is intended to assist in two different kinds of courses: an introductory course in which an overview serves as a foundation for those intending to major in theatre (future theatre *makers*) and a theatre appreciation course in which an overview provides insights and understanding for audience members (future theatre *goers*). Although these two courses may address the same topics, they usually do so with somewhat different emphases. Because instructors will often use the material in ways suited to their individual needs, we have sought to provide a logically organized, comprehensive overview of the theatre. But instructors need not follow the sequence we have chosen nor use all of the material in the book. Some instructors may wish to use only some chapters in Part Two, for instance, while others may wish to assign Part Three prior to or concurrently with Part Two. Regardless, our aim has been to provide helpful discussions of topics pertinent to introductory courses rather than to prescribe how the courses should be organized.

Acknowledgments

It is impossible to list all of those persons to whom we are indebted. The bibliography indicates most of the sources we have used, and captions indicate those persons and organizations who have permitted us to include their illustrations. So, in addition to this list, we want to thank the following colleagues for their insightful and useful comments: Sam Abel, University of Vermont; Susan Kattwinkel, College of Charleston; Lawrence Leach, Monroe County Community College; Rebecca E. Rumbo, University of Connecticut; and Steve Woods, Louisiana State University.

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Oscar G. Brockett Robert J. Ball

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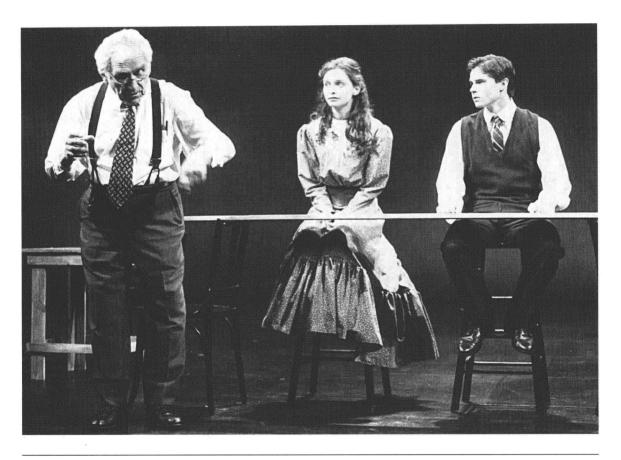
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Chapter 1

The Nature of Theatre



Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, one of America's best known and most popular plays, as seen at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. Directed by Peter Hunt. The actors are James Whitmore, Calista Flockhart, and Sam Trammell. (photo by Richard Feldman)