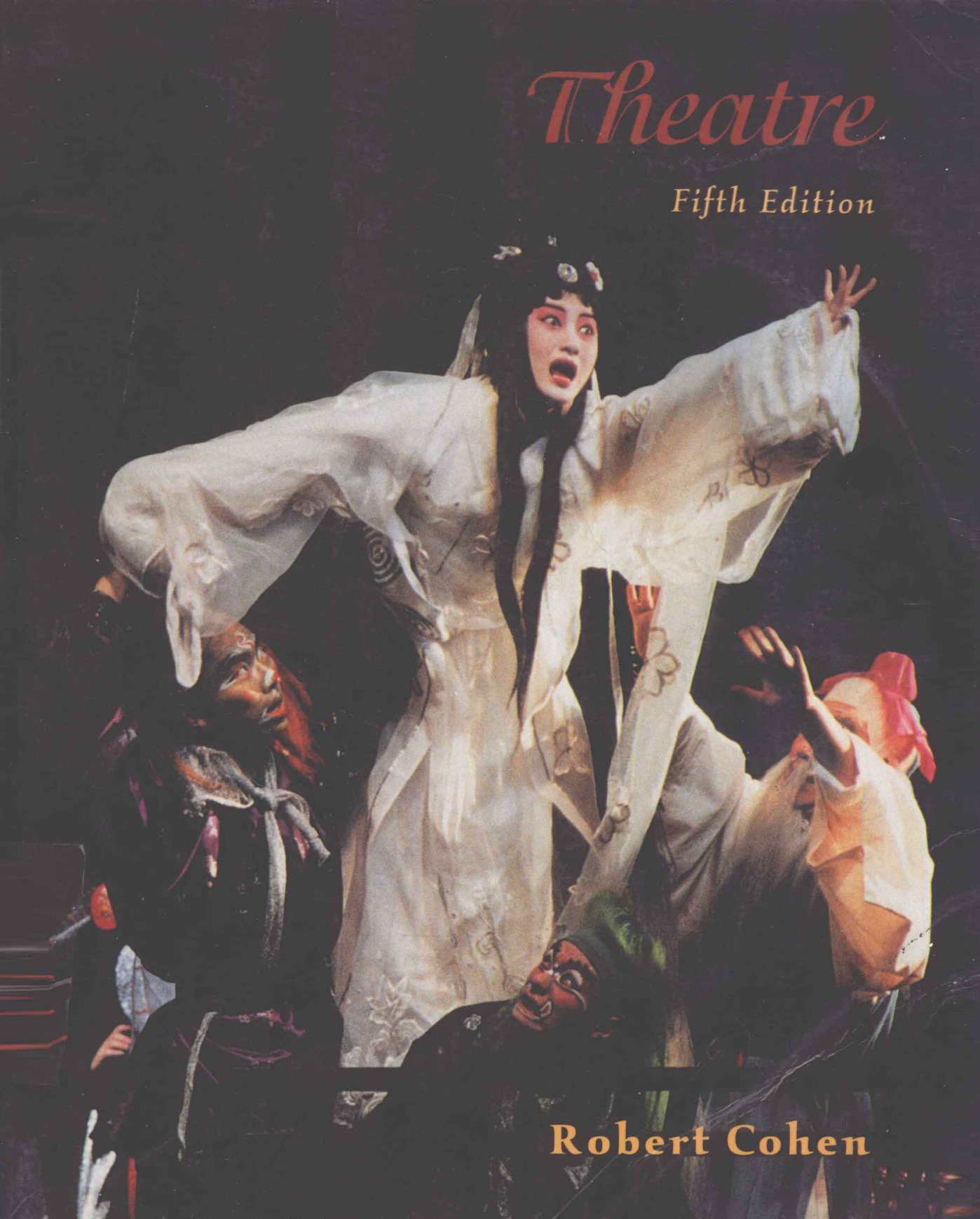
Theatre

Fifth Edition



Robert Cohen

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FIFTH EDITION

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Preface

I am sitting in a darkened theatre correcting the galley sheets for the book you are about to read. A technical rehearsal for a play I am directing is in progress; I am seated at a makeshift desk in the back of the house, my reading illuminated by a tiny covered gooseneck lamp. Onstage stand several actors, silent and motionless, as light plays over their faces and bodies. Above me, unseen and unheard, technicians operate, adjust, and record the settings for another of the play's hundred and fifty light cues. To the outside observer, it is the dullest situation imaginable; nothing observable happens for twenty or thirty minutes at a stretch. A pool of light intensifies and then recedes, muffled conversation crackles over headsets, footsteps clang on steel catwalks lacing the ceiling, and a spotlight is carefully repositioned. This has been going on now since eight in the morning, and it is already past dinnertime.

And yet my eye is continually pulled from these pages to the dance of light upon the stage. The violet and amber hues are rich with color, and the sharp shafts of incandescence dazzle with brilliance. I am fascinated by the patient weariness of the actors, alternately glowing in and then shadowed by the lights, endlessly holding the positions that, in performance, they will occupy for only a few transitory seconds. I gaze with admiration at the followspot operator, his hands gloved, as he handles his instrument with the precision and sensitivity of a surgeon.

The silence, the stasis, is hypnotic. All is quiet but profound with held-back beats, incipient torrents of passion and exhilaration. The potential is riveting—I am alive with excitement—and I look back to these cold galley sheets with alarm.

How can I have thought to express the thrill of the theatre in these pages? How can I have hoped to make recognizable the joy and awe I feel in theatrical involvement?

The theatre is not merely a collection of crafts, a branch of literature, a collaboration of technique, or even an all-encompassing art form. It is a life. It is people. It is people making art out of themselves. Its full reality transcends by light-years anything that could be said or written about it.

What I have tried to do in these pages is not so much to introduce the theatre or to survey it as to *present* the theatre with its liveliness and humanness intact, with its incipient passion and exhilaration always present, with its potential for joy, awe, wisdom, and excitement as clear to the reader as they have been made clear to me.

Features

Integral to the text are the presentations of seven "model plays," drawn from the theatre's history, as the core of the "past" and "present" sections. These seven plays—*Prometheus Bound, Oedipus Tyrannos,* the York Cycle, *Romeo and Juliet, The Bourgeois Gentleman, The Three Sisters,* and *Happy Days*—represent, in combination, the range and magnitude of human theatrical achievement. That is not to say that they are the world's greatest dramatic masterpieces (although some of them surely are), but that they collectively define the major horizons of the drama as well as the theatre's major styles, themes, and expressions of human

imagination. However, I do not intend for these model play presentations to substitute for seeing the plays or for reading them. Readers of this fifth edition may gain access to six of these model plays (together with two others) in their entirety through a companion anthology, *Eight Plays for Theatre,* and to twelve more plays, including *Prometheus Bound,* in *Twelve Plays for Theatre.*

With or without the knowledge of the whole plays, however, I believe that the model presentations in this book, along with the excerpts from 25 other plays, will provide outlines for the reader's understanding and springboards for the reader's imagination of drama as it has been created and practiced through the major periods of theatrical history.

I have included more than 250 theatre photographs—mostly in color—collected from all five continents. The vast majority of these are of significant recent stage productions from around the world. Other photos illustrate the processes of theatrical creation or the historical and current contexts of theatre presentation. Completing the book's art are a dozen drawings by scholar/architects that illustrate theatres both past and present as accurately as current research and skilled reconstruction can make possible. Extended captions should help readers better appreciate these images of theatre worldwide and make stronger connections to the text examples.

The text offers a number of pedagogical aids. Terms commonly used in theatre and theatre history are defined in the glossary at the back of the book, and further sources of information for the curious can be found in the selected bibliography. To help students enjoy performances, I have included an appendix that offers advice on observing and writing critically about plays.

To help students enhance their playgoing experience further, we have prepared a brief guide—*Enjoy the Play!* Co-authored with Lorna Cohen, the guide includes suggestions as to how and where students may attend live theatre—at low cost—either in their own hometowns or in major theatre centers here and abroad. It also includes pointers on how to write a play report.

To help busy instructors, there is the test bank, written by Marilyn Moriarty, which includes 50 multiple-choice questions and several short-answer or essay questions per chapter. A computerized version of the test bank is available to qualified adopters.

No study of the theatre can be truly comprehensive without seeing and reading plays. It is my belief that regular playgoing and play reading, supported by the discussions in these pages and in the classroom, will provide a good foundation for an informed and critical enthusiasm for the art of drama.

What's New?

As part of the updating throughout, I've included more than 125 new photographs, as well as theatre drawings, new to this edition, by America's most distinguished theatre scholar/engineer, George C. Izenour. Three new photo essays highlight the visual nature of theatre. "A Play Is Put Together" (Chapter 15) combines text and photos to illustrate the many steps of play production, specifically a 1998 staging of *Measure for Measure* at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival. Chapter 14 includes two new photo essays that highlight the working methods and contributions of Broadway designers Tony Walton (scenery) and Patricia Zipprodt (costumes).

I've made significant changes to the text as well, including a new chapter on musical theatre. Chapter 10 addresses the increased role musicals play in current theatre, not only on New York's Broadway but in regional theatres around the country, and in major metropolitan theatres abroad. I have also greatly expanded the size—and scope—of the Asian theatre chapter, which now includes, in addi-

tion to Japanese *kabuki,* illustrated coverage of *nō,* Chinese Opera *(xiqu),* Indian *kathakali,* and related subjects. And I have sought to frame this section with an opener to Part Two of the book that treats the commonality of the theatre's most ancient origins across the global East-West division.

And, of course, all chapters have been revised, some substantially. "Theatre Today" (Chapter 11) has, naturally, been updated on virtually every page, with entirely new discussions and photographs of such contemporary productions as *The Lion King, The Beauty Queen of Leenane, Rent, Gross Indecency, How I Learned to Drive, Titanic, The Peony Pavilion, Time Rocker,* and dozens of others. The survey of American playwrights has been augmented with the addition of Paula Vogel, and that entire section has been moved to the chapter on playwriting (13). The chapter on design (14) has been substantially revised to accommodate new developments, both aesthetic and technological, and the chapter on acting (12) has been revised to clarify even further some of the ongoing debates between presentational and representational techniques in that field. In all of these revisions, I have profited from literally hundreds of valuable suggestions from readers and from a dozen reviews solicited by the publisher from around the country.

Acknowledgments

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the many reviewers of previous editions of this book, and of the new material first drafted for the current one: in particular these include, for the current edition: Joe Aldridge, University of Nevada at Las Vegas; George Caldwell, Washington State University; Kurt Daw, Kennesaw State University; Richard Devin, University of Colorado; Cliff Faulkner, University of California at Irvine; Stephen Hancock, University of Memphis; Mark Harvey, University of Minnesota; Richard Isackes, University of Texas at Austin; Robert Gerald Levy, Clarion University of Pennsylvania; Dean Mogle, College Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati; C. Ronald Olauson, Mankato State University; Mikell Pinkney, University of Florida; Rebecca Rumbo, University of Connecticut; Terry Donovan Smith, University of Washington; Janet Swenson, Brigham Young University; and Edmond Williams, University of Alabama.

I am also deeply grateful to the following individuals for helping me locate and acquire the many new photographs used in this edition: James Seacat and Michael Bigelow Dixon at the Actors Theatre of Louisville; Richard Devin at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival; David Schwarm, Special Collections, UC Irvine Library; Greg McCart and Jenny Herbert at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia; Ann Goddard at the Utah Shakespearean Festival; Stephanie Howard at Steppenwolf Theatre Company; Carla Steen at the Guthrie Theatre; Jane Sato at the Arena Stage; Bill Schroeder at the Yale Repertory Theatre; Tang Yuen Ha of the Hong Kong Jing Kun Arts Association; Don Hughes and Cynthia Dike of IAI Presentations for the Hubei Opera photographs; Katalin Mitchell at the American Repertory Theatre; Phyllis Moberly at the Mark Taper Forum; Patricia Eaton at the San Jose Repertory Theatre; Jenny Burkholder at the Goodman Theatre; Marton Andras at the Pécs National Theatre of Hungary; Jennifer Wislocki at the Goodspeed Opera House; Maria Bonilla at the Costa Rica National Theatre; Daniel S. Yang at the Hong Kong Repertory Theatre; Lo Tak Sing at the Festival of Asian Arts in Hong Kong; Christofer Gross at South Coast Repertory; Kimberly Moore at the Hartford Stage Company; Maija-Liisa Marton at the Espoo Theatre of Finland; Kim Kalapos at Portland Center Stage; Bruce Lee at the Utah Shakespearean Theatre; S. Einsenlet at the Verkehrs-und Reisebüro Gemeinde Oberammergau; and extra help and advice from the

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Finally, I'd like to thank the entire editorial and production team at the extraordinary Mayfield Publishing Company. This fifth edition of *Theatre* marks the thirtieth anniversary of my relationship with Mayfield (originally National Press), and I cannot possibly imagine a more talented and agreeable assemblage of bibliognosts. In particular, I would like to acknowledge the superb work of senior production editor Julianna Scott Fein, art director Jeanne Schreiber, design manager Susan Breitbard, art manager Robin Mouat, and production director Linda Toy—along with other crucial staff members Star MacKenzie, Irina Raicu, Brian Pecko, Randy Hurst, Joe Hanson, and Claire Seng-Niemoeller. Above all, let me share my admiration in this space for my wonderfully hard-driving editor, Jan Beatty, who has been the stout-hearted sounding board and counselor for virtually every page that follows.

Contents

Introduction

It is evening in Manhattan. On Broadway and the streets that cross it — from 42nd to 52nd — marquees light up, "Performance Tonight" signs materialize in front of double doors, and beneath a few box-office windows, placards announce "This Performance Completely Sold Out." At Grand Central Station, to the east, and Pennsylvania Station, to the south, trains disgorge suburbanites from Greenwich, Larchmont, and Trenton; students from New Haven and Philadelphia; daytrippers from Boston and Washington. Up from the Seventh and Eighth Avenue subway stations of Times Square troop denizens of the island city and the neighboring boroughs. At the Times Square "TKTS" booth, hundreds line up in the deepening chill to buy the half-price tickets that go on sale a few hours before curtain time for undersold shows. Now, converging on these few midtown blocks of America's largest city, come limousines, restaurant buses, private cars, and taxis, whose drivers search for a curbside slot to deposit their riders among the throng of pedestrians. Financiers and dowagers, bearded intellectuals, bedraggled bohemians, sleek executives, hip Harlemites, arm-in-arm widows, conventioneers, tourists, honeymooners, out-of-work actors, celebrities, the precocious young — all commingle in this bizarre aggregation that is the Broadway audience. It is as bright, bold, and varied a crowd as is likely to assemble at any one place in America.

It is eight o'clock. In thirty or forty theatres, houselights dim, curtains rise, spotlights pick out performers whose lives center on

About three dozen theatres line the streets of a mere two blocks in midtown Manhattan; five of them – the Booth, the Plymouth, the Royale, the Music Box, and the Martin Beck – are shown here in a single half block of 45th Street. Most Broadway theatres date from the beginning of the twentieth century, and several are currently being restored. This convergence of playhouses makes Broadway the most concentrated – and consequently the most lively – theatre district in the world.

this moment. Here a new musical, here a star-studded revival of an American classic, here a contemporary English comedy from London's West End, here a new play fresh from its electrifying Seattle or Atlanta premiere, here a one-woman show, here an off-Broadway hit moving to larger quarters, here a new avant-garde dance-drama, here a touring production from eastern Europe, and here the new play everyone expects will capture this year's coveted Pulitzer Prize. The hours pass.

Eleven o'clock. Pandemonium. All the double doors open simultaneously, as if on cue, and once again the thousands pour out into the night. At nearby restaurants, waiters stand by to receive the after-theatre onslaught. In Sardi's private upstairs room, an opening-night cast party gets under way; downstairs, the patrons rehash the evening's entertainment and sneak covert glances at the celebrities around them and at the actors heading for the upstairs sanctuary to await the reviews that will determine whether they will be employed next week or back on the street.

Now let's turn back the clock. It is dawn in Athens, the thirteenth day of the month of Elaphebolion in the year 458 B.C. From thousands of low mud-bricked homes in the city, from the central agora, from temples and agricultural outposts, streams of Athenians and visitors converge upon the south slope of the Acropolis. Bundled against the morning's dampness, carrying with them breakfast figs

and flagons of wine, they pay their tokens at the entrance to the great Theatre of Dionysus and take their places in the seating spaces allotted them. Each tribe occupies a separate area. They gather for the festival of the Great Dionysia, celebrating the greening of the land, the rebirth of vegetation, and the long sunny days that stretch ahead. It is a time for revelry, a time for rejoicing at fertility and its fruits. And it is above all a time for the ultimate form of Dionysian worship: the theatre.

The open stone seats carved into the hillside fill up quickly. The crowd of 17,000 people here today comprises not only the majority of Athenian citizens but thousands of noncitizens as well: women, slaves, tradesmen, foreign visitors, and resident aliens. Even the paupers are in attendance, thanks to the two obols meted out to each of them from a state fund so that they can purchase entry; they sit with the foreigners and latecomers on the extremities of the *theatron,* as this first of theatres is called.

Now as the eastern sky grows pale, a masked and costumed actor appears atop a squat building set in full view of every spectator. A hush falls over the crowd, and the actor, his voice magnified by the wooden mask he wears, booms out this text:

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

And the entranced crowd settles in, secure in the knowledge that today they are in good hands. Today they will hear and see a new version of a familiar story — the story of Agamemnon's homecoming and his murder, the revenge of that murder by his son Orestes, and the final disposition of justice in the case of Orestes' act — as told in the three tragedies that constitute *The Oresteia.* This magnificent trilogy is by Aeschylus, Athens's leading dramatist for more than forty years. The spectators watch closely, admiring but critical. Tomorrow they or their representatives will decide by vote whether the festival prize should go to this group of plays or to one of those shown yesterday, whether Aeschylus still reigns supreme or the young Sophocles has better sensed the true pulse of the time. Even forty years later, the comic playwright Aristophanes will be arguing the merits and demerits of this day's work.

It is noon in London, and Queen Elizabeth I sits on the throne. Flags fly boldly atop three of the taller buildings in Bankside, across the Thames, announcing performance day at The Globe, The Rose, and The Swan. Boatmen have already begun ferrying theatre-bound Londoners across the river. Meanwhile, north of town, other flocks of Londoners are headed by foot and by carriage up to Finsbury Fields and the theatres of Shoreditch: The Fortune and The Curtain. Public theatres have been banned in the city for some time now by action of the aldermen; however, an ensemble of trained schoolboys is rehearsing for a private candlelight performance before the queen.

Now, as the morning sermon concludes at St. Paul's Cathedral, the traffic across the river increases. London Bridge fills with pedestrians hurrying to Bankside, where The Globe players will present a new tragedy by Shakespeare (something called *Hamlet,* supposedly after an old play by Thomas Kyd). And The Rose promises a revival of the late Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus.* The noisy crowds swarm into the theatres, where the price of admission is a penny; another penny is needed for a pint of beer, and those who wish to go upstairs and take a seat on one of the benches in the gallery — the best place to see the action, both on the stage and off — must plunk down yet more pennies.

At The Globe, 2,000 spectators are on hand for the premiere. A trumpet sounds once, then again, and then builds into a full fanfare. The members of the audience exchange a few last winks with friends old and new — covert and