

THE CAMBRIDGE
HISTORY OF

BRITISH
THEATRE

VOLUME 3
SINCE 1895

EDITED BY
BAZ KERSHAW

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VOLUME 3
Since 1895

This volume explores the rich and complex histories of English, Scottish and Welsh theatres in the 'long' twentieth century since 1895. Twenty-three original essays by leading historians and critics investigate the major aspects of theatrical performance, ranging from the great actor-managers to humble seaside entertainers, from between-wars West End women playwrights to the roots of professional theatre in Wales and Scotland, and from the challenges of alternative theatres to the economics of theatre under Thatcher. Detailed surveys of key theatre practices and traditions across this whole period are combined with case studies of influential productions, critical years placed in historical perspective and evaluations of theatre at the turn of the millennium. The collection presents an exciting evolution in the scholarly study of modern British theatre history, skilfully demonstrating how performance variously became a critical litmus test of the great aesthetic, cultural, social, political and economic upheavals in the age of extremes.

BAZ KERSHAW is Chair of Drama at the Department of Drama, University of Bristol. He is the author of *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (1992) and *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (1999), and has published in many journals including *Theatre Journal*, *New Theatre Quarterly* and *The Drama Review*.

THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF
BRITISH THEATRE

General Editor

PETER THOMSON, *University of Exeter*

The Cambridge History of British Theatre provides a uniquely authoritative account of the turbulent and often troublesome public life of performance in Britain. Whilst making full use of new research in a subject that is at the centre of current concern, the essays are designed for the general reader as well as for the specialist. Each volume is fully illustrated. Together, they offer a comprehensive and comprehensible history of theatre, of which plays are a part but by no means the whole.

The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 1: Origins to 1660

EDITED BY JANE MILLING AND PETER THOMSON

The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 2: 1660 to 1895

EDITED BY JOSEPH DONOHUE

The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 3: Since 1895

EDITED BY BAZ KERSHAW

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General preface

It is not the aim of the three-volume *Cambridge History of British Theatre* to construct theatrical history as a seamless narrative, not least because such seamlessness would be a distortion of the stop/start/try-again, often opportunistic, truth. Chronology has guided, but not bullied, us. The editorial privilege has been to assemble a team of international scholars able to speak with authority on their assigned (or sometimes chosen) topics. The binding subject is theatre, to which drama is a major, but not the only, contributor.

Each of the volumes includes some essays which are broad surveys, some which treat specific themes or episodes, some which are socio-theatrical 'snapshots' of single years and some which offer case studies of particular performance events. There is, of course, an underlying assertion: that a nation's theatre is necessarily and importantly expressive of, even when resistant to, the values that predominate at the time, but the choice of what to emphasise and what, however regretfully, to omit has rested with the volume's editor or editors. The aim has been to provide a comprehensive 'history' that makes no vain pretence to all-inclusiveness. The character of the volumes is the character of their contributors, and those contributors have been more often asked to use a searchlight than a floodlight in order to illuminate the past.

It is in the nature of 'histories' to be superseded. These volumes, though, may hope to stand as a millennial record of scholarship on a cultural enterprise – the British theatre – whose uniqueness is still valued. They are addressed to a readership that ranges from students to sheer enthusiasts. A 'history' is not the place for scholars to talk in secret to other scholars. If we have ever erred in that direction, it has been without the sanction of Victoria Cooper, who has shepherded these volumes through to publication with the generosity that is well known to all the authors who have worked with her.

Peter Thomson

Acknowledgements

Collaborative scholarly projects are often like flocks of migrating birds: they know where they want to get to – a ‘new history’, say – and they have a keen sense of the best route to get there, but many unpredictable factors will determine the nature and length of the journey. The flight of these particular essays to the bookshops has been especially perturbed by a key paradox in the writing of history, but especially recent history: when the history-bird cannot see the wood for the trees, a resort to the avian equivalent to ‘slash and burn’ will not improve its view, nor its progress. So first and foremost I must thank all the contributors to this volume, who have been unusually understanding of, and sensitive to, the difficulties of a complicated task; as well as being fabulously patient with our slow advance through the thickets and brambles, they have engaged wholeheartedly and often imaginatively with my, sometimes no doubt unreasonable, editorial demands. It would usually be invidious to single out any one of them, but the structure of the book allows me to thank Dennis Kennedy especially for his unerring guidance and sustaining good humour. Thanks too must go to the editors of the other volumes; we were never strictly a ‘team’, but thanks to Peter Thomson’s trust, great good sense and impressively speedy editorial support it never felt like we were working alone. Closer to home, thanks are due to colleagues in the Department of Drama at Bristol, but especially to Janet Thumim for nimbly shifting resources to support the project, and to my remarkable postdoctoral research associates, Angela Piccini and Caroline Rye, who have been what every embattled academic editor must long for: brilliantly supple, strong, cool and supportive, especially as this project flew through the apex of its demand on my time. Special thanks must also go to my doctoral research student, Dafydd James, who assiduously helped to compile the chronology and bibliography right on schedule. The staff of the University of Bristol Theatre Collection were specially helpful in the search for illustrations, so thanks particularly to the keeper, Jo Elsworth, and to Louise Matter and Frances Carlyon, for

their speedy and spot on support. Also, thank goodness, yet again I have been personally and professionally sustained beyond all reasonable measure to get my part of this whole thing done by Dr Gill Hadley, and by Eleanor and Logan. Without them it probably would not even have grown its feathers, let alone flapped its wings, and so attracted the interest and support of a significant number of the practising theatre artists who are named in these pages: many thanks to those for helping to source images and, much more importantly, for the high creativity that we have been privileged to write about. And, finally, we all have been incredibly fortunate that our commissioning editor at Cambridge University Press is Vicki Cooper: to have enough courage to trust us to complete the outward migration is one thing, as she must have known she could assemble a fit production team at the Press, but to have the vision to imagine how it might actually wing its way back into the public domain with much more than it started out with, thanks to everyone who contributed, is quite something else. To slightly paraphrase Samuel Butler, this was surely a case of the long-distance, high-flying flock being the egg's idea for getting more eggs.

Baz Kershaw
September 2003

Chronology

	Theatrical events	Political and social events
1895	Henry Irving is first actor to be knighted Elizabethan Stage Society founded by William Poel Oscar Wilde's trial; <i>An Ideal Husband</i> and <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> performed in London	
1896	Jarry's <i>Ubu Roi</i> performed in Paris Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i> performed in London Wilson Barrett's <i>The Sign of the Cross</i> performed in London	Lumière brothers bring Cinématographe to London
1897	Beerbohm Tree opens Her Majesty's Theatre J. M. Barrie, <i>The Little Minister</i>	
1898	New Century Theatre Company founded The Independent Theatre Company collapses Wyndham's Theatre opens Moscow Art Theatre founded Brecht born	
1899	The Stage Society founded Irish Literary Theatre founded by Yeats/Gregory	South African (Boer) War begins
1900	Craig directs <i>Dido and Aeneas</i> , Purcell Opera Society	Méliès makes <i>Jeanne d'Arc</i> (film)

	Theatrical events	Political and social events
	Max Beerbohm directs <i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i> Wilde dies in Paris	
1901	Apollo Theatre opens	Queen Victoria dies Accession of Edward VII
1902	Barrett, <i>The Christian King</i> Barrie, <i>The Admirable Crichton</i>	Education Act South African War ends
1903	New Theatre opens	Women's Social and Political Union founded by Emmeline Pankhurst First powered flight by Wright brothers
1904	Barker–Vedrenne seasons start at Royal Court Abbey Theatre founded by Miss Horniman RADA founded by Herbert Beerbohm Tree Barker–Archer publish National Theatre scheme Chekhov dies	
1905	Aldwych Theatre opens Tree establishes annual Shakespeare festival Barker, <i>The Voysey Inheritance</i> Irving dies on tour; Ibsen dies	
1906	Variety Artistes' Federation established Samuel Beckett born	
1907	Lena Ashwell takes over Kingsway Theatre Riots at the Abbey Theatre Barker's <i>Waste</i> refused licence Elizabeth Robins, <i>Votes for Women</i>	
1908	The Society of West End Theatre founded Actresses' Franchise League founded	Henry Ford produces first Model T car

	Theatrical events	Political and social events
	Craig's first publication of <i>The Mask</i> (to 1929)	
	Hamilton's <i>Diana of Dobson's</i> at the Kingsway	
	Horniman creates Manchester Repertory Company	
1909	Glasgow Repertory Theatre founded with British première of <i>The Seagull</i>	Parliamentary inquiry into censorship
	Elizabeth Barker, <i>Chains</i>	Kinematograph Act
1910	Diaghilev's Ballets Russes visits London	King Edward dies
	Reinhardt's productions of <i>Sumurun</i> (Coliseum) and <i>The Miracle</i> (Olympia exhibition hall)	Accession of George V
1911	Stage Society forms Repertory Theatre Association	Prison Reform Bill
	Liverpool Repertory Theatre started	
	Pioneer Players founded by Edith Craig	
1912	First Royal Command Performance of Variety	
	Githa Sowerby, <i>Rutherford and Sons</i>	
	Stanley Houghton, <i>Hindle Wakes</i>	
	Reinhardt's <i>Oedipus Rex</i> (Covent Garden)	
1913	Jackson founds Birmingham Repertory Theatre	
	Actresses' Franchise League founds first Women's Theatre Company	
	Shaw's <i>Androcles and the Lion</i> at St James'	
1914	Old Vic starts producing all Shakespeare's plays (to 1923)	World War One starts

	Theatrical events	Political and social events
	Glasgow Repertory Theatre closes	
	Shaw, <i>Pygmalion</i>	
1915	Barker's final Court Theatre season	
	Harold Brighouse, <i>Hobson's Choice</i>	
1916	Oscar Asche's <i>Chu Chin Chow</i> opens at His Majesty's Theatre (to 1921)	Easter Uprising in Dublin Introduction of Entertainment Tax
1917	Beerbohm Tree dies	Russian Revolution
1918	Nigel Playfair opens Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith	World War One ends General Election – Lloyd George forms coalition government Women granted vote
1919	William Bridges-Adams directs Shakespeare Memorial Theatre British Drama League founded	
1920	Scottish National Players Committee founded Shaw, <i>Heartbreak House</i>	Irish Civil War
1921	Shaw, <i>Back to Methuselah</i>	The dole (unemployment pay) started
1922	Scottish National Theatre Society founded	Irish Free State established Conservatives win General Election
1923	Oxford Repertory Theatre formed Terence Gray founds Cambridge Festival Theatre Sybil Thorndike in Shaw's <i>St Joan</i> Marie Stopes, <i>Our Ostriches</i> Death of Sarah Bernhardt	Conservatives hold power in General Election – Baldwin Prime Minister
1924	Edith Evans's <i>Millamant</i> at Lyric, Hammersmith Barry Jackson's modern-dress <i>Hamlet</i>	First Labour government elected Ramsey MacDonald Prime Minister
1925	Peter Godfrey / Molly Veness open Gate Theatre	Conservatives regain power

	Theatrical events	Political and social events
1926	Workers' Theatre Movement founded Theatre Managers' Association founded Shakespeare Memorial Theatre burns down Shaw receives Nobel prize for literature Shaw, <i>Mrs Warren's Profession</i>	General Strike BBC Royal Charter
1927	Arts Theatre Club opens	BBC formed
1928	Brecht sees Eliot's <i>Sweeney Agonistes</i> in London Moscow Art Theatre visits London Fortune and Piccadilly Theatres built League of Welsh Drama established R. C. Sherriff, <i>Journey's End</i>	Full emancipation for women
1929	Harcourt Williams directs Old Vic Company Jackson founds Malvern Festival Piscator publishes <i>The Political Theatre</i> Sean O'Casey, <i>The Silver Tassie</i> Noel Coward, <i>Bitter Sweet</i>	First talking films marketed Great Depression and Wall Street Crash General Election, Labour minority government, MacDonald Prime Minister
1930	British Actors' Equity formed League of Welsh Drama collapses	
1931	Lilian Baylis opens the new Sadler's Wells Compagnie des Quinze visits London First English performance of Wilde's <i>Salome</i> Coward, <i>Cavalcade</i>	Depression in Britain 2.5 million unemployed General Election, coalition national government under MacDonald
1932	Rupert Doone's Group Theatre founded Joan Littlewood's Theatre of	First National Workers' Movement conference Hunger marches in London

	Theatrical events	Political and social events
	Action founded	
	New Shakespeare Memorial	
	Theatre opens	
	Lady Gregory dies	
1933	Guthrie's first season directing Old Vic Company	Hitler becomes German Chancellor
	Regent's Park Open Air Theatre opens	Reichstag burns
	Kurt Jooss's dance theatre visits London	
	Left Theatre founded	
	Curtain Theatre (Glasgow) founded	
1935	Theatre of Action becomes Theatre Union	Baldwin replaces MacDonald as Prime Minister
	First Ivor Novello musical at Drury Lane	Left Book Club founded
	Gielgud, Olivier, Ashcroft and Edith Evans in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> at New Theatre	
1936	London Unity Theatre founded Guthrie reappointed to Old Vic Company	Accession of George VI Spanish Civil War begins Television introduced on BBC services
	Novello, <i>Careless Rapture</i>	Saunders Lewis's arson at Penyberth
1937	Left Theatre collapses Olivier, Richardson join Old Vic	Chamberlain replaces Baldwin as Prime Minister
1938	Auden and Isherwood, <i>On the Frontier</i>	Republic of Ireland Munich Crisis
1939	Group Theatre closes ENSA established MSU Players founded by Molly Urquhart	Spanish Civil War ends Germany invades Poland
	Yeats dies	World War Two begins
1940	CEMA established Scottish National Players collapses	Battle of Britain and the Blitz Churchill replaces Chamberlain as Prime Minister