
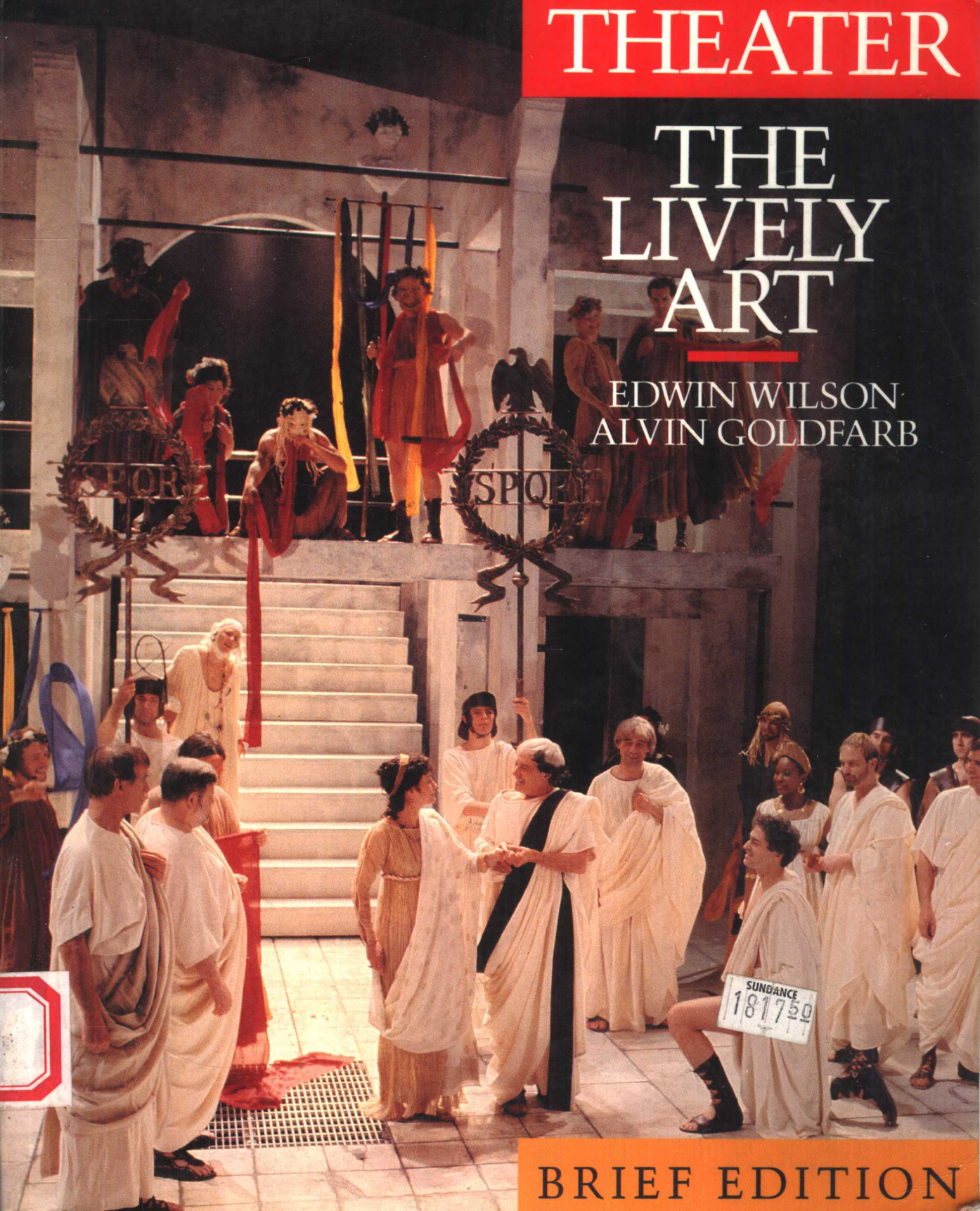


THEATER



THE LIVELY ART

EDWIN WILSON
ALVIN GOLDFARB





THEATER

THE LIVELY ART

BRIEF EDITION

EDWIN WILSON

*Professor Emeritus
Hunter College and Graduate Center
The City University of New York*

ALVIN GOLDFARB

*Dean of the College of Fine Arts
and Professor of Theater
Illinois State University*

McGraw-Hill, Inc.

*New York St. Louis San Francisco Auckland
Bogotá Caracas Lisbon London Madrid Mexico
Milan Montreal New Delhi Paris San Juan
Singapore Sydney Tokyo Toronto*

To our wives, Catherine Wilson and Elaine Goldfarb
—E. W. and A. G.

THEATER: THE LIVELY ART, BRIEF EDITION

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4 5 6 7 8 9 0 QPH QPH 9 0 9 8 7 6

ISBN 0-07-070742-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wilson, Edwin.

Theater: the lively art / Edwin Wilson, Alvin Goldfarb. — Brief ed.

p. cm.
1. Theater. 2. Theater—History. I. Goldfarb, Alvin.

II. Title.

PN2037.W57 1993

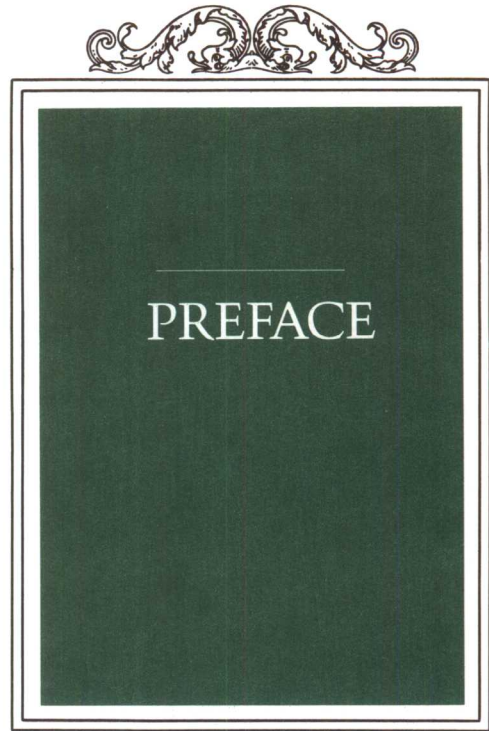
792—dc20

92-8112

This book was set in Trump Medieval by Waldman Graphics, Inc.
The editors were Niels Aaboe and Susan Gamer;
the designer was Joan E. O'Connor;
the production supervisor was Richard A. Ausburn.
The photo editor was Inge King.
Quebecor Printing/Hawkins was printer and binder.

Cover credit: Hartford Stage Company's production of *Julius Caesar*.
Directed by Mark Lamos. Photo by Jennifer W. Lester © 1991.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.



Theater: The Lively Art, Brief Edition, incorporates a number of elements in one volume: an introduction to the audience's experience of theater; an investigation of the elements of theater; a brief survey of theater history; and a close look at theater today. Like the full edition, it has been created with the student in mind: it contains a wealth of information; is written in a lively, accessible style; and is lavishly illustrated.

The Brief Edition is intended for college courses that have a short semester, or for instructors who want to use the text in conjunction with other activities, such as extensive play readings or production projects. It contains the essence of the full edition but is more compact.

Part One (Chapters 1 to 7) introduces students to the people who make theater possible, to the elements of theater, and to significant concepts of theater such as genre and realism and nonrealism. We explore the roles of the performer, the director, the designer, the technical expert, the critic, and—far from the least important—the audience member.

We also focus on the elements of theater. We investigate acting and directing, including various acting techniques and methods of actors' training, as well as the major approaches to directing. We look at the script: at dramatic structure; at the creation of dramatic characters; and

at the point of view incorporated in tragedy, comedy, tragicomedy, melodrama, and so forth. We study design and technical production, including the nuts-and-bolts aspects of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound. We also consider the theoretical aspects of criticism.

Part Two, The Theater Tradition and Theater Today, consists of Chapters 8 to 11. Chapters 8 and 9 offer an overview of theater history from its beginnings through most of the nineteenth century. Some instructors may prefer to omit these periods of theater history; if so, they should feel free to eliminate Chapters 8 and 9 and move directly from Chapter 7 to Chapter 10.

Chapters 10 and 11, which are devoted to developments of the past hundred years, offer an extensive look at contemporary theater. The forces that began over a century ago—in realism and departures from realism, in acting techniques, in the emergence of the director, and in scene and lighting design—have defined the theater we have today. As we point out in Chapter 11, ours is a diverse, eclectic theater, rich in variety and innovation. We look at the many cross-currents and trends that make up the theater which students of today and audiences of tomorrow will be attending.

The Brief Edition has a number of features that we hope will be helpful and appealing to teachers and students alike. First and foremost, we have attempted to make it immediate and alive—just the way theater should be. This sense of immediacy and personalization has been a goal of our writing style. We have attempted to write in the most readable language possible. To this end, we have dispensed with dry, pedantic language, and wherever possible we have avoided “laundry lists” of names, dates, and titles. The book contains a wealth of information, but we hope it is presented in a manner that makes it vivid and alive.

Another feature is approximately 150 photographs, 17 in full color, which are directly tied to the text. The illustrations—both photographs and line drawings—do not exist in isolation but explain and enhance the material in the text. Moreover, the photographs have been selected to be dynamic and “dramatic” in and of themselves.

Finally, there is a glossary of technical and historical terms in drama and theater.

We assume that all students reading the book are potential theatergoers, not just in their college years but throughout their lives. We have attempted, therefore, to make *Theater: The Lively Art*, Brief Edition, an ideal one-volume text to prepare students as future audience members. It will give them a grasp of how theater functions, of how it should be viewed and judged, and of the tradition behind any performance they may attend. The book will also prepare students who wish to continue studies in theater, as majors, as minors, or as students from other disciplines who take advanced courses.

Theater is an art form; beyond that, it is one of the performing arts. As such, its quality is elusive. Theater exists only at the moment when a performance occurs, and to study it in a book or classroom is to be one step removed from that immediate experience.

Nevertheless, the experience of theater can be many times more meaningful if audience members understand a number of things: the component parts of theater, the various creative artists and technicians who make it happen, the tradition and historical background from which theater springs, and the genre or movement of which a particular play is a part. It is our hope that *Theater: The Lively Art*, Brief Edition, will provide the knowledge and information to make this possible and that it will encourage and inspire students to become lifelong audience members, whether or not they are actual participants in theater.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is a long list of colleagues and others who have helped to make this book possible and to whom we are deeply grateful. We thank Prof. J. Thomas Rimer and Prof. James V. Hatch for providing invaluable material on Asian theater and African American theater respectively. Scott Walters developed the Instructor's Manual and assisted in other aspects of the project. Edward Dee and J. K. Curry assisted with the preparation of the manuscript, and Edward Dee prepared the index. Jana Barber and Betsy Sameshima assisted with typing and research. John Sipes and Barbara Acker, faculty members at Illinois State University, provided the movement and voice exercises in Chapter 2. Steve Meckstroth, Humanities Librarian at Illinois State, helped with many of our research emergencies.

The following people, who read and commented on the manuscript in various stages of development, made important contributions to the final result: Ronald O. Davis, Florida A&M University; Arthur Greene, University of Virginia; Robert W. MacClennan, Sinclair Community College; George M. Roesler, Inver Hills Community College; and Susan E. Sanders, Northern Essex Community College.

At McGraw-Hill we express our profound thanks and unbounded admiration to Joan O'Connor, the designer, and Inge King, the photography editor, who have collaborated on a total of eight books with one or both of us. Finally, we are exceedingly grateful to Susan Gamer, our editing supervisor; and to our general editors, Niels Aaboe and Peter Labella.

Edwin Wilson
Alvin Goldfarb



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INTRODUCTION

What happens when we go to the theater? How does the experience unfold?

First, we hear or read about a play we would like to see; then we make plans to go, alone or with someone else. Perhaps we are invited by a friend or taken as part of a group such as a college or high school class; in any case, someone makes arrangements to buy tickets.

On the day of the performance, we go to the theater, which may be part of an arts center or a separate building with distinctive architecture—either traditional, along the lines of an old theater with a marquee, or a modern building. When we go inside, we enter a lobby area, which may be furnished elegantly, with chandeliers and other plush furnishings,

Theater: A living art form *Performers, masks, costumes, lights—these elements combine with the script and other aspects of theater to produce a unique experience. Each moment in theater is a live encounter between the members of the audience and what is happening onstage. The scene shown here is a production of Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus at the Stratford Festival in Ontario, Canada. The performers are (left to right): Andrew Jackson, Nicholas Pennell as Titus, Goldie Semple, and Juan Chioran.*

(Michael Cooper)

or quite simply. Whatever the environment of the theater building, the experience has begun for us and we soak up the atmosphere.

Once inside the theater auditorium, we observe the appearance of the space as we join the other audience members. We take our seats and look at the theater program, reading about the performers and other artists who are responsible for the production we are about to see. After a time, the lights in the auditorium go down and the lights on the stage come up.

The performance begins, and we enter the world of the play. If there is scenery onstage, we become aware of the locale of the action: perhaps it is a living room in a modern home, or a room in a palace, or a forest. The actors and actresses impersonate characters: they may be portraying members of a modern family, or they may be playing such legendary figures as Joan of Arc, Hamlet, or Romeo and Juliet. The way the characters are dressed and the way they move and talk tell us who they are and also indicate the world they inhabit.

As the action gets under way, we see how the characters relate to each other: which ones are drawn to each other, and who opposes whom. We begin to identify with the characters: some we feel close to, and others we distrust. We also become aware of whether the play is funny or sad: if the characters make fools of themselves, we laugh at them; if they are threatened by sinister forces, we become concerned for their safety; if they suffer, we may suffer along with them. The action of the play builds excitement and suspense. There is a movement toward a climax, a showdown between the major characters; and then there is a resolution.

Meanwhile, we have been in the midst of a singular experience. One of the timeless appeals of theater is that each performance is unique: the particular encounter between audiences and performers is new each time it occurs. The actors may be playing the same roles in the same play, but their performances will vary from one night to the next, and the audience is also different each time. Thus, the combination of the two is something that has never happened before and will never happen again. Moreover, this has been a truly "live" performance—that is, both the actors and the audience are gathered in the same place at the same time. The actors are appearing in the flesh, not as images on film or on a television screen, and they feel the electricity that passes between spectators and performers just as much as the audience members do.

This phenomenon occurs no matter what type of play we have just experienced. We may have felt the thrill and excitement of watching a lavishly produced musical with awe-inspiring scenic and lighting effects and, along with this, the infectious appeal of the music. Or we may have let ourselves enjoy the amusement and raucous laughter of a knockabout farce. We may have been taken out of our everyday world and transported to another time and place such as the Rome of Julius Caesar or the England of Richard III. Perhaps we have been frightened and engulfed by

a spine-tingling melodrama, or inspired by the great courage and daring of a mythical Greek hero.

After the play ends, the performers come onstage for a bow as the audience applauds. Then the lights in the auditorium come on, and we leave the theater and return to life outside, to what is sometimes called the "real world." Usually we carry with us thoughts, impressions, and emotions that may linger for some time to come.

THE DIVERSITY OF MODERN THEATER EXPERIENCES

This experience has been repeated thousands and thousands of times throughout many centuries and throughout the world, and today is repeated every night of the year all over the United States. Not only that, it is repeated in widely diverse settings. In fact, it could be said that rarely if ever has there been such a variety of theater experiences avail-

Resident professional theater *One of the most important developments in theater in the United States in recent years is the growth of resident professional theaters. Here we see a scene from a production of Shakespeare's Measure for Measure at the Old Globe Theatre in San Diego, California, with Stephen Markle as Angelo (left) and Nance Williamson as Isabella.*

(Will Gullette)



able to audiences as exists in the United States today. These experiences range from musical extravaganzas in theaters that seat 3,000 or 4,000 people to productions in spaces no larger than a school classroom where 40 or 50 people watch a handful of actors perform on a small stage.

One important source of theater productions is resident professional theaters. In cities like Boston, Hartford, New Haven, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Louisville, Minneapolis, Denver, Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, these companies present a full season of plays that include revivals of the classics as well as many new plays being given their first performances.

Meanwhile, every season thirty or forty productions open on Broadway in New York City, which was once the focal point of all theater activity in the United States. Though it is now only one of many places where theater is produced, Broadway still represents the highest in professional standards of acting and visual production. And productions that are given a stamp of approval on Broadway, such as spectacular musicals like *The Phantom of the Opera*, often travel to theaters across the country.

(Carol Rosegg/Martha Swope Associates)



Alternative theater: A vital force

Adding to the rich mixture of theater across the country is alternative theater: small, mostly nonprofit theaters that produce significant revivals, experimental avant-garde work, and theater for special populations such as minorities and those interested in political or social issues. The scene here is from a production of Flow My Tears the Policeman Said by an off-off-Broadway group, Mabou Mines.



College and university theater Among the wide variety of theater produced in the United States—both professional and amateur—an important part is that presented on university and college campuses. The American College Theater Festival is organized to recognize the best of this. Each year over 500 productions are entered, and from these a number are invited to a series of regional festivals. Four to six productions are chosen for presentation each spring at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Illinois State University's production of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, shown here, was a recent finalist.

In smaller theaters in New York—referred to as *off-Broadway* or *off-off-Broadway* theaters—and small theaters elsewhere, plays and musicals are presented by the hundreds. These include revivals of unusual plays from the past as well as experimental, avant-garde plays of the present. They also include plays that appeal to particular groups: political plays, minority plays, feminist plays, and so forth.

A different experience occurs at numerous Shakespeare festivals in places that range from New York's Central Park to San Diego's Old Globe Theater, from Houston, Texas, to Ashland, Oregon. Every summer thousands of audience members see *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *As You Like It*, or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in these outdoor amphitheaters.

In addition to this, theater departments in colleges and universities across the country mount classic plays like Molière's *Tartuffe* or Aristophanes's *Lysistrata* and modern classics such as Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* or Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*, as well as more recent dramas. Most of these are carefully rehearsed, full-scale