

# *The Theater Experience*

Eighth Edition

Edwin Wilson



E I G H T H   E D I T I O N

# The Theater Experience

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Edwin Wilson

*Graduate School and University Center  
The City University of New York*



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## THE THEATER EXPERIENCE

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## About the Author

Teacher, author, and critic, Edwin Wilson has worked in many aspects of theater. Educated at Vanderbilt University, the University of Edinburgh, and Yale University, he received a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Yale Drama School, as well as the first Doctor of Fine Arts degree awarded by Yale. He has taught at Yale, Hofstra, Vanderbilt, Hunter College, and the CUNY Graduate Center. At Hunter he served as chair of the Department of Theatre and Film and head of the graduate theater program. At CUNY he directs the Martin E. Segal Theatre Center.

Edwin Wilson was the theater critic of *The Wall Street Journal* for 22 years. In addition to *The Theater Experience*, he is coauthor with Alvin Goldfarb of *Living Theater: A History*, *Theater: The Lively Art*, and the *Anthology of Living Theater*,

also published by McGraw-Hill, and he was responsible for the volume *Shaw on Shakespeare*. He was the president of the New York Drama Critics Circle and served several times on the Tony Nominating Committee and the Pulitzer Prize Drama Jury. He is on the boards of the John Golden Fund, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, and the Theatre Development Fund, of which he was also president.

Before turning to teaching and writing, Edwin Wilson was assistant to the producer for the film *Lord of the Flies*, directed by Peter Brook, and the Broadway play *Big Fish, Little Fish*, directed by John Gielgud. He produced several off-Broadway shows and coproduced a Broadway play directed by George Abbott. He also directed in summer and regional theater, serving one season as resident director of the Barter Theater in Virginia.

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*To My Wife, Catherine*



# Preface

## INTRODUCTION

When I set out to write *The Theater Experience*, I realized that every introductory text I had read or used approached theater from the standpoint of either the historian or the practitioner; it was a chronicle of what had happened in theater through the years, or a look at theater from the standpoint of the insider: the critic, the actor, the director, and so forth. I knew, however, that the vast majority of students studying theater for the first time would be potential audience members. Some of them might go on to major in theater, and a few might, in time, actually become performers, playwrights, or designers. Even these, though, would be attending theater.

I decided, therefore, that what was needed more than anything else was a text that approached theater from the point of view of the theatergoer; hence, the first few chapters focused on the audience. I have maintained this approach

through all eight editions of *The Theater Experience*. The book contains as much information about the various elements of theater as any available, and it also contains an abundance of historical facts, but always these are presented in a way that can be understood and absorbed by students who, I hope, will be attending theater for the rest of their lives.

## ORGANIZATION

*The Theater Experience* has five parts, each corresponding to an essential element of a theater event:

- The audience, which sees the event and responds to it (Part 1)
- The performers, who bring the event alive; and the director, who guides them (Part 2)
- The type of event being performed (Part 3)
- The dramatist, who constructs the action, develops the characters, and writes the dialogue (Part 4)

- The designers, who provide the environment in which the event occurs (Part 5)

Each part in turn has several chapters which explore different aspects of putting a theater performance together.

This organization is a departure from texts that look at theater chronologically, beginning with the Greeks and moving forward. There is a great deal of history in the book, but it is introduced at the point where it seems most relevant. Thus, the physical appearance of a Greek theater, Roman theater, *nō* theater, and Elizabethan theater is discussed in the section on theater spaces. Tragedy and comedy, from ancient times to the present, are examined in the section on types of drama.

This arrangement departs from the pedantic, strictly academic approach of the past. Similarly, this text does not present theater purely from the point of those who produce it. *The Theater Experience* puts the audience, those who attend and observe theater, at the forefront.



The organization of the text has a further advantage in that it allows an instructor to arrange the parts in any way with which he or she feels comfortable. Someone who wishes to take types of drama first—or stage spaces and design, or performer and directors—will find that the text works perfectly well in that order.

## Production Shots

From the beginning, one hallmark of *The Theater Experience* has been its abundant production photographs, taken from professional productions in New York and many regional theaters, from colleges, and from abroad. The eighth edition introduces something new: color production photographs throughout the book. This feature brings theater alive for the reader with more colorful and more numerous photographs than ever before.

At certain points, photographs are clustered in a Photo Essay: a group of photographs reflecting a common theme or demonstrating a progression, such as the development of a design from first sketches to a completed scene or costume. From “Performers Play Diverse Roles” to “The Special Effects of Lighting,” we have attempted to present the vibrancy of theater through the power of images.

## Boxes

Another feature of *The Theater Experience* is the sidebar, or box.

Several types of boxes appear in the text. “**Getting Started in Theater**” boxes are personal statements from directors, playwrights, set designers, technicians, and others which illustrate the diversity of talents and backgrounds of theater professionals. “**Play Synopsis**” boxes are two-page spreads which provide detailed summaries of well-known plays, act by act, and are accompanied by photographs of both the playwright and a staged production. Additional boxes throughout the text present excerpts from plays, important critical quotations, warm-up exercises for actors, and much more.

## Tools for Learning

Throughout the text, important words and terms are set in **bold** type to help students identify and remember them. Some of these are technical; some are the special vocabulary of theater; some are concepts and key words important to understanding theater. Every bold term can be referenced in one of the two glossaries found at the end of the book. In addition, a summary concludes each chapter, reinforcing the major points covered.

## Appendixes

Several useful appendixes are included to aid in teaching and serve as informational resources. One is a **glossary of technical terms** used in theater; a second is a lengthier description of

**major theatrical forms and movements**; the third is a helpful series of **historical outlines**. The outlines, organized by nation and time period, list theatrical events on one side and developments in politics, society, science, etc., on the other.

## NEW TO THIS EDITION

### Content

There are several noteworthy changes and additions in the eighth edition. First, and most important, the text has been revised. Material that no longer seemed pertinent or timely has been eliminated; at the same time, new, relevant material has been added. The chapters on acting, directing, scenery, stage costumes, and lighting and sound have undergone a close review by specialists in these fields, and the text has been rewritten to reflect current thinking and recent research.

### Design

With this edition we have chosen to make the most of a brand-new design. In addition to color photographs from the most recent performances, we have used color and design to highlight the features which have made this book a success over the years. I believe you will find that the design brings new life to the text, especially to “Getting Started,” “Play Synopses,” and the other boxes found throughout it.



## Exploring Theater on the Web



One of the most significant additions to the eighth edition is a boxed feature at the conclusion of each chapter: “**Exploring Theater on the Web.**” This entirely new section guides students in how to amplify and explore chapter topics on the Internet. Links to reliable, up-to-date sites tie the content of each chapter to the World Wide Web with exercises which help deepen students’ appreciation of theater while they hone their ability to research and reference electronically. They can do this at home, on their own computers, and it will be a vital supplement to the text and to classroom discussions.

## Support for Instructors

*Please note: The supplements listed here and below in “Support for Students” may accompany this text. Please contact your local McGraw-Hill representative for details concerning policies, prices, and availability, as some restrictions may apply. If you are not sure who your representative is, you can find him or her by using the Rep Locator at [www.mhhe.com](http://www.mhhe.com).*

**Instructor’s Manual:** McGraw-Hill offers an Instructor’s Manual to all instructors who adopt *The Theater Experience* for their courses. Each chapter of the Instructor’s Manual includes:

- Overview and outline of the text chapter
- List of significant names and terms found in the chapter
- Questions for student essays or discussions
- Suggestions for demonstrations and exercises for class involvement
- Play recommendations for the chapter

The last section of the Instructor’s Manual contains a sample Test Bank, organized by chapter, for in-class quizzes and testing.

**Computerized Test Bank:** The test questions from the Instructor’s Manual are available on MicroTest, a powerful but easy-to-use test-generating program. MicroTest is available for Windows and Macintosh personal computers. With MicroTest, you can easily view the file and select test questions, then print a test and answer key. You can customize questions, headings, and instruction; you can add or import questions of your own; and you can print your test in a choice of fonts allowed by your printer.

**Online Learning Center:** [www.mhhe.com/theaterexperience](http://www.mhhe.com/theaterexperience) The Website and Online Learning Center is an Internet-based resource for students and faculty alike. The Instructor’s Resources are password-protected and offer the complete text of the Instructor’s Manual, a correlation guide for *Anthology of Living Theater* and *The Theater Experience*, and a link to our customizable database of plays. To receive a password for the site, contact your local sales representative or E-mail us at [theater@mcgraw-hill.com](mailto:theater@mcgraw-hill.com).

Additionally, the Online Learning Center offers chapter-by-chapter quizzes for testing students. These brief quizzes are separate from those offered in the Instructor’s Manual; they generate instant grades; and the results can be E-mailed directly to the instructor with the click of a button (see “Student Resources” on the next page). This special quizzing feature is a valuable tool for the instructor who requires a quick way to check reading comprehension and basic understanding *without using up valuable class time*.

**Online Course Support:** The online content of *The Theater Experience* is supported by WebCT, eCollege.com, and Blackboard. To find out more contact your local McGraw-Hill representative or visit [www.mhhe.com/solutions](http://www.mhhe.com/solutions).

As an adopter, you may also be eligible to use our PageOut service to get you and your course up and running online in a matter of hours—at no cost to you and without knowing HTML! To find out more contact your local McGraw-Hill representative or visit [www.pageout.net](http://www.pageout.net).



## Student Resources

**The McGraw-Hill Theatergoer's Guide:** A recently-revised *Theatergoer's Guide* is packaged with every new copy of the text. The guide is an excellent introduction to the art of attending and critiquing a play—from making theater reservations and knowing when to applaud to evaluating a performance and doing research on the Internet.

**Online Learning Center:** [www.mhhe.com/theaterexperience](http://www.mhhe.com/theaterexperience): McGraw-Hill offers extensive web resources for students with Internet access. Students will find the Online Learning Center of particular use with *The Theater Experience*, as for each chapter it offers glossary terms, chapter objectives, discussion questions, and on-line testing. In addition, the site hosts links to promote getting involved in theater and conducting research on the web.

**The McGraw-Hill Guide to Electronic Research in Theater:** This brief booklet is designed to assist students in locating theater sites on the web and evaluating on-site information; it also provides guidelines for referencing on-line sources. This supplement can be packaged free with the text.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first developed many of the ideas in this book while teaching a course in Introduction to Theater at Hunter College of the City University of New York. To my former colleagues and students at Hunter, I express my deep appreciation.

Teachers who have used the book have contributed specific material which I have incorporated in the text. I particularly wish to thank Stuart Baker, who was responsible for Appendix 2 and much of the material in Appendix 3; Mira Felner, who not only wrote the material on women and Greek and Elizabethan theater but also made a substantial contribution to the chapters on acting; J. K. Curry, who contributed the synopsis of

*Fefu and Her Friends*; Susan Tenneriello, who prepared the index; Scott Walters, who prepared the Instructor's Manual; Christopher Goumas, who provided invaluable assistance with the chapters on design; and Alvin Goldfarb, whose advice in many areas, especially the chapter on diversity, was of inestimable value.

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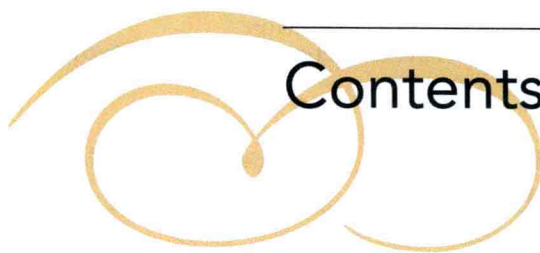
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Through all eight editions of *The Theater Experience*, I have had the great good fortune to work with Inge King, the incredibly talented and perceptive photograph editor: there is no one like her. Also, through most editions I have been blessed with the unerring, unbelievable copyediting of the incomparable Susan Gamer. I am most grateful to Julie Booth, who so capably prepared our most exciting new feature: "Exploring Theater on the Web" at the conclusion of each chapter. At McGraw-Hill I have been fortunate to have the assistance of Gladys True as project manager; Keith McPherson, who is responsible for the inventive, vibrant design of the book; and David Patterson, my extraordinary marketing manager. Finally, my editor Allison McNamara is a model of patience, persistence, ingenuity, and support; this edition would not have been possible without her.

**Edwin Wilson**





# Contents in Brief

Preface	xvii
Introduction	1

## **Part 1 The Audience**

---

1	The Audience: Its Role and Imagination	15
2	Background and Expectations of the Audience	37
3	The Critic and the Audience	59

## **Part 2 The Performers and the Director**

---

4	Acting: Offstage and in the Past	75
5	Stage Acting Today	91
6	The Director and the Producer	117

## **Part 3 The Play: Types of Theater**

---

7	The Text: Subject, Purpose, and Perspective	149
8	Tragedy and Other Serious Drama	163
9	Comedy and Tragicomedy	181
10	Musical Theater	203
11	Theater of Diversity	219

## **Part 4 The Playwright: Dramatic Structure and Dramatic Characters**

---

12	Conventions of Dramatic Structure	245
13	Dramatic Structure: Climactic, Episodic, and Other Forms	261
14	Dramatic Characters	285

## **Part 5 The Designers: Environment, Visual Elements, and Sound**

---

15	Stage Spaces	305
16	Scenery	329
17	Stage Costumes	359
18	Lighting and Sound	381
Epilogue: Integrating the Elements and Predicting the Future		401

## **Appendices**

---

A	Technical Terms	409
B	Major Theatrical Forms and Movements	416
C	Historical Outline	423
Notes		438
Select Bibliography		439
Index		442

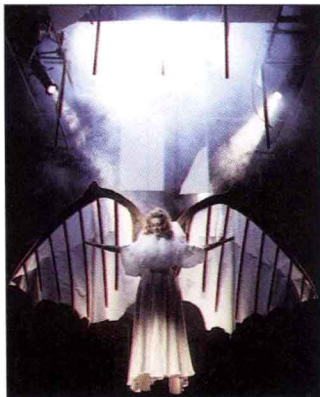


# Contents

<i>Preface</i>	xvii
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Theater: The Art Form	3
The Focus of Theater: Human Beings	5
The Impulse Toward Theater	5
Theater as a Transitory Art	6
The Elements of Theater	9
Summary	10

## Part 1 The Audience

**12**



<b>Chapter 1 The Audience: Its Role and Imagination</b>	<b>15</b>
The Relationship Between Performer and Audience	16
<i>The Special Nature of Theater: A Contrast with Film</i>	16
<i>The Chemistry of Performer-Audience Contact</i>	17
Theater as a Group Experience	18
<i>Psychology of Groups</i>	19
<i>How Audience Makeup Affects the Theater Experience</i>	20
The Separate Roles of Performers and Spectators	20
<i>How Should the Audience Be Involved?</i>	21
<i>Audience Participation through Direct Action</i>	21
The Imagination of the Audience	23
<i>Tools of the Imagination: Symbol and Metaphor</i>	25
<i>The "Reality" of the Imagination</i>	27
The Imaginary Worlds of Theater	28
<i>Realism and Nonrealism</i>	28
<i>Distinguishing Stage Reality from Fact</i>	32
Summary	34
Exploring Theater on the Web	34
 <b>Chapter 2 Background and Expectations of the Audience</b>	 <b>37</b>
Background of Individual Spectators	37



Background of the Period	39
<i>Theater and Society</i>	39
<b>Play Synopsis: <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i></b>	<b>40</b>
<i>Greek Theater and Culture</i>	42
<i>Elizabethan Theater and Culture</i>	42
<i>Modern Theater and Culture</i>	43
Background Information on the Play or Playwright	45
Expectations: The Variety of Experiences in Modern Theater	47
<i>Broadway and Touring Theater</i>	47
<i>Resident Professional Theaters</i>	49
<i>Alternative Theaters: Off-Broadway and Elsewhere</i>	49
<i>College and University Theaters</i>	51
<i>Multicultural, Multicultural, and Gender Theaters</i>	52
Summary	56
Exploring Theater on the Web	56



<b>Chapter 3 The Critic and the Audience</b>	<b>59</b>
Theatrical Criticism	60
<i>What Is Criticism?</i>	60
<i>Preparation for Criticism</i>	60
<i>Critical Criteria</i>	61
<i>Descriptive and Prescriptive Criticism</i>	63
<b>Play Synopsis: <i>Fefu and Her Friends</i></b>	<b>64</b>
<i>Fact and Opinion in Criticism</i>	66
<i>The Reviewer and the Critic</i>	66
<b>Getting Started in Theater—Mel Gussow, Critic</b>	<b>67</b>
The Audience's Relationship to Criticism: Two Issues	68
<i>The Audience's Independent Judgment</i>	68
<i>Analysis and Overanalysis</i>	70
Summary	71
Exploring Theater on the Web	71

## Part 2 The Performers and the Director

**72**



<b>Chapter 4 Acting: Offstage and in the Past</b>	<b>75</b>
"Acting" in Everyday Life	75
<i>Imitation</i>	76
<i>Role Playing</i>	76
Acting in Life versus Acting Onstage	79
<b>Photo Essay: Audra McDonald</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Play Synopsis: <i>Death of a Salesman</i></b>	<b>82</b>
Stage Acting: A Historical Perspective	84
<i>Physical Demands of Classical Acting</i>	84
<i>Vocal Demands of Classical Acting</i>	86
<i>Performing in Classics Today</i>	86
Summary	89
Exploring Theater on the Web	89





<b>Chapter 5 Stage Acting Today</b>	<b>91</b>
The Acting Experience	92
Challenges of Acting Today	94
<b>Photo Essay: Performers Play Diverse Roles</b>	<b>95</b>
<i>The Development of Realistic Acting</i>	96
<b>Play Synopsis: <i>The Three Sisters</i></b>	<b>102</b>
<i>Performers' Training Today</i>	104
<i>Synthesis and Integration</i>	110
Judging Performances	112
Summary	114
Exploring Theater on the Web	114



<b>Chapter 6 The Director and the Producer</b>	<b>117</b>
The Theater Director	117
<i>Evolution of the Director: A Historical Perspective</i>	118
<i>The Director and the Script</i>	119
<b>Photo Essay: The Director at Work</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>Getting Started in Theater—Zelda Fichandler, Director</b>	<b>127</b>
<i>The Director and the Production</i>	128
<b>Photo Essay: Putting a Production Together</b>	<b>136</b>
<i>The Director's Power and Responsibility</i>	139
The Producer or Manager	139
<i>The Commercial Producer</i>	139
<i>Noncommercial Theaters</i>	141
Completing the Picture: Playwright, Director, and Producer	143
Summary	144
Exploring Theater on the Web	144

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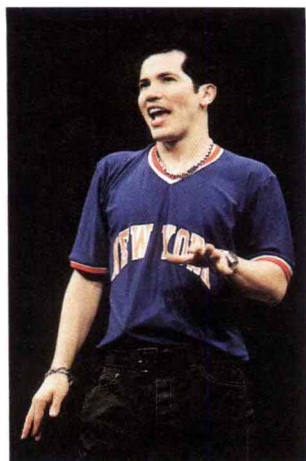
## Part 3 The Play: Types of Theater 146



<b>Chapter 7 The Text: Subject, Purpose, and Perspective</b>	<b>149</b>
Subject	150
Focus and Emphasis	150
Purpose	151
Viewpoint	152
<i>What Is Point of View?</i>	152
<i>The Dramatist's Point of View</i>	153
<i>Society's Point of View</i>	154
<i>Viewpoint and Genre</i>	157
<b>Play Synopsis: <i>M. Butterfly</i></b>	<b>158</b>
Summary	161
Exploring Theater on the Web	161



<b>Chapter 8 Tragedy and Other Serious Drama</b>	<b>163</b>
Tragedy	163
<i>Traditional Tragedy</i>	164
<b>Play Synopsis: King Oedipus</b>	<b>166</b>
<i>Modern Tragedy</i>	168
Heroic Drama	171
<b>Photo Essay: Modern Domestic Drama</b>	<b>172</b>
Bourgeois or Domestic Drama	174
Melodrama	175
<b>Getting Started in Theater—Emily Mann,     Playwright-Director</b>	<b>176</b>
Summary	179
Exploring Theater on the Web	179
 <b>Chapter 9 Comedy and Tragicomedy</b>	 <b>181</b>
Comedy	181
<i>Characteristics of Comedy</i>	182
<b>Play Synopsis: The Way of the World</b>	<b>184</b>
<i>Techniques of Comedy</i>	186
<i>Forms of Comedy</i>	189
<b>Photo Essay: Forms of Comedy</b>	<b>190</b>
Tragicomedy	192
<i>What Is Tragicomedy?</i>	193
<i>Modern Tragicomedy</i>	194
Theater of the Absurd	196
<i>Absurdist Plots: Illogicality</i>	196
<i>Absurdist Language: Nonsense and Non Sequitur</i>	198
<i>Absurdist Characters: Existential Beings</i>	198
Summary	200
Exploring Theater on the Web	200
 <b>Chapter 10 Musical Theater</b>	 <b>203</b>
Background	203
<i>Drama and Music</i>	203
<i>The Appeal of Music and Dance</i>	204
<i>Types of Musical Theater</i>	204
A Brief History of the American Musical	206
<i>Antecedents</i>	206
<i>The 1920s and 1930s: Musical Comedies</i>	207
<i>The 1920s and 1930s: Advances in Musicals</i>	207
<i>Musical Theater of the 1940s and 1950s</i>	209
<i>Musicals from the 1960s through the 1990s</i>	211
<b>Photo Essay: Diverse American Musicals</b>	<b>212</b>
Summary	217
Exploring Theater on the Web	217

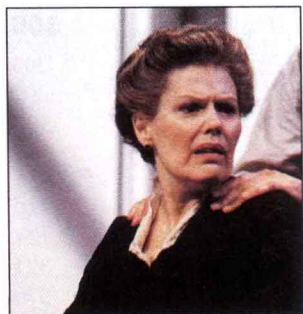


<b>Chapter 11 Theater of Diversity</b>	<b>219</b>
African American Theater	220
<i>Background of African American Theater</i>	220
<i>African American Theater in the Middle and Late Twentieth Century</i>	221
Getting Started in Theater—August Wilson, Playwright	223
Play Synopsis: <i>Fences</i>	224
Asian American Theater	226
<i>Background of Asian Theater</i>	226
<i>Contemporary Asian American Theater</i>	230
Hispanic Theater	231
Native American Theater	233
Feminist Theater	234
Gay and Lesbian Theater	235
Performance Art	236
Fringe Theater Festivals	238
Postmodernism and Culturally Diverse Theater	238
Summary	240
Exploring Theater on the Web	240

## Part 4 The Playwright: Dramatic Structure and Dramatic Characters 242



<b>Chapter 12 Conventions of Dramatic Structure</b>	<b>245</b>
Essentials of Dramatic Structure	246
<i>The Form of Drama: Plot versus Story</i>	246
<i>The Subject and Verb of Drama: People and Action</i>	247
<i>The Crucible of Drama: Conflict</i>	248
Play Synopsis: <i>Waiting for Godot</i>	250
Structural Conventions: The Rules of the Game	252
<i>Limited Space</i>	253
<i>Limited Time</i>	253
<i>Strongly Opposed Forces</i>	254
<i>A Balance of Forces</i>	255
<i>Incentive and Motivation</i>	255
Creating a Dramatic Structure	256
<i>The Opening Scene</i>	256
<i>Obstacles and Complications</i>	256
<i>Crisis and Climax</i>	257
Summary	258
Exploring Theater on the Web	258



<b>Chapter 13 Dramatic Structure: Climactic, Episodic, and Other Forms</b>	<b>261</b>
Climactic Structure	262
<i>Characteristics of Climactic Structure</i>	262
Play Synopsis: <i>Ghosts</i>	264
<i>Significant Periods of Climactic Structure</i>	268