APPENDIX 1
BIOGRAPHY AND WORKS OF SAMUEL BECKETT

Samuel (Barclay) Beckett was born on Good Friday, April 13, 1906, near Dublin, Ireland. Raised in a middle class, Protestant home, the son of a quantity surveyor and a nurse, he was sent off at the age of 14 to attend the same school which Oscar Wilde had attended. Looking back on his childhood, he once remarked, "I had little talent for happiness."

Beckett was consistent in his loneliness. The unhappy boy soon grew into an unhappy young man, often so depressed that he stayed in bed until mid afternoon. He was difficult to engage in any lengthy conversation--it took hours and lots of drinks to warm him up--but the women could not resist him. The lonely young poet, however, would not allow anyone to penetrate his solitude. He once remarked, after rejecting advances from James Joyce's daughter, that he was dead and had no feelings that were human.

In 1928, Samuel Beckett moved to Paris, and the city quickly won his heart. Shortly after he arrived, a mutual friend introduced him to James Joyce, and Beckett quickly became an apostle of the older writer. At the age of 23, he wrote an essay in defense of Joyce's magnum opus against the public's lazy demand for easy comprehensibility. A year later, he won his first literary prize--10 pounds for a poem entitled "Whoroscope" which dealt with the philosopher Descartes meditating on the subject of time and the transience of life. After writing a study of Proust, however, Beckett came to the conclusion that habit and routine were the "cancer of time", so he gave up his post at Trinity College and set out on a nomadic journey across Europe.

Beckett made his way through Ireland, France, England, and Germany, all the while writing poems and stories and doing odd jobs to get by. In the course of his journeys, he no doubt came into contact with many tramps and wanderers, and these acquaintances would later translate into some of his finest characters. Whenever he happened to pass through Paris, he would call on Joyce, and they would have long visits, although it was rumored that they mostly sat in silence, both suffused with sadness.

Beckett finally settled down in Paris in 1937. Shortly thereafter, he was stabbed in the street by a man who had approached him asking for money. He would learn later, in the hospital, that he had a perforated lung. After his recovery, he went to visit his assailant in prison. When asked why he had attacked Beckett, the prisoner replied "Je ne sais pas, Monsieur", a phrase hauntingly reminiscent of some of the lost and confused souls that would populate the writer's later works.

During World War II, Beckett stayed in Paris--even after it had become occupied by the Germans. He joined the underground movement and fought for the resistance until 1942 when several members of his group were arrested and he was forced to flee with his French-born wife to the unoccupied zone. In 1945, after it had been liberated from the Germans, he returned to Paris and began his most prolific period as a writer. In the five years that followed, he wrote Eleutheria, Waiting for Godot, Endgame, the novels Malloy, Malone Dies, The Unnamable, and Mercier et Camier, two books of short stories, and a book of criticism.
Samuel Beckett's first play, *Eleutheria*, mirrors his own search for freedom, revolving around a young man's efforts to cut himself loose from his family and social obligations. His first real triumph, however, came on January 5, 1953, when *Waiting for Godot* premiered at the Théâtre de Babylone. In spite of some expectations to the contrary, the strange little play in which "nothing happens" became an instant success, running for four hundred performances at the Théâtre de Babylone and enjoying the critical praise of dramatists as diverse as Tennessee Williams, Jean Anouilh, Thornton Wilder, and William Saroyan who remarked, "It will make it easier for me and everyone else to write freely in the theatre." Perhaps the most famous production of *Waiting for Godot*, however, took place in 1957 when a company of actors from the San Francisco Actor's Workshop presented the play at the San Quentin penitentiary for an audience of over fourteen hundred convicts. Surprisingly, the production was a great success. The prisoners understood as well as Vladimir and Estragon that life means waiting, killing time and clinging to the hope that relief may be just around the corner. If not today, then perhaps tomorrow.

Beckett secured his position as a master dramatist on April 3, 1957 when his second masterpiece, *Endgame*, premiered (in French) at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Although English was his native language, all of Beckett's major works were originally written in French--a curious phenomenon since Beckett's mother tongue was the accepted international language of the twentieth century. Apparently, however, he wanted the discipline and economy of expression that an acquired language would force upon him.

Beckett's dramatic works do not rely on the traditional elements of drama. He trades in plot, characterization, and final solution, which had hitherto been the hallmarks of drama, for a series of concrete stage images. Language is useless, for he creates a mythical universe peopled by lonely creatures who struggle vainly to express the unexpressable. His characters exist in a terrible dreamlike vacuum, overcome by an overwhelming sense of bewilderment and grief, grotesquely attempting some form of communication, then crawling on, endlessly.

Beckett was the first of the absurdist to win international fame. His works have been translated into over twenty languages. In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He continued to write until his death in 1989, but the task grew more and more difficult with each work until, in the end, he said that each word seemed to him "an unnecessary stain on silence and nothingness."

Samuel Beckett is an Irish novelist and playwright, one of the great names of Absurd Theatre with Eugéne Ionesco, although recent study regards Beckett as postmodernist. His plays are concerned with human suffering and survival, and his characters are struggling with meaninglessness and the world of the Nothing. Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. In his writings for the theater Beckett showed influence of burlesque, vaudeville, the music hall, commedia dell'arte, and the silent-film style of such figures as Keaton and Chaplin.

"We all are born mad. Some remain so." (from *Waiting for Godot*, 1952)

**The works Of Samuel Beckett:**

- OUR EXAGMINATION ROUND HIS FACTIFICATION FOR INCAMINATION OF WORK IN PROGRESS, 1929
• WHOHOSCOPE, 1930
• PROUST, 1931
• MORE PRICKS THAN KICKS, 1934
• ECHO'S BONES, 1935
• MURPHY, 1938
• MOLLOY, 1951 - Molloy (suom. Raili Phan-Chan-The)
• MALONE MEURT, 1951 - Malone Dies - Malone kuolee (suom. Caj Westerberg)
• L'INNOMMABLE, 1953 - The Unnamable
• EN ATTENDANT GODOT, 1952 - Waiting for Godot - Godota odotellessa / Huomenna hän tulee (suom. Aili Palmén)
• WATT, 1953 - Watt (suom. Caj Westerberg)
• NOUVELLES ET TEXTES POUR RIEN, 1955
• FIN DE PARTIE, 1957 - Endgame - Leikin loppu (suom. Aili Palmén)
• THE UNNAMEABLE, 1958
• FROM AN ABANDONED WORK, 1958
• BRAM VAN VELDE, 1958
• ACTE SANS PAROLES, 1958
• KRAPPP'S LAST TAPE, 1959 - Viimeinen ääninauha (suom. Juha Mannerkorpi, Seppo Virtanen)
• ALL THAT FALL, 1959 - Kaikkien kaatuvien tie
• HAPPY DAYS, 1961 - Voi miten ihanä päivä (suom. Juha Mannerkorpi)
• COMMENT C'EST, 1961 - How it is - Millaista on (suom. Juha Mannerkorpi)
• WORDS AND MUSIC, 1962
• ACTE SANS PAROLES II, 1963
• CASCANDO, 1963
• PLAY, 1964
• IMAGINATION MORTE IMAGINEZ, 1965
• ASSEZ, 1966
• BING, 1966
• FILM, 1967
• VA ET VIENT, 1967 - Come and Go
• NO KNIFE, 1967
• EH JOE, 1967
• L'ISSUE, 1968
• SANS, 1968
• BREATHE, 1970
• PREMIER AMOUR, 1970 - Ensi rakkaus (suom. Ulla-Kaarina Jokinen, Seppo Polameri)
• SÉJOUR, 1970
• LE DÉPEUPLER, 1971
• BREATHE AND OTHER SHORT PLAYS, 1972
• ABANDONNE, 1972
• THE NORTH, 1972
• NOR I, 1973
• STILL, 1974
• MERCIER ET CAMIER, 1974 - Mercier ja Camier (suom. Tarja Roinila)
• ALL STRANGE AWAY, 1976
• GHOST TRIO, 1976
• THAT TIME, 1976
• ROUGH FOR THEATRE I, 1976
• ROUGH FOR RADIO I, 1976
• ROUGH FOR RADIO II, 1976
• FOR TO WEND YET AGAIN AND OTHER FIZZLES, 1976
• FOUR NOVELLAS, 1977
• ... BUT THE CLOUDS..., 1977
• MIRLITONNADES, 1978
• COMPANY, 1979
• ALL STRANGE AWAY, 1979
• NOHOW ON, 1981
• ROCKABY, 1982
• OHIO IMPROMPTU, 1982
• A PIECE OF MONOLOGUE, 1982
• MAL VU MAL DIT, 1982 - ILL SEEN ILL SAID - Huonosti nähty, huonosti sanottu (suom. Anni Sumari)
• WORSTWARD HO, 1983
• WHAT WHERE, 1983
• NACHT UND TRÄUME, 1983
• THE COLLECTER SHORTER PLAYS OF SAMUEL BECKETT, 1984
• QUAD, 1984
• CATASTROPHE, 1984
• COMPLETE DRAMATIC WORKS, 1986
• HOMMAGE À JACK B. YEATS, 1988
• TELEPLAYS, 1988
• LE MONDE ET LE PANTALON, 1989
• STIRRING STILL, 1989
• DREAM OF FAIR TO MIDDLING WOMEN, 1992
• NOHOW ON: THREE NOVELS, 1996
APPENDIX 2
SUMMARY OF WAITING FOR GODOT

Two men, Vladimir and Estragon, meet near a tree. They converse on various topics and reveal that they are waiting there for a man named Godot. While they wait, two other men enter. Pozzo is on his way to the market to sell his slave, Lucky. He pauses for a while to converse with Vladimir and Estragon. Lucky entertains them by dancing and thinking, and Pozzo and Lucky leave.

After Pozzo and Lucky leave, a boy enters and tells Vladimir that he is a messenger from Godot. He tells Vladimir that Godot will not be coming tonight, but that he will surely come tomorrow. Vladimir asks him some questions about Godot and the boy departs. After his departure, Vladimir and Estragon decide to leave, but they do not move as the curtain falls.

The next night, Vladimir and Estragon again meet near the tree to wait for Godot. Lucky and Pozzo enter again, but this time Pozzo is blind and Lucky is dumb. Pozzo does not remember meeting the two men the night before. They leave and Vladimir and Estragon continue to wait.

Shortly after, the boy enters and once again tells Vladimir that Godot will not be coming. He insists that he did not speak to Vladimir yesterday. After he leaves, Estragon and Vladimir decide to leave, but again they do not move as the curtain falls, ending the play.
APPENDIX 3

DRAMA AND THEATRE IN INTERNET

Drama (drä'mə, dräm's)  

1.  
   a. A prose or verse composition, especially one telling a serious story, that is intended for representation by actors impersonating the characters and performing the dialogue and action.  
   b. A serious narrative work or program for television, radio, or the cinema.  
2. Theatrical plays of a particular kind or period: Elizabethan drama.  
3. The art or practice of writing or producing dramatic works.  
4. A situation or succession of events in real life having the dramatic progression or emotional effect characteristic of a play: the drama of the prisoner's escape and recapture.  
5. The quality or condition of being dramatic: a summit meeting full of drama.  

Definition: n theatrical piece; acting  
Antonyms: comedy

Literary Dictionary: drama

Drama, the general term for performances in which actors impersonate the actions and speech of fictional or historical characters (or non-human entities) for the entertainment of an audience, either on a stage or by means of a broadcast; or a particular example of this art, i.e. a play. Drama is usually expected to represent stories showing situations of conflict between characters, although the monodrama is a special case in which only one performer speaks. Drama is a major genre of literature, but includes non-literary forms (in mime), and has several dimensions that lie beyond the domain of the literary dramatist or playwright (see mise en scène). The major dramatic genres in the West are comedy and tragedy, but several other kinds of dramatic work fall outside these categories (see drame, history play, masque, melodrama, morality play, mystery play, tragicomedy). Dramatic poetry is a category of verse composition for theatrical performance; the term is now commonly extended, however, to theatrical poems that involve a similar kind of impersonation, as in the closet drama and the dramatic monologue.

Columbia Encyclopedia: Western drama, plays produced in the Western world. This article discusses the development of Western drama in general; for further information see the various national literature articles.

Greek Drama

The Western dramatic tradition has its origins in ancient Greece. The precise evolution of its main divisions—tragedy, comedy, and satire—is not definitely known. According to Aristotle, Greek drama, or, more explicitly, Greek tragedy, originated in the dithyramb. This was a choral hymn to the god Dionysus and involved exchanges between a lead singer and the chorus. It is thought that the dithyramb was sung at the Dionysia, an annual festival honoring Dionysus.
Tradition has it that at the Dionysia of 534 B.C., during the reign of Pisistratus, the lead singer of the dithyramb, a man named Thespis, added to the chorus an actor with whom he carried on a dialogue, thus initiating the possibility of dramatic action. Thespis is credited with the invention of tragedy. Eventually, Aeschylus introduced a second actor to the drama and Sophocles a third, Sophocles' format being continued by Euripides, the last of the great classical Greek dramatists.

Generally, the earlier Greek tragedies place more emphasis on the chorus than the later ones. In the majestic plays of Aeschylus, the chorus serves to underscore the personalities and situations of the characters and to provide ethical comment on the action. Much of Aeschylus' most beautiful poetry is contained in the choruses of his plays. The increase in the number of actors resulted in less concern with communal problems and beliefs and more with dramatic conflict between individuals.

Accompanying this emphasis on individuals' interaction, from the time of Aeschylus to that of Euripides, there was a marked tendency toward realism. Euripides' characters are ordinary, not godlike, and the gods themselves are introduced more as devices of plot manipulation (as in the use of the deus ex machina in Medea, 431 B.C.) than as strongly felt representations of transcendent power. Utilizing three actors, Sophocles developed dramatic action beyond anything Aeschylus had achieved with only two and also introduced more natural speech. However, he did not lose a sense of the godlike in man and man's affairs, as Euripides often did. Thus, it is Sophocles who best represents the classical balance between the human and divine, the realistic and the symbolic.

Greek comedy is divided by scholars into Old Comedy (5th cent. B.C.), Middle Comedy (c.404–c.321 B.C.), and New Comedy (c.320–c.264 B.C.). The sole literary remains of Old Comedy are the plays of Aristophanes, characterized by obscenity, political satire, fantasy, and strong moral overtones. While there are no extant examples of Middle Comedy, it is conjectured that the satire, obscenity, and fantasy of the earlier plays were much mitigated during this transitional period. Most extant examples of New Comedy are from the works of Menander; these comedies are realistic and elegantly written, often revolving around a love-interest.

Roman Drama

The Roman theater never approached the heights of the Greek, and the Romans themselves had little interest in serious dramatic endeavors, being drawn toward sensationalism and spectacle. The earliest Roman dramatic attempts were simply translations from the Greek. Gnaeus Naevius (c.270–c.199 B.C.) and his successors imitated Greek models in tragedies that never transcended the level of violent melodrama. Even the nine tragedies of the philosopher and statesman Seneca are gloomy and lurid, emphasizing the sensational aspects of Greek myth; they are noted primarily for their inflated rhetoric. Seneca became an important influence on Renaissance tragedy, but it is unlikely that his plays were intended for more than private readings.

Although Roman tragedy produced little of worth, a better judgment may be passed on the comedies of Plautus and Terence. Plautus incorporated native Roman elements into the plots and themes of Menander, producing plays characterized by farce, intrigue, romance, and sentiment. Terence was a more polished stylist who wrote for and about the upper classes and dispensed with the element of farce.
The Roman preference for spectacle and the Christian suppression of drama led to a virtual cessation of dramatic production during the decline of the Roman Empire. Pantomimes accompanied by a chorus developed out of tragedy, and comic mimes were popular until the 4th cent. A.D. (see pantomime). It is this mime tradition, carried on by traveling performers, that provided the theatrical continuity between the ancient world and the medieval. The Roman mime tradition has been suggested as the origin of the commedia dell'arte of the Italian Renaissance, but this conjecture has never been proved.

Medieval Drama

While the Christian church did much to suppress the performance of plays, paradoxically it is in the church that medieval drama began. The first record of this beginning is the trope in the Easter service known as the Quem quaeritis [whom you seek]. Tropes, originally musical elaborations of the church service, gradually evolved into drama; eventually the Latin lines telling of the Resurrection were spoken, rather than sung, by priests who represented the angels and the two Marys at the tomb of Jesus. Thus, simple interpolations developed into grandiose cycles of mystery plays, depicting biblical episodes from the Creation to Judgment Day. The most famous of these plays is the Second Shepherds' Play.

Another important type that developed from church liturgy was the miracle play, based on the lives of saints rather than on scripture. The miracle play reached its peak in France and the mystery play in England. Both types gradually became secularized, passing into the hands of trade guilds or professional actors. The Second Shepherds' Play, for all its religious seriousness, is most noteworthy for its elements of realism and farce, while the miracle plays in France often emphasized comedy and adventure (see miracle play).

The morality play, a third type of religious drama, appeared early in the 15th cent. Morality plays were religious allegories, the most famous being Everyman. Another type of drama popular in medieval times was the interlude, which can be generally defined as a dramatic work with characteristics of the morality play that is primarily intended for entertainment.

Renaissance Drama

By the advent of the Renaissance in the 15th and 16th cent., most European countries had established native traditions of religious drama and farce that contended with the impact of the newly discovered Greek and Roman plays. Little had been known of classical drama during the Middle Ages, and evidently the only classical imitations during that period were the Christian imitations of Terence by the Saxon nun Hrotswitha in the 10th cent.

Italy

The translation and imitation of the classics occurred first in Italy, with Terence, Plautus, and Seneca as the models. The Italians strictly applied their interpretation of Aristotle's rules for the drama, and this rigidity was primarily responsible for the failure of Italian Renaissance drama. Some liveliness appeared in the comic sphere, particularly in the works of Ariosto and in Machiavelli's satiric masterpiece, La Mandragola (1524). The pastoral drama—set in the country and depicting the romantic affairs of rustic people, usually shepherds and shepherdesses—was more successful than either comedy or
tragedy. Notable Italian practitioners of the genre were Giovanni Battista Guarini (1537–1612) and Torquato Tasso.

The true direction of the Italian stage was toward the spectacular and the musical. A popular Italian Renaissance form was the intermezzo, which presented music and lively entertainment between the acts of classical imitations. The native taste for music and theatricality led to the emergence of the opera in the 16th cent. and the triumph of this form on the Italian stage in the 17th cent. Similarly, the commedia dell'arte, emphasizing comedy and improvisation and featuring character types familiar to a contemporary audience, was more popular than academic imitations of classical comedy.

France

Renaissance drama appeared somewhat later in France than in Italy. Estienne Jodelle's Senecan tragedy Cleopatre captive (1553) marks the beginning of classical imitation in France. The French drama initially suffered from the same rigidity as the Italian, basing itself on Roman models and Italian imitations. However, in the late 16th cent. in France there was a romantic reaction to classical dullness, led by Alexandre Hardy, France's first professional playwright.

This romantic trend was stopped in the 17th cent. by Cardinal Richelieu, who insisted on a return to classic forms. Richelieu's judgment, however, bore fruit in the triumphs of the French neoclassical tragedies of Jean Racine and the comedies of Molière. The great tragedies of Pierre Corneille, although classical in their grandeur and in their concern with noble characters, are decidedly of the Renaissance in their exaltation of man's ability, by force of will, to transcend adverse circumstances.

Spain

Renaissance drama in Spain and England was more successful than in France and Italy because the two former nations were able to transform classical models with infusions of native characteristics. In Spain the two leading Renaissance playwrights were Lope de Vega and Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Earlier, Lope de Rueda had set the tone for future Spanish drama with plays that are romantic, lyrical, and generally in the mixed tragicomic form. Lope de Vega wrote an enormous number of plays of many types, emphasizing plot, character, and romantic action. Best known for his La vida es sueño [life is a dream], a play that questions the nature of reality, Calderón was a more controlled and philosophical writer than Lope.

England

The English drama of the 16th cent. showed from the beginning that it would not be bound by classical rules. Elements of farce, morality, and a disregard for the unities of time, place, and action inform the early comedies Gammer Gurton's Needle and Ralph Roister Doister (both c.1553) and the Senecan tragedy Gorboduc (1562). William Shakespeare's great work was foreshadowed by early essays in the historical chronicle play, by elements of romance found in the works of John Lyly, by revenge plays such as Thomas Kyd's Spanish Tragedy (c.1586)—again inspired by the works of Seneca—and by Christopher Marlowe's development of blank verse and his deepening of the tragic perception.
Shakespeare, of course, stands as the supreme dramatist of the Renaissance period, equally adept at writing tragedies, comedies, or chronicle plays. His great achievements include the perfection of a verse form and language that capture the spirit of ordinary speech and yet stand above it to give a special dignity to his characters and situations; an unrivaled subtlety of characterization; and a marvelous ability to unify plot, character, imagery, and verse movement.

With the reign of James I the English drama began to decline until the closing of the theaters by the Puritans in 1642. This period is marked by sensationalism and rhetoric in tragedy, as in the works of John Webster and Thomas Middleton, spectacle in the form of the masque, and a gradual turn to polished wit in comedy, begun by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher and furthered by James Shirley. The best plays of the Jacobean period are the comedies of Ben Jonson, in which he satirized contemporary life by means of his own invention, the comedy of humours.

**Drama from 1750 to 1800**

The second half of the 17th cent. was distinguished by the achievements of the French neoclassicists and the Restoration playwrights in England. Jean Racine brought clarity of perception and simplicity of language to his love tragedies, which emphasize women characters and psychological motivation. Molière produced brilliant social comedies that are neoclassical in their ridicule of any sort of excess.

In England, Restoration tragedy degenerated into bombastic heroic dramas by such authors as John Dryden and Thomas Otway. Often written in rhymed heroic couplets, these plays are replete with sensational incidents and epic personages. But Restoration comedy, particularly the brilliant comedies of manners by George Etherege and William Congreve, achieved a perfection of style and cynical upper-class wit that is still appreciated. The works of William Wycherley, while similar in type, are more savage and deeply cynical. George Farquhar was a later and gentler master of Restoration comedy.

**Eighteenth-Century Drama**

The influence of Restoration comedy can be seen in the 18th cent. in the plays of Oliver Goldsmith and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. This century also ushered in the middle-class or domestic drama, which treated the problems of ordinary people. George Lillo's London Merchant; or, The History of George Barnwell (1731), is an important example of this type of play because it brought the bourgeois tragic hero to the English stage.

Such playwrights as Sir Richard Steele and Colley Cibber in England and Marivaux in France contributed to the development of the genteel, sentimental comedy. While the political satire in the plays of Henry Fielding and in John Gay's Beggar's Opera (1728) seemed to offer a more interesting potential than the sentiment of Cibber, this line of development was cut off by the Licensing Act of 1737, which required government approval before a play could be produced. The Italian Carlo Goldoni, who wrote realistic comedies with fairly sophisticated characterizations, also tended toward middle-class moralizing. His contemporary, Count Carlo Gozzi, was more ironic and remained faithful to the spirit of the commedia dell'arte.

Prior to the surge of German romanticism in the late 18th cent., two playwrights stood apart from the trend toward sentimental bourgeois realism. Voltaire tried to revive classical models and introduced exotic Eastern settings, although his tragedies tend to be
more philosophical than dramatic. Similarly, the Italian Count Vittorio Alfieri sought to restore the spirit of the ancients to his drama, but the attempt was vitiated by his chauvinism.

The Sturm und Drang in Germany represented a romantic reaction against French neoclassicism and was supported by an upsurge of German interest in Shakespeare, who was viewed at the time as the greatest of the romantics. Gotthold Lessing, Friedrich von Schiller, and Goethe were the principal figures of this movement, but the plays produced by the three are frequently marred by sentimentality and too heavy a burden of philosophical ideas.

Nineteenth-Century Drama

The romantic movement did not blossom in French drama until the 1820s, and then primarily in the work of Victor Hugo and Alexandre Dumas père, while in England the great Romantic poets did not produce important drama, although both Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley were practitioners of the closet drama. Burlesque and mediocre melodrama reigned supreme on the English stage.

Although melodrama was aimed solely at producing superficial excitement, its development, coupled with the emergence of realism in the 19th cent., resulted in more serious drama. Initially, the melodrama dealt in such superficially exciting materials as the gothic castle with its mysterious lord for a villain, but gradually the characters and settings moved closer to the realities of contemporary life.

The concern for generating excitement led to a more careful consideration of plot construction, reflected in the smoothly contrived climaxes of the “well-made” plays of Eugène Scribe and Victorien Sardou of France and Arthur Wing Pinero of England. The work of Émile Augier and Alexandre Dumas fils combined the drama of ideas with the “well-made” play. Realism had perhaps its most profound expression in the works of the great 19th-century Russian dramatists: Nikolai Gogol, A. N. Ostrovsky, Ivan Turgenev, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov, and Maxim Gorky. Many of the Russian dramatists emphasized character and satire rather than plot in their works.

Related to realism is naturalism, which can be defined as a selective realism emphasizing the more sordid and pessimistic aspects of life. An early forerunner of this style in the drama is Georg Büchner’s powerful tragedy Danton's Death (1835), and an even earlier suggestion may be seen in the pessimistic romantic tragedies of Heinrich von Kleist. Friedrich Hebbel wrote grimly naturalistic drama in the middle of the 19th cent., but the naturalistic movement is most commonly identified with the “slice-of-life” theory of Émile Zola, which had a profound effect on 20th-century playwrights.

Henrik Ibsen of Norway brought to a climax the realistic movement of the 19th cent. and also served as a bridge to 20th-century symbolism. His realistic dramas of ideas surpass other such works because they blend a complex plot, a detailed setting, and middle-class yet extraordinary characters in an organic whole. Ibsen's later plays, such as The Master Builder (1892), are symbolic, marking a trend away from realism that was continued by August Strindberg's dream plays, with their emphasis on the spiritual, and by the plays of the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck, who incorporated into drama the theories of the symbolist poets (see symbolists).
While these antirealistic developments took place on the Continent, two playwrights were making unique contributions to English theater. Oscar Wilde produced comedies of manners that compare favorably with the works of Congreve, and George Bernard Shaw brought the play of ideas to fruition with penetrating intelligence and singular wit.

Twentieth-Century Drama

During the 20th cent., especially after World War I, Western drama became more internationally unified and less the product of separate national literary traditions. Throughout the century realism, naturalism, and symbolism (and various combinations of these) continued to inform important plays. Among the many 20th-century playwrights who have written what can be broadly termed naturalist dramas are Gerhart Hauptmann (German), John Galsworthy (English), John Millington Synge and Sean O'Casey (Irish), and Eugene O'Neill, Clifford Odets, and Lillian Hellman (American).

An important movement in early 20th-century drama was expressionism. Expressionist playwrights tried to convey the dehumanizing aspects of 20th-century technological society through such devices as minimal scenery, telegraphic dialogue, talking machines, and characters portrayed as types rather than individuals. Notable playwrights who wrote expressionist dramas include Ernst Toller and Georg Kaiser (German), Karel Čapek (Czech), and Elmer Rice and Eugene O'Neill (American). The 20th cent. also saw the attempted revival of drama in verse, but although such writers as William Butler Yeats, W. H. Auden, T. S. Eliot, Christopher Fry, and Maxwell Anderson produced effective results, verse drama was no longer an important form in English. In Spanish, however, the poetic dramas of Federico García Lorca are placed among the great works of Spanish literature.

Three vital figures of 20th-century drama are the American Eugene O'Neill, the German Bertolt Brecht, and the Italian Luigi Pirandello. O'Neill's body of plays in many forms—naturalistic, expressionist, symbolic, psychological—won him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1936 and indicated the coming-of-age of American drama. Brecht wrote dramas of ideas, usually promulgating socialist or Marxist theory. In order to make his audience more intellectually receptive to his theses, he endeavored—by using expressionist techniques—to make them continually aware that they were watching a play, not vicariously experiencing reality. For Pirandello, too, it was paramount to fix an awareness of his plays as theater; indeed, the major philosophical concern of his dramas is the difficulty of differentiating between illusion and reality.

World War II and its attendant horrors produced a widespread sense of the utter meaninglessness of human existence. This sense is brilliantly expressed in the body of plays that have come to be known collectively as the theater of the absurd. By abandoning traditional devices of the drama, including logical plot development, meaningful dialogue, and intelligible characters, absurdist playwrights sought to convey modern humanity's feelings of bewilderment, alienation, and despair—the sense that reality is itself unreal. In their plays human beings often portrayed as dupes, clowns who, although not without dignity, are at the mercy of forces that are inscrutable.

Probably the most famous plays of the theater of the absurd are Eugene Ionesco's Bald Soprano (1950) and Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot (1953). The sources of the theater of the absurd are diverse; they can be found in the tenets of surrealism, Dadaism (see Dada), and existentialism; in the traditions of the music hall, vaudeville, and burlesque; and in the films of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Playwrights whose
works can be roughly classed as belonging to the theater of the absurd are Jean Genet (French), Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürenmatt (Swiss), Fernando Arrabal (Spanish), and the early plays of Edward Albee (American). The pessimism and despair of the 20th cent. also found expression in the existentialist dramas of Jean-Paul Sartre, in the realistic and symbolic dramas of Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, and Jean Anouilh, and in the surrealist plays of Jean Cocteau.

Somewhat similar to the theater of the absurd is the so-called theater of cruelty, derived from the ideas of Antonin Artaud, who, writing in the 1930s, foresaw a drama that would assault its audience with movement and sound, producing a visceral rather than an intellectual reaction. After the violence of World War II and the subsequent threat of the atomic bomb, his approach seemed particularly appropriate to many playwrights. Elements of the theater of cruelty can be found in the brilliantly abusive language of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger (1956) and Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (1962), in the ritualistic aspects of some of Genet's plays, in the masked utterances and enigmatic silences of Harold Pinter's "comedies of menace," and in the orgiastic abandon of Julian Beck's Paradise Now! (1968); it was fully expressed in Peter Brook's production of Peter Weiss's Marat/Sade (1964).

During the last third of the 20th cent. a few continental European dramatists, such as Dario Fo in Italy and Heiner Müller in Germany, stand out in the theater world. However, for the most part, the countries of the continent saw an emphasis on creative trends in directing rather than a flowering of new plays. In the United States and England, however, many dramatists old and new continued to flourish, with numerous plays of the later decades of the 20th cent. (and the early 21st cent.) echoing the trends of the years preceding them.

Realism in a number of guises—psychological, social, and political—continued to be a force in such British works as David Storey's Home (1971), Sir Alan Ayckbourn's Norman Conquests trilogy (1974), and David Hare's Amy's View (1998); in such Irish dramas as Brian Friel's Dancing at Lughnasa (1990) and Martin McDonagh's 1990s Leenane trilogy; and in such American plays as Jason Miller's That Championship Season (1972), Lanford Wilson's Talley's Folly (1979), and John Guare's Six Degrees of Separation (1990). In keeping with the tenor of the times, many of these and other works of the period were marked by elements of wit, irony, and satire.

A witty surrealism also characterized some of the late 20th cent.‘s theater, particularly the brilliant wordplay and startling juxtapositions of the many plays of England's Tom Stoppard. In addition, two of late-20th-century America's most important dramatists, Sam Shepard and David Mamet (as well as their followers and imitators), explored American culture with a kind of hyper-realism mingled with echoes of the theater of cruelty in the former's Buried Child (1978), the latter's Glengarry Glen Ross (1983), and other works. While each exhibited his own very distinctive voice and vision, both playwrights achieved many of their effects through stark settings, austere language in spare dialog, meaningful silences, the projection of a powerful streak of menace, and outbursts of real or implied violence.

The late decades of the 20th century were also a time of considerable experiment and iconoclasm. Experimental dramas of the 1960s and 70s by such groups as Beck's Living Theater and Jerzy Grotowski's Polish Laboratory Theatre were followed by a mixing and merging of various kinds of media with aspects of postmodernism, improvisational techniques, performance art, and other kinds of avant-garde theater. Some of the era's
more innovative efforts included productions by theater groups such as New York's La MaMa (1961–) and Mabou Mines (1970–) and Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Co. (1976–); the Canadian writer-director Robert Lepage's intricate, sometimes multilingual works, e.g. Tectonic Plates (1988); the inventive one-man shows of such monologuists as Eric Bogosian, Spalding Gray, and John Leguizamo; the transgressive drag dramas of Charles Ludlam's Ridiculous Theater, e.g., The Mystery of Irma Vep (1984); and the operatic multimedia extravaganzas of Robert Wilson, e.g. White Raven (1999).

Thematically, the social upheavals of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s—particularly the civil rights and women's movements, gay liberation, and the AIDS crisis—provided impetus for new plays that explored the lives of minorities and women. Beginning with Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun (1959), drama by and about African Americans emerged as a significant theatrical trend. In the 1960s plays such as James Baldwin's Blues for Mr. Charley (1964), Amiri Baraka's searing Dutchman (1964), and Charles Gordone's No Place to Be Somebody (1967) explored black American life; writers including Ed Bullins (e.g., The Taking of Miss Janie, 1975), Ntozake Shange (e.g., For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf, 1976) and Charles Fuller (e.g., A Soldier's Play, 1981) carried these themes into later decades. One of the most distinctive and prolific of the century's African-American playwrights, August Wilson, debuted on Broadway in 1984 with Ma Rainey's Black Bottom and continued to define the black American experience in his ongoing dramatic cycle into the next century.

Feminist and other women-centered themes dramatized by contemporary female playwrights were plentiful in the 1970s and extended in the following decades. Significant figures included England's Caryl Churchill (e.g., the witty Top Girls, 1982), the Cuban-American experimentalist Maria Irene Fornes (e.g., Fefu and Her Friends, 1977) and American realists including Beth Henley (e.g., Crimes of the Heart, 1978), Marsha Norman (e.g., 'Night Mother, 1982), and Wendy Wasserstein (e.g., The Heidi Chronicles, 1988). Skilled monologuists also provided provocative female-themed one-women shows such as Eve Ensler's The Vagina Monologues (1996) and various solo theatrical performances by Lily Tomlin, Karen Finley, Anna Deveare Smith, Sarah Jones, and others.

Gay themes (often in works by gay playwrights) also marked the later decades of the 20th cent. Homosexual characters had been treated sympathetically but in the context of pathology in such earlier 20th-century works as Lillian Hellman's The Children's Hour (1934) and Robert Anderson's Tea and Sympathy (1953). Gay subjects were presented more explicitly during the 1960s, notably in the English farces of Joe Orton and Matt Crowley's witty but grim portrait of pre-Stonewall American gay life, The Boys in the Band (1968). In later years gay experience was explored more frequently and with greater variety and openness, notably in Britain in Martin Sherman's Bent (1979) and Peter Gill's Mean Tears (1987) and in the United States in Jane Chambers' Last Summer at Bluefish Cove (1980), Harvey Fierstein's Torch Song Trilogy (1981), Larry Kramer's The Normal Heart (1986), David Henry Hwang's M. Butterfly (1988), which also dealt with Asian identity, and Paul Rudnick's Jeffrey (1993). Tony Kushner's acclaimed two-part Angels in America (1991–92) is generally considered the century's most brilliant and innovative theatrical treatment of the contemporary gay world.

Bibliography

See A. Nicoll, World Drama from Aeschylus to Anouilh (1950); J. Gassner, Masters of the Drama (3d ed. 1954); M. Bieber, The History of Greek and Roman Theatre (2d ed.
Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance. It is derived from a Greek word meaning "action" (Classical Greek δράμα), derived from "to do" (Classical Greek δράω).

Dramas are performed in various media: theatre, radio, film, and television. Drama is often combined with music and dance: the drama in opera is sung throughout; musicals include spoken dialogue and songs; and some forms of drama have regular musical accompaniment (melodrama and Japanese Nō, for example). In certain periods of history (the ancient Roman and modern Romantic) dramas have been written to be read rather than performed. In improvisation, the drama does not pre-exist the moment of performance; performers devise a dramatic script spontaneously before an audience.

History of drama

Greek

The three types of drama composed in the city of Athens were tragedy, comedy, and satyrs. The origins of Athenian tragedy and comedy are far from clear, but they began (and continued to be) as a part of the celebrations of the god Dionysus, which were held once a year. Every year three authors were chosen to write three dramas, and one satyr play each. Similarly, five authors were also chosen to write three comedies and a satyr play each. Each tragedy tetralogy was then performed in 3 successive days, and on the last day the 5 comedies competed. All the plays were played in the Dionysos theatre in Athens, and the best author for both tragedy and comedy was chosen.

The chorus seems to have originated during ??? with a leader singing a song about some legendary hero. Later the leader, rather than singing about the hero, began to think about...
the hero while impersonating him. Spoken dialogue between several actors was added, and the result was "tragedy" in the Greek form. The very first prize for tragedy went to Thespis in 534 BC.

In fact, the two masks associated with drama with the smiling and frowning faces are both symbols of the Muses Thalia and Melpomene. Thalia is the Muse of comedy (the smiling face), and Melpomene is the Muse of tragedy (the frowning face).

Medieval

In the Middle Ages, drama in the vernacular languages of Europe emerged from religious enactments of the liturgy. Mystery plays were presented on the porch of the cathedrals or by strolling players on feast days. These again evolved into tragic and comic forms, depending on the theme. The first truly secular plays in Europe were historical plays, celebrating the lives of historical or legendary kings, these combined the functions of entertainment and propaganda. Some scholars today believe that Shakespeare's Richard III, for instance, served to propagate the Tudor myth.

Miracle and mystery plays (such as Everyman) later evolved into more elaborate forms of drama, such as was seen on the Elizabethan stages.

Elizabethan and Jacobean

One of the great flowerings of drama in England occurred in the 16th and 17th centuries. Many of these plays were written in verse, particularly iambic pentameter. In addition to Shakespeare, such authors as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Middleton, and Ben Jonson were prominent playwrights during this period. As in the medieval period, historical plays celebrated the lives of past kings, enhancing the image of the Tudor monarchy. Authors of this period drew some of their storylines from Greek mythology and Roman mythology or from the plays of eminent Roman playwrights such as Plautus and Terence.

Opera

Western opera is a dramatic art form, which arose during the Renaissance in an attempt to revive the classical Greek drama tradition in which both music and theatre were combined. Being strongly intertwined with western classical music, the opera has undergone enormous changes in the past four centuries and it is an important form of theatre until this day. Noteworthy is the huge influence of the German 19th century composer Richard Wagner on the opera tradition. In his view, there was no proper balance between music and theatre in the operas of his time, because the music seemed to be more important than the dramatic aspects in these works. To restore the connection with the traditional Greek drama, he entirely renewed the operatic format, and to emphasize the equally importance of music and drama in these new works, he called them "music dramas".

Today

Except the sacred classical Indian musical theatre, the usual purpose of drama is as entertainment. However drama can also be used as an educational activity or for therapeutic purposes. It is even used for religious ministry.
It has a unique ability to allow us to play, allowing us to be another person or in a situation that we would not normally encounter such as, being a general in a war. This is what makes drama a useful way of teaching, learning, and growing as a person.

Drama has a holistic way of teaching people. Whether it be in a play or by partaking in a role-play situation, participants learn through interactions with others -- this allows participants to not only learn facts as they would from a book or in a classroom, but to enter the world of another person, to be allowed to explore how they feel about this situation or person, whether it be a war-torn town or the wolf in the Three Little Pigs. Every interaction with another character or situation gives a greater understanding of what is happening around us.

If you look at a small child when they are playing, they are enthralled with their own world, and through their actions, thoughts and the way they play they learn about themselves, others, and the world around them. Play allows them to act out new situations, try out new ways of doing things and by doing so learn.

When people grow up, the idea of play becomes less important and entering into the imagination becomes more difficult. However this is where drama has the unique and undeniable ability to help others learn and grow as individuals, as it allows them to play. Through playing we can once again try out situations, whether it be for a job interview by live action role-playing (aka. LARP), or just to think about new ideas, we can also gain confidence in ourselves and learn to trust others.

Role-play and can also play an important part in therapy, again entering the imagination and allowing ourselves to pretend and to think of things in other ways. Drama therapy is often considered an effective treatment for people who have had severe emotional and psychological problems, although it is important to note that the evidence to support therapeutic efficacy of Drama therapy is anecdotal rather than scientific.

In the theater, drama is a living, breathing art form. Actors are placed on stage, so that they can breathe life into the characters that have been created by the playwrights. In theater, the two main things to consider are: a) drama is driven by conflict and b) that drama is action. Action can be loosely defined as anything a character does with an objective behind it, whereas conflict can be briefly summarized as a clash between the motives of one or more characters.

Pantomime

These stories follow in the tradition of fables and folk tales, usually there is a lesson learned, and with some help from the audience the hero/heroine saves the day. This kind of play uses stock characters seen in masque and again commedia del arte, these characters include the villain (docore), the clown/servant(Arlechino/Harlequin/buttons), the lovers etc. These plays usually have an emphasis on moral dilemmas, and good always triumphs over evil, this kind of play is also very entertaining making it a very effective way of reaching many people.

Works cited

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3. ^ Although there is some dispute among theatre historians, it is probable that the plays by the Roman Seneca were not intended to be performed. Manfred by Byron is a good example of a 'dramatic poem.' See the entries on "Seneca" and "Byron (George George)" in Martin Banham, (ed.) The Cambridge Guide to Theatre (1998).
4. ^ Some forms of improvisation, notably the Commedia dell'arte, improvise on the basis of 'lazzi' or rough outlines of scenic action (see Gordon (1983) and Duchartre (1929)). All forms of improvisation take their cue from their immediate response to one another, their characters' situations (which are sometimes established in advance), and, often, their interaction with the audience. The classic formulations of improvisation in the theatre are Joan Littlewood and Keith Johnstone in Britain and Viola Spolin in the USA. See Johnstone (1981) and Spolin (1963).
Theater

(θέατρον) 

the·a·tre n.
A building, room, or outdoor structure for the presentation of plays, films, or other dramatic performances.
A room with tiers of seats used for lectures or demonstrations: an operating theater at a medical school.

Dramatic literature or its performance; drama: the theater of Shakespeare and Marlowe.
The milieu of actors and playwrights.

The quality or effectiveness of a theatrical production: good theater; awful theater.
Dramatic material or the use of such material: “His summation was a great piece of courtroom theater” (Ron Rosenbaum).

The audience assembled for a dramatic performance.

A large geographic area in which military operations are coordinated: the European theater during World War II.

[Middle English theatre, from Old French, from Latin theātrum, from Greek theātron, from théāsthai, to watch, from théa, a viewing.]

WORD HISTORY: Theories about the development of the theater in the West generally begin with Greek drama; this is etymologically appropriate as well as historically correct, since the words theory and theater are related through their Greek sources. The Greek ancestor of theater is theātron, “a place for seeing, especially for dramatic representation, theater.” Theātron is derived from the verb theāsthai, “to gaze at, contemplate, view as spectators, especially in the theater,” from thea, “a viewing.” The Greek ancestor of theory is theōriā, which meant among other things “the sending of theōroi (state ambassadors sent to consult oracles or attend games),” “the act of being a spectator at the theater or games,” “viewing,” “contemplation by the mind,” and “theory or speculation.” The source of theōriā is theōros, “an envoy sent to consult an oracle, spectator,” a compound of thea, “viewing,” and –oros, “seeing.” It is thus fitting to elaborate theories about culture while seeing a play in a theater.

World of the Body: theatre

In Peter Brook’s famous description of the essential ingredients for theatre as simply ‘the audience and the message’, the physical presence of actors is not judged
strictly necessary. Yet the history of theatre worldwide makes clear that the first requirement of spectacle or drama is the performer's body. As the mime, Etienne Decroux, ironically put it: 'When the actor ceases to appear on the stage with his body, he will be justified in disregarding the art of the body.' Decroux condemned the use of elaborate scenery, lighting, costume, and properties (characteristic of the naturalistic or 'fourth wall' style of drama prevalent since the nineteenth century) — all of which, he held, obscured the bodily art of acting itself. Contemporary mime stripped the art to its essentials: to act naked on a naked stage, dispensing with all visual or musical support or accompaniment, and thus proving that the gesture can be self-sufficient. A mime, Jean Dorcy claimed, could portray the universe in two square feet.

Older theatre traditions such as classical Greek drama, the *commedia dell'arte,* and the Japanese Noh theatre, all influenced the development of contemporary mime. Whereas the Classical Greek tragic actor's physical movements were restricted both by his heavy costume and by the transcendant dignity of his roles, and he relied for expression on his voice, the actor in Greek comedy was expected to be something of an acrobat, displaying physical agility and skill in a primarily bodily form of theatre. The Japanese Noh was a drama of soliloquy and reminiscence, rather than one of conflict, in which the actor's stylized movements and stamping provided a rhythmic accompaniment to his narrative, with subjects taken from myth and legend. The *commedia dell'arte* was a mainly improvisatory form of theatre developed in sixteenth-century Italy: its influence has extended to the present in the stock characters its actors created — most famously Pantalone and Arlecchino — and the comic stunts and routines which evolved around them.

Contrary to the practice of Decroux and other mimes, these forms of drama do make use of spoken dialogue, costume, stage settings, and music. However, the feature these share in common with mime, and which epitomizes the non-naturalistic and body-based nature of these traditions, is the concealment or disguising of the face, by the use of a mask, or heavy stylized makeup which obscures the natural expression of the actor. The purpose of this is to turn the eyes away from the face and towards the body of the actor. Dorcy once wrote of acting that 'one cannot simultaneously and fully use the body and the face as means of expression without one of these two being overshadowed by the other.' Perhaps it is appropriate, for a proponent of unspoken theatre, that the third instrument of the actor, the voice, is missing from the this statement. Indeed, practitioners of mime often claim a conflict between bodily movement, gesture, and attitude, and the spoken text, in holding the attention of the spectator. (This word is preferred by Dorcy and others over the word 'audience', for prioritizing the visual over the aural dimensions of theatre.)

Once the face is concealed, the spectator loses sight of what is commonly thought to be the most expressive part of the human frame. Attention is focused instead on the body, which becomes the sole vehicle of expression. Bodily movement, gesture, attitude are heightened and intensified in order to emphasize contrasts, and to eliminate superfluous movements and amplify or exaggerate the remaining motions.

The movement of the actor's body is inseparable from theatre, according to Dorcy: 'The stage is a place where space changes nature, size and architecture according to the body occupying it; without a body in motion, the stage would be a desert.' In such physical acting, each image created by the body, viewed separately, will reveal distinct emotions and circumstances. The gesture of the mime can conjure up absent objects; sometimes it serves as an interjection and expresses the psychological content of the moment: hesitation, joy, fear, etc. A successful attitude is like a condensed drama; perfect, complete, it is an image epitomizing identity, origin, destination, and intent.

The ideal intensity of bodily expression on the stage is summarized by Jean-Louis Barrault, who wrote that 'As soon as I found myself ... I was put to death. My life is an execution. My conduct will therefore be a struggle against death, against the clock,
against time. A single watchword must be issued in this inner world of the body: to delay the hour of surrender, to delay the “moment of truth”. Accordingly, from head to toe, every part of this body is placed in a state of alert.’ Its enactment of the absurd and tragic collision between the inner world of the self and the outer world of destiny links mime to the plays of Beckett and Ionesco, in the Theatre of the Absurd. Its dictates, based on Jarry's 1896 play, Ubu Roi, held that human life was so illogical and language so inadequate as a means of communication that one was thrown back onto the body as the sole vehicle of expression, whether laughter, pain, or bewilderment.

Bodily confrontation is emphasized in the later Theatre of Cruelty movement, begun in the 1960s. Inspired by the writings of Antonin Artaud, it sought to free humans from the restraints of morality and reason, returning to a state of unfettered expression of power and desire. This was a precursor to the recent resurgence of ‘new melodrama’, which employs non-naturalistic, expressionistic styles of acting, and physical theatre, with its emphasis on extreme bodily states and forms of expression.

— Natsu Hattori

Bibliography

Britannica Concise Encyclopedia: theatre
Architecture
Building or space in which performances are given before an audience. It contains an auditorium and stage. In ancient Greece, where Western theatre began (5th century BC), theatres were constructed in natural hollows between hills. The audience sat in a tiered semicircle facing the orchestra, a flat circular space where the action took place. Behind the orchestra was the skene. The theatres of Elizabethan England were open to the sky, with the audience looking on from tiered galleries or a courtyard. During this period the main innovation was the rectangular thrust stage, surrounded on three sides by spectators. The first permanent indoor theatre was Andrea Palladio's Olimpico Theatre in Vicenza, Italy (1585). The Farnese Theatre in Parma (1618) was designed with a horseshoe-shaped auditorium and the first permanent proscenium arch. Baroque European court theatres followed this arrangement, elaborating on the interior with tiered boxes for royalty. Richard Wagner's Festspielhaus in Bayreuth, Ger. (1876), with its fanshaped seating plan, deep orchestra pit, and darkened auditorium, departed from the Baroque stratified auditorium and reintroduced Classical principles that are still in use. The proscenium theatre prevailed in the 17th – 20th centuries; though still popular in the 20th century, it was supplemented by other types of theatre, such as the thrust stage and theatre-in-the-round. In Asia, stage arrangements have remained simple, with the audience usually grouped informally around an open space; notable exceptions are the no drama and kabuki of Japan. See also amphitheatre; odeum.

Film and Theatre
Live performance of dramatic actions in order to tell a story or create a spectacle. The word derives from the Greek theatron (“place of seeing”). Theatre is one of the oldest and most important art forms in cultures worldwide. While the script is the basic element of theatrical performance, it also relies in varying degrees on acting, singing, and dancing, as well as on technical aspects of production such as stage design. Theatre is thought to have its earliest origins in religious ritual; it often enacts myths or stories central to the belief structure of a culture or creates comedy through travesty of such narratives. In Western civilization, theatre began in ancient Greece and was adapted in Roman times; it
was revived in the medieval liturgical dramas and flourished in the Renaissance with the Italian commedia dell'arte and in the 17th – 18th centuries with established companies such as the Comédie-Française. Varying theatrical forms may evolve to suit the tastes of different audiences (e.g., in Japan, the kabuki of the townspeople and the no theatre of the court). In Europe and the U.S. in the 19th and early 20th centuries theatre was a major source of entertainment for all social classes, with forms ranging from burlesque shows and vaudeville to serious dramas performed in the style of the Moscow Art Theatre. Though the musicals of Broadway and the farces of London's West End retain their popular appeal, the rise of television and movies has eroded audiences for live theatre and has tended to limit its spectators to an educated elite. See also little theatre.

For more information on theatre, visit Britannica.com.

**English Folklore: theatre**

Actors and theatre-workers appear to be one of the most superstitious of all occupational groups, and indeed many seem to regard being superstitious as a badge of the trade. Many of the superstitions are well known—whistling anywhere in a theatre being very unlucky, and Macbeth being so unlucky as to be referred to as ‘The Scottish Play’ rather than by its real name. Others are less well known—actors will not say the last lines of a play in rehearsal, to place an umbrella on a table during rehearsals spells disaster, and some unlucky tunes—such as ‘Three Blind Mice’ and ‘I dreamt I dwelt in Marble Halls’—are studiously avoided. Knowlson also devotes some paragraphs to the beliefs of ‘front-of-house’ staff such as ushers and box-office workers. Few of the reported superstitions can be traced back before 1900, and most are considerably later. Some exceptions are those printed in the *Folk-Lore Record* of 1879 which include a dislike of the colour blue for costumes, unless counteracted by silver, the dread of rehearsals on Sundays, and the belief that if the first customer to enter the auditorium on the first night is a woman the play is doomed.

**Bibliography**

The full bibliography list is available here.

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**Classical Literature Companion: theatre**

1. **Greek.** The Greek theatre appears to have originated with the open-air circular dancing floor (*orchēstra*), a level space of hard earth constructed for performances of choral lyric, of which one variety, the dithyramb, is according to one tradition the progenitor of Attic tragedy (see 1). All large Greek theatres were open to the sky (but see ODEUM). The arrangement described below, which may be regarded as typical, is based on that of the theatre of Dionysus at Athens (see DIONYSUS, THEATRE OF). In the middle of the *orchestra* was a *thymelē* or altar of Dionysus, on the steps of which the flute-player who accompanied the chorus probably stood. For the spectators at Athens there was a *theatron*, ‘watching-place’, on the slope of the Acropolis above the *orchestra*. Important spectators sat on seats made of stone at the front of the *theatron*; the rest sat on backless wooden benches placed on rising terraces of earth, crossed at intervals by passageways for access. Beyond these bare facts the details of the construction of the theatre are very obscure. At each side of the *orchestra* was a *parodos* or ‘way-in’, used by the spectators when they entered the theatre and by the chorus and actors on entering and leaving the *orchestra*. In later times a convention grew up that when the scene was Athens, characters purporting to come on the scene from the agora or Piraeus should enter from the audience's right, since these places were situated in fact in that direction; coming
from the country they entered from the left. At the back of the orchestra was a low platform or stage, perhaps 8 m. (25 ft.) wide and 3 m. (10 ft.) deep, connected by steps with the orchestra. Behind it and extending beyond it on each side was a building, the skēnē (‘tent’, ‘hut’), containing the dressing rooms, with a wide double door in the façade giving access to the stage. The skene provided the backdrop for the stage, and its roof could serve as a stage for action at a higher level, the setting of the solitary watchman on the palace roof in Agamemnon, for example.

There were two pieces of stage equipment, perhaps used mainly in tragedy (which would account for their being the object of mockery in comedy), the mēchanē (‘machine’) and the ekkyklēma (‘the roll-out’). The mechane was a kind of crane which could swing a character round and into view, particularly when a god is announced as being above the house or coming through the sky. The appearance in this manner of a god who provided a solution in an intractable situation originated the Latin phrase deus ex machina, ‘a god on a machine’, to describe an unexpected outside intervention which resolves a difficulty. Euripides was thought by some to be over-fond of this expedient for concluding a play. The ekkyklema was a device by which off-stage events in the drama could be revealed to the actors on stage and to the audience; a tableau was arranged on a platform which was then wheeled out through the central door of the skene (e.g. in Agamemnon, Clytemnestra standing over the murdered bodies of Agamemnon and Cassandra). Various other stage-properties might be used in the Greek theatre, e.g. statues, altars, or other prominent features of the play, and scenery might be painted on boards. There was, however, no curtain. For the actors and their dress see COMEDY, GREEK 3 and TRAGEDY 2. For the admission charge see THEORIC FUND.

Glimpses of the lighter side of Greek theatre-going may be found in the Characters of Theophrastus which include the loquacious man who talked so much that his neighbours could not follow the play, the mean man who availed himself of a free day to bring his children, the shameless man who took advantage of his foreign guests to get admitted without paying, and the stupid man who fell asleep during the play and was left alone in the theatre when the audience had gone. Philochorus writing in the third century BC describes how the audience fill their cups with wine when the chorus enter and fill them again when the chorus leave. Aristotle comments that the eating of sweets is commonest when the actors are bad.

2. Roman. There was no permanent theatre at Rome until 55 BC, when Pompey built one in stone from the spoils of the Mithridatic War. It was erected in the Campus Martius, next to the Curia (where Julius Caesar was later assassinated). There seem to have been seats for about 10,000 spectators. Two other stone theatres were subsequently built in Rome, both in the Campus Martius, that of L. Cornelius Balbus dedicated in 13 BC, and that known as the theatre of Marcellus, built by the emperor Augustus and named after his adopted son.

In the time of Plautus, Terence, Ennius, and Pacuvius (late third and the second centuries BC), plays were performed on wooden stages in front of a temporary wooden building having three doors opening on to the stage. These stages would be erected in the Forum or Circus Maximus, with circles of wooden seats; an attempt to erect a permanent theatre in 155 BC was thwarted by the consul Scipio Nasica who induced the senate to demolish the building as it constituted a danger to public morality. But in the first century BC even the temporary theatres became quite elaborate, with linen awnings to keep the sun off the spectators in the auditorium (cavea), and ornately decorated stage buildings. The theatre had a semicircular orchestra; at the back of it was a stage wider and deeper than the Greek stage (as it existed later at least; see 1 above).

The orchestra was not used for dancing, as in Greece, but for seating, reserved for senators, priests, and officials. After 68 BC the equitēs had the right to occupy the first fourteen rows of the auditorium behind the orchestra. Behind the stage was the stage building which might rise as high as the sloping auditorium. The auditorium was much
more enclosed than in a Greek theatre, and could even have the awnings replaced by a roof, as at Pompeii. The uncomfortable nature of the seating is mentioned by Ovid (Ars amatoria 1. 141), who refers to the narrow space allotted to each spectator, and to the knees of those behind pressing into the backs of those in front. From the end of the second century BC Roman theatres had a curtain, kept in a slot in the floor of the stage and raised at the end of the play (a convenient way of indicating that the performance was over). Stage scenery was said to have been first introduced in 99 BC. The chorus in the tragedies of Ennius, Pacuvius, and Accius (unlike the chorus of Greek drama) stood on the stage, not in the orchestra, and could enter and exit like any other character (whereas with very rare exceptions the Greek chorus did not leave until the end of the play). This was more realistic; the functions of the chorus had changed and there was no longer that important lyrical element in drama for which it had been the mouthpiece.

The players were slaves or freedmen, trained to the profession, and organized in companies (grex, caterva) under the direction of a manager (dominus gregis) paid for by the magistrate who gave the ludi (‘games’) at which the plays were performed. The players' pay gradually increased, and although actors (like musicians) were originally despised, the examples of Roscius and Aesopus showed that popular actors might become rich and socially acceptable. Female parts (except in mimes and late comedy) were played by men. It is said that the type of character was indicated at first by wigs (white for old men, red for slaves, etc.) and later by masks (see ROSCIUS), but whether masks were in fact worn in the Roman theatre, and if so, when, is a matter of dispute. Tragic actors wore long flowing robes and high buskins (cothurni); comic actors wore ordinary dress and the soccus or low-heeled shoe.

**US History Encyclopedia: Theater**

Theater in America started as ritual performance by Native Americans and then, upon the arrival of the first white, Spanish settlers, became another sort of ritual, based on medieval European Christian morality plays. For many years, theater was outlawed in Colonial America, although the proscription hardly called a halt to performances. As everywhere, theater ranged between high and low: early "high" theater attempted to duplicate what was going on in Europe and included rewritten ("improved") Shakespeare and other, mostly British dramas, including School for Scandal by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. "Low" theater included riverboat shows, Vaudeville, minstrel shows, and Wild West shows. It was not until the late eighteenth century that an authentic "American" voice began to emerge in the theater. This voice continued to develop throughout the nineteenth century and found itself being embraced on the world stage during the twentieth century.

**Early American Theater**

While there are no records of the earliest Native American performances, Indian rituals were noted by the early white settlers. Native Americans performed most of their theatrical pieces in honor of various gods or to celebrate changes in seasons, harvests, hunts, battles, and so on. Among the many performances were the summer and winter rituals of the Pueblo Indians. Pueblo dramas included the Deer Dance, Buffalo Dance, Corn Dance, Raingod Dance, and the Eagle Dance. Variations on Native American performance were later played out many times with white settlers in rituals and ceremonies focused around treaties and other meetings. These dramas included gift giving, dances, and speeches. Later, Indians—and cowboys—became stock characters in performances ranging from melodramas to vaudeville. In "Wild West" shows of the nineteenth century, Indian rituals were recreated for white audiences in the eastern United States and in Europe.

The first recorded white colonial performances were morality plays performed by missionaries for Spanish soldiers in Florida in 1567. These plays were intended to show the supremacy of the Spaniards' religion and its ultimate triumph in the New World.
Although no record of the actual play exists, it can be assumed that it took the stylized and ritualistic form of medieval drama.

In Colonial days, theater was looked down upon by many of the Puritanical white settlers, so it was not until 1665 that the first play performed in English was recorded. *Ye Bare and Ye Cub* was performed by three men in Accomack County, Virginia. Apparently someone was offended by the offering, or simply by the idea of theater, because the players were sued. After the play was performed in court, the performers were found "not guilty of fault." Quakers were especially opposed to theatrical performances and had laws passed against them in most of the colonies, beginning with William Penn's in Pennsylvania. Proscriptions against theater were not passed in Virginia, and that is likely why it became the home of the first professional American theater, the Company of Comedians, led by entrepreneur Lewis Hallam.

Hallam's troupe of provincial players arrived from England in 1752. Like most of the companies to follow, the Company of Comedians was run by an actor/manager. After performing Shakespeare in Williamsburg, Virginia, Hallam built the first theater in New York City in 1753 and in Charleston in 1754. Hallam's fare also included such English staples as Restoration drama, farce, and operetta. His company played Philadelphia and toured the South and eventually moved to Jamaica, where Hallam died. While in Jamaica, Hallam's wife married another theater producer, David Douglass, who had founded theaters in Philadelphia and New York. Under Douglass, the company moved back to the States, calling itself the American Company. Hallam's son, Lewis Hallam the Younger, often performed opposite his mother and proved to be a talented comic. In 1767, Hallam played the lead in the first professional American drama, Thomas Godfrey's *Prince of Parthia*.

In 1775, theater was again banned, this time by the Continental Congress. While the ban was routinely ignored, it did put off professional theater producers—including David Douglass, who moved back to Jamaica—and fostered more amateur performances, especially those featuring patriotic themes.

**Theater in the Early United States**

After the Revolutionary War (1775–1783), the American Company returned to New York City and when David Douglass died, Hallam took over and produced what is widely believed to be the first important American play, one written by a Harvard-educated lawyer and army officer, Royall Tyler. Tyler's play, *The Contrast*, debuted in New York in March 1787. The characters in *The Contrast* include a Revolutionary War veteran and a man deemed a natural nobleman. The leading character, Jonathan, was the first in a long line of "Yankees" to grace the American stage. Tyler made comparisons between American and British attitudes that favored the American. In addition to its themes of patriotism and the belief that love conquers all, Tyler's play is filled with references to the fashions and topics of the time. *The Contrast* was an instant hit that was also performed in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Boston and has seen revivals up to the twenty-first century.

During the early nineteenth century, touring groups continued to play a large role in American theater, and English actors were often imported to headline local productions. Among the more popular players were Edmund Kean and Junius Brutus Booth (father of actor Edwin Booth and actor/Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth). At this time, actors often specialized in one or two roles that they were known for.

The American-born actor credited with innovating a truly American style of acting was Edwin Forrest. After playing second leads to Edmund Kean, Forrest eventually became a leading man and played throughout the East, South, and Midwest. Forrest was an athletic actor who was a natural for heroic and rebellious roles. He found his greatest fame as star of *Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags* (1829), a play that he found by sponsoring a contest for a tragedy, "of which the hero … shall be an
aboriginal of this country." Forrest played the Indian Metamora throughout his career, and the success of the play caused many other dramas featuring the noble savage to be entered into the American repertory.

For the most part, when Black Americans were portrayed, it was not as noble persons but as buffoons. The 1840s saw the rise of minstrelsy, in which mostly white, but also black, performers sang and danced while made up in blackface, achieved by smearing coal on the face. Minstrel shows remained popular until the early twentieth century. Also wildly popular in mid-century were "Tom Shows," melodramatic productions based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Other forms of diversion included vaudeville, which boasted such performers as Eddie Foy, W. C. Fields, and Sophie Tucker. P. T. Barnum sponsored singing tours by the "Swedish Nightingale," Jenny Lind, and opened the American Museum (1842) in New York City where he exhibited such freakish attractions as "Tom Thumb" and the Siamese twins Chang and Eng. Barnum, along with James A. Bailey, founded the Barnum and Bailey Circus in 1881.

Wild West shows were in vogue, especially Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, organized by former Pony Express rider William Frederick Cody in 1883. Cody's Cowboy and Indian show toured throughout the United States and Europe. Showboats were also a popular venue for all manner of entertainment from vaudeville to Shakespeare.

**Theater of the Gilded Age**

The last thirty years of the 1800s, often referred to as the "Gilded Age," were dominated by melodrama. Many Civil War plays were produced; they often focused on romances between Northern and Southern lovers but skirted the political issues of the war. Nonetheless, American theater was edging ever closer to the realistic style of performance that would come to dominate it in the twentieth century.

A trend in late-nineteenth-century drama, attributed largely to California-born manager/playwright/producer David Belasco, was to greatly enhance the production values of a play. Belasco built enormous and spectacular three-dimensional sets that he deemed naturalistic. Belasco was among the forerunners of a small group of producers who were breaking away from the romantic style of acting that marked the nineteenth century as well. These producer/directors encouraged actors to perform in a naturalistic style that suited the actors' own personalities.

By 1888, it was estimated that there were more than 2,400 professional actors in the United States. A few earned as much as $100,000 a year—a tremendous amount at the time. Among the highly paid actors were many who came from theatrical families, including descendents of the Booths, the Davenports, the Jeffersons, and the Drew-Barrymores (Lionel, Ethel, and John Barrymore all worked on the New York stage in the early twentieth century). Lesser-known performers were often badly treated; sometimes no pay was given for weeks or even months of rehearsal. Thus, in 1894, the Actors' Society of America, later Actors' Equity, was formed to negotiate standard contracts for actors. Even before this, other stage employees organized unions.

The number of actors grew to around 15,000 at the turn of the twentieth century. Along with the increase in actors came an increase in acting schools. Among the first was the Lyceum Theatre School, founded in New York City in 1884 and renamed the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in 1892. The American Academy of Dramatic Arts remains perhaps the most prestigious acting school in the country.

In the mid-nineteenth century, stock companies rose in number and often traveled. The opening of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869 meant that productions could travel to the West Coast. Soon companies stopped developing a large number of new plays and instead produced long runs of a single, popular play that they often took on tour. By the early 1870s, there were about 50 resident stock companies in the country. In
1886, a group of booking agents and managers formed a partnership known as the Theatrical Trust (or Syndicate). For approximately thirty years, the Syndicate controlled virtually all bookings at professional theaters. Over 1,700 theaters were available to touring productions in 1905, according to Julius Cahn's *Official Theatrical Guide*, making the Syndicate's sphere of influence very great indeed. By the turn of the twentieth century, resident stock companies were nearly nonexistent.

A challenge to the Syndicate's authority came from independent producer David Belasco, who wanted to stage a play set in Japan at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis and was blocked by the syndicate. Belasco booked a theater anyway and, typically, the Syndicate mounted a rival play on the same topic as Belasco's. Even an antitrust suit, filed after the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 became law, failed to loosen the Syndicate's grip. What did finally stop the Syndicate was another group of theatrical monopolists, the New York–based Shubert brothers—Lee, Sam S., and Jacob J. The Shuberts, who initially worked with the Syndicate, eventually joined forces with David Belasco, actress Minnie Maddern Fiske, and others to overturn it.

The nineteenth century did see some accomplished American playwrights, including Edward Harrigan, William Dean Howells, and Steele MacKaye. However, the time and country that produced such memorable writers in other genres as Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, and Henry David Thoreau failed to nurture a truly great playwright until the twentieth century.

**Theatre in the Early Twentieth Century**

The early twentieth century mostly saw a continuation of commercialization and lack of originality in the theater. Melodrama, with subjects ranging from historical to romantic to Western to mystery, remained the form most often performed. Touring ceased to be the main way in which plays were presented and stock companies again formed. The continuing prosperity of America was reflected in the theater, and by 1912 there were some 8,000 theaters in America. By then, activities were focused in New York, especially off Times Square. Many of the theaters built during the boom of the 1920s were still used in 2002.

With the exception of some suffragist actresses, there were very few performers involved in political causes. However, in the Chicago slums, Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr recognized the possibilities of theater as a force for social good and opened Hull House in 1889 as an alternative entertainment for impoverished youth. Similar theaters followed, including the Henry Street Settlement in New York.

As more and more of the theatergoing public became exposed to the work of such groundbreaking European playwrights as Henrik Ibsen, Anton Chekhov, and George Bernard Shaw, a small but active theater intelligentsia was formed that looked for more sophisticated plays. In the teens, "Little Theaters" began to open around the country. Some of these were formed for the purpose of offering standard commercial fare at cut rates, but many were formed with a higher purpose in mind—to produce serious, realist drama. These little theaters, including Chicago's Little Theatre, New York's Neighborhood Playhouse and Washington Square Players, and the Cleveland Playhouse featured work by both contemporary European and American playwrights and were modeled after European art theaters such as the Moscow Art Theatre and Dublin's Abbey Theatre. American performances by these two theater companies and others greatly influenced the style of acting in America further toward naturalism.

In Massachusetts, the Provincetown Players were developing the early short sea plays (set on the sea) of the only American playwright ever to win a Nobel Prize (1936), Eugene O'Neill. O'Neill was the son of James O'Neill, a famous actor who felt he had squandered his talent playing mostly one role, in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, throughout his career. The plays were taken to New York and the Provincetown Players began a tradition of developing plays out of town before a New York opening. O'Neill was the
first of many great American playwrights to work in the twentieth century. He is credited with first perfecting the realist voice of the American stage.

During the 1930s, the Great Depression brought a far greater interest in political theater. Such groups as the International Ladies Garment Workers Union put on plays, and even the government got into the act through the federally sponsored and ill-fated Federal Theatre Project, which attempted to put 13,000 theater people on the government payroll. Meanwhile, the unions were represented by playwright Clifford Odets in his *Waiting for Lefty* on the legitimate stage. Lillian Hellman and Thornton Wilder were among the other prominent playwrights of the time.

The postwar 1940s were also a fascinating time for theater. It was then that the heartbreaking dramas of Mississippi playwright Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie* (1945) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), were staged. Marlon Brando, who studied the Stanislavski System of acting originated at the Moscow Art Theatre and taught at The Actors Studio (opened 1947), became an overnight sensation after starring in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. His intimate performance not only led to a long film career but also had a great influence on the way American actors performed.

Arthur Miller debuted works that deal with government corruption (*All My Sons*, 1947), the alienation of modern man (*Death of a Salesman*, 1949), and manipulation of public opinion through the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings of the early 1950s (*The Crucible*, 1953). In 1947, Julian Beck and Judith Malina formed the Living Theatre, an experimental theater devoted to producing avant-garde plays that promoted the ideals of pacifism and anarchy.

The 1940s also saw the development of the American musical, starting with *Oklahoma* (1943), written by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein and choreographed by Agnes DeMille. Other musicals included *Brigadoon* (1947) and *My Fair Lady* (1956), by the team of Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, and *West Side Story* (1957) by Leonard Bernstein and Arthur Laurents, and later, *Sweeney Todd* (1979), by Stephen Sondheim. The musical was to become the most American of theatrical genres; immense productions began to dominate the large theaters in New York by the 1950s and continue to do so.

**Theatre in the Late Twentieth Century**

The Civil Rights Movement, the war in Vietnam, and the other upheavals of the 1960s provided a rich time for theater. Playwrights including Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones) championed the Black Arts Movement with such in-your-face plays as *Dutchman* (1964), in which a white woman stabs a black man on a subway. David Rabe wrote about Vietnam in *Stick and Bones* (1971). The 1960s also saw the first of many plays dealing openly with homosexuality. *The Boys in the Band* premiered in 1968. Later plays to deal with the subject included *Larry Kramer's* *The Normal Heart* (1985) and Tony Kushner's Pulitzer Prize–winning two-part epic, *Angels in America* (1991,1993). The 1960s also ushered in the work of Neil Simon, probably the most popular writer of comedies in the late twentieth century.

Among other important playwrights of the last part of the century, California born and raised Sam Shepard writes plays about those who, like himself, rejected the mores of polite society; Christopher Durang lampoons the Catholic church that he was raised in; and Marsha Norman writes of a woman so disconnected she is planning suicide (*night Mother*, 1982). Performance artists such as Karen Finley, whose work dealt with her own sexuality, Anna Deavere Smith, who explores social issues such as Black-Jewish relationships, and performer/musician Laurie Anderson rose to prominence in the 1980s.

Many of these performances were produced Off Broadway, including the New York Shakespeare Festival, founded in 1954 by Joseph Papp for the purpose of mounting Shakespeare productions in Central Park that were free and open to the public each summer. When Papp died in 1991, the innovative African American director George C.
Wolfe became director of the festival. Papp also produced the surprise hit hippie musical of 1967, Hair, at his not-for-profit Public Theater. Hair was then moved to Broadway and the profits used for other, less commercial productions.

Broadway is still dominated by musicals and revivals of musicals, and it has seen a tremendous decline since the 1980s, largely because of escalating costs in mounting a production. In the 1950s, a grand musical such as My Fair Lady might have cost half a million dollars to produce, and tickets were less than ten dollars each. By the end of the twentieth century, costs soared so that a musical such as The Lion King (1997) could cost $15 million to produce and a ticket could cost up to $100.

Broadway budgets and ticket prices have long provided much of the momentum for Off Broadway and later for even smaller—less than 100-seat—houses called Off Off Broadway. Greenwich Village's Caffe Cino, founded in 1958 by Joe Cino, is generally thought to be the birthplace of Off Off Broadway, but Off Off Broadway's most enduring and important producer is Ellen Stewart of Cafe La Mama, which was founded in 1962, and renamed the La Mama Experimental Theater Club. Stewart is known for giving fresh voices a place in her theater, not because she likes the script—she often does not read them in advance—but rather because she has a good feeling about the person bringing an idea for a production to her. Off and Off Off Broadway venues, in addition to many regional theaters including Steppenwolf in Chicago, Magic Theater in San Francisco, and repertory companies including Yale Repertory Theater, American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, Missouri Repertory Theater, and Chicago's Goodman Theater, are thought by many to be the most exciting places to view theater in the twenty-first century.

Bibliography

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building, structure, or space in which dramatic performances take place. In its broadest sense theater can be defined as including everything connected with dramatic art—the play itself, the stage with its scenery and lighting, makeup, costumes, acting, and actors.

Ancient Greece

Theater in ancient Greece developed from the ceremonial worship of the god Dionysus (in which the death and rebirth of the god were celebrated) and was communal in nature. The focal point of the structure in which the ceremony took place was a level, circular space at the foot of a hill. Around this space, called the orchēstra, an auditorium rose in a large semicircle. Behind the orchēstra was the skēne, a building where the actors could change costume. Between the skēne and the orchēstra was a space called the proskenion, which later developed into the stage.

The original religious nature of Greek drama made audiences particularly receptive to the cosmic themes presented in classical tragedy. Greek actors performed in masks and stylized costumes (see mask). The chorus remained in the orchēstra
throughout the play, performing intricate dances and chants while commenting on the dramatic action taking place on the proskenion. The date at which the proskenion became a raised stage is uncertain, but it had definitely achieved this status by the Hellenistic period (3d–1st cent. B.C.).

The years from the decline of classical Greece through the Hellenistic period to the Roman era saw the erosion of serious drama and a corresponding increase in the architectural grandeur of theaters. As the religious and thus the choral element diminished, the skēne became an elaborate structure and the orchēstra was increasingly reduced in size.

**Ancient Rome and the Early Christian Era**

In Rome, for the first time, theaters were enclosed within a single wall, making them architectural units. The Roman skēne (in Latin the scaenae frons) was frequently monumental in scale. Roman audiences never evinced an interest in serious drama but accepted romantic comedy as long as it included an element of farce. By the period of the Empire, Roman theater had degenerated into brutal and obscene spectacle, and it was finally banned by the Christian church.

While Greek actors were highly respected, their Roman counterparts were originally slaves. Although position of Roman actors had improved by the 1st cent. B.C. (as evidenced by the career of Quintus Roscius), later Christian antipathy to the stage led to the view of the actor as a social outcast. Until the 10th cent., theatrical performances were restricted to traveling acrobats, jugglers, mimes, and the like. Popular types of traveling theater, performed on plain wooden platforms, also existed throughout the Greek and Roman periods. Native farce and burlesque probably flourished before Aristophanes; it certainly did by the 3d cent. B.C. in the Greek phylakes and the Roman fabula Atellana.

**Medieval Theaters**

In the 9th cent. drama returned to the Western world in the form of mystery and miracle plays, which were performed in churches. Usually stories from the Bible, such plays were first acted by priests, their stage consisting of different platform sets arranged in rows along the side of the nave of the church. One effect of the church setting was to create a close relationship between audience and performer.

Later these plays were moved out of the church into the street, where the platform sets were arranged around an area in which the audience could stand or move from place to place in a prescribed order. Acting took place either on the platforms, in front of them, or between them, depending on the need. The platforms were often elaborate in their decoration and stage machinery. With the shift to the streets, acting was transferred from the priesthood to the amateurs of the guilds or professional players.

**Renaissance Theaters**

After the advent of the Renaissance in Italy there were various attempts to construct theaters on Roman models, the culmination of this movement being the Teatro Olimpico (1580–84) at Vicenza, designed by Andrea Palladio. However, the development of the theater form that was to dominate until the 20th cent. began with the Teatro Farnese (1618) at Parma, designed by Gian-Battista Aleotti. Of primary importance was Aleotti's use of the prosenium arch creating the picture-frame stage.

Italians also introduced painted perspective scenery, first outlined in the treatise Architettura (1537–45) of Sebastiano Serlio. While these developments were taking place in an academic and aristocratic milieu, the commedia dell'arte was carrying on a popular theater of improvisation, which did much toward developing professional acting as opposed to courtly amateurism.
In England and Spain, theories of theater construction were less tied to classical example than in Italy. The Spanish theater developed in the corral, or courtyard, of various large buildings, where plays were originally performed, while the innyard served as a similar model in England. These theaters offered greater flexibility of movement than did the Italian. The Elizabethan audience in England included all levels of society, and professional actors were treated with relative respect. By the closing of the theaters by the Puritans in 1642, English audiences had become overwhelmingly aristocratic, a tendency that continued in the Restoration period.

In 17th-century England the designs of Inigo Jones revealed Italian influence in their use of perspective scenery and the proscenium arch. However, English theater never indulged in the architectural extravaganzas that proliferated on the continent. In 17th-century Europe the trend in theater production was increasingly toward more elaborate machinery and scenery with less and less concern for the drama itself. This trend is illustrated by the triumph of opera in Italy and Spain and, later, by the popularity of the exuberant baroque architecture and scene design of the Bibiena family throughout 18th-century Europe.

**Theaters in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries**

The development of a middle-class audience in 18th-century France and England created a desire for more realistic settings and acting. Although some attempts were made in the 18th cent. (notably by David Garrick in England and Adrienne Lecouvreur in France) to combat the artificial, rhetorical style of acting then popular, it was not until the late 19th cent. that a more natural style of acting gained wide acceptance. Of great importance in the development of realistic acting was Constantin Stanislavsky, cofounder of the Moscow Art Theater, who stressed the actors' absolute identification with the characters they portray.

Similarly, realism in scenery and costumes was not popular until well into the 19th cent. The creation of realistic effects was facilitated by the introduction of gas lights in the early 19th cent. and of electricity later in the century. Electric lighting was, however, also used for antirealistic effects by such scene designers as Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig. The introduction of gas lighting made it possible to dim the auditorium lights, a practice that tended to make the audience more separate from the stage. Richard Wagner, in his opera theater at Bayreuth, attempted further to isolate the audience by means of a gap of darkness between a double proscenium arch. While most commercial theaters today still use the proscenium arch stage, there has been much experimental work to restore a vital relationship between audience and stage.

By the late 19th cent., theater was dominated by commercial playhouses in large cities, particularly in England and the United States. However, in the late 19th cent. several independent theaters, more interested in art than in making money, came into being, including the Théâtre Libre in Paris (1887), the Freie Bühne in Berlin (1889), the Independent Theatre Society in London (1891), and the Moscow Art Theatre in Russia (1891).

**Twentieth-Century Theaters**

Smaller independent theaters were also prevalent in the early 20th cent., as in the Provincetown Players (1915) in the United States. Concurrently, antirealistic expressionist and symbolic movements in theater were developing, such as Vsevolod Meyerhold's constructivism, the “theater of cruelty” of Antonin Artaud, and the “epic theater” of Bertolt Brecht. There was also a growing interest in Asian theater, which seemed attractive to many because of its relatively bare stage, symbolic stage properties, and stylized, nonrealistic acting (see Asian drama).
Theatrical developments since World War II, especially in noncommercial theater, have brought the stage more in contact with the audience. Theater-in-the-round became popular at American universities in the 1930s, and in the 1950s and 60s many “music tents” featuring theater-in-the-round sprang up in American cities. Experimental relationships between audience and acting space have also been constructed. Such groups as the Living Theater of Julian Beck and Judith Malina produced free-form events in which audience and actors mingled, thus removing completely traditional barriers between them.

Bibliography

Quotes About: Theater
Quotes:
"Theater of cruelty means a theater difficult and cruel for myself first of all. And, on the level of performance, it is not the cruelty we can exercise upon each other by hacking at each other's bodies, carving up our personal anatomies, or, like Assyrian emperors, sending parcels of human ears, noses, or neatly detached nostrils through the mail, but the much more terrible and necessary cruelty which things can exercise against us. We are not free. And the sky can still fall on our heads. And the theater has been created to teach us that first of all." - Antonin Artaud

"The theater, which is in no thing, but makes use of everything -- gestures, sounds, words, screams, light, darkness -- rediscovers itself at precisely the point where the mind requires a language to express its manifestations. To break through language in order to touch life is to create or recreate the theatre." - Antonin Artaud

"Drama is based on the Mistake. I think someone is my friend when he really is my enemy, that I am free to marry a woman when in fact she is my mother, that this person is a chambermaid when it is a young nobleman in disguise, that this well-dressed young man is rich when he is really a penniless adventurer, or that if I do this such and such a result will follow when in fact it results in something very different. All good drama has two movements, first the making of the mistake, then the discovery that it was a mistake." - W. H. Auden

"The theatre is a gross art, built in sweeps and over-emphasis. Compromise is its second name." - Enid Bagnold

"It's one of the tragic ironies of the theatre that only one man in it can count on steady work -- the night watchman."

"I submit all my plays to the National Theatre for rejection. To assure myself I am seeing clearly." - Howard Barker

Serge Sudeikin's poster for the Bat Theatre (1922).

Theatre (or theater, see spelling differences) (from French "théâtre", from Greek "theatron", θεάτρον, meaning "place of seeing") is the branch of the performing arts defined as simply as what "occurs when one or more human beings, isolated in time and/or space, present themselves to another or others."[1] By this broad definition, theatre
has existed since the dawn of man, as a result of human tendency for story telling. Since its inception, theatre has come to take on many forms, often utilizing elements such as speech, gesture, music, dance, and spectacle, combining the other performing arts, often as well as the visual arts, into a single artistic form. Modern Western theatre is dominated by realism, although many other forms, including classical and experimental forms, as well as Eastern forms, are frequently performed.

Overview of theatre
New York State Theater, Lincoln Center

Drama (literally translated as action, from a verbal root meaning "To do") is the branch of theatre in which speech, either from written text (plays), or improvised is paramount. And the companion word drama is also Greek, dran meaning to do. The first theatre, the Theatre of ancient Greece, created the definition of a theatre: an audience in a half-circle watching an elevated stage where actors use props staging plays. Musical theatre is a form of theatre combining music, songs, dance routines, and spoken dialogue. However, theatre is more than just what one sees on stage. Theatre involves an entire world behind the scenes that creates the costumes, sets, and lighting to make the overall effect interesting.

There is a long tradition of political theatre, which aims to educate audiences on contemporary issues and encourage social change. The Catholic church took advantage of the entertainment value of theatre to create passion plays, mystery plays, and morality plays.

The Kutiyattam, Sanskrit theatre from the province of Kerala, is one of the oldest living theatrical traditions in India. It is traditionally performed in the Kuttampalams, theatres located in Hindu temples. The Kutiyattam goes back more than 2000 years and represents a unique synthesis of Sanskrit classicism and local traditions of Kerala (particularly the comic theatre in the Malayalam language).[2] Artist Guru Māni Mādhava Chākyār as Ravana in Kutiyattam

An overview of the traditional theatres of India suggests that multiple systems of communication are ordered into hierarchies that vary from theatre to theatre. Abstract masks and song-less mime dominate the Seraikella Chhau of Bihar, while the shifting use of municipal space flavours the grand Ram Lila at Ramnagar in Uttar Pradesh. In the Kuchipudi theatre (Andhra Pradesh) and the Bhagavatamela (Tanjore district, Tamilnadu), elaborate dance and stylised hand gestures prevail. Spectacular headdresses, costumes, and colour-coded makeup distinguish both the Kathakali theatre of Kerala and the Yakshagana of Karnataka.[3]

There are a variety of philosophies, artistic processes, and theatrical approaches to creating plays and drama. Some are connected to political or spiritual ideologies, and some are based on purely "artistic" concerns. Some processes focus on a story, some on theatre as event, and some on theatre as catalyst for social change. According to Aristotle's seminal theatrical critique Poetics, there are six elements necessary for theatre: Plot, Character, Idea, Language, Song, and Spectacle. The 17th-century Spanish writer Lope de Vega wrote that for theatre one needs "three boards, two actors, and one passion". Others notable for their contribution to theatrical philosophy are Konstantin Stanislavski, Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, Orson Welles, Peter Brook, and Jerzy Grotowski.

The most recognisable figures in theatre are the directors, playwrights, and actors, but theatre is a highly collaborative endeavour. Plays are usually produced by a production team that commonly includes a scenic or set designer, lighting designer, costume designer, sound designer, dramaturg, stage manager, and production manager.
The artistic staff is assisted by technical theatre personnel who handle creation and execution of the production.

Some theatre theorists argue that actors should study all of the commonly-taught acting methods to perfect their craft (though many others disagree), such as the Meisner, Stanislavsky, Strasberg, and Hagen acting methods. Theater, overall, encompasses people, ideas, and the works of art that result from their collaboration.

**Genres of theatre**

There are a variety of genres that writers, producers, and directors can employ in theatre to suit a variety of tastes:

**Musical theatre**: A theatrical genre in which a story is told through the performance of singing (with instrumental music), spoken dialogue, and often dance.

**Natyta**: Sacred classical Indian musical theatre that includes natya proper (mime) and nritta (pure dance).

**Nautanki**: A diverse Indian form of street plays consisting of folklore and mythological dramas with interludes of folk songs and dances.

**Theatre for social change**: Theatre that addresses a social issue and uses performance as a way of illustrating injustice to the audience.

**Comedy**: Comes from the Greek word *komos* which means celebration, revel, or merrymaking. It does not necessarily mean funny, but can focus on a problem that leads to some form of catastrophe which in the end has a happy and joyful outcome.

**Farce**: A comic dramatic piece that uses highly improbable situations, stereotyped characters, extravagant exaggeration, fast pacing, and violent horseplay.

**Pantomime**: A form of musical drama in which elements of dance, mime, puppetry, slapstick, and melodrama are combined to produce an entertaining and comic theatrical experience, often designed for children.

**Romantic comedy**: A medley of clever scheming, calculated coincidence, and wondrous discovery, all of which contribute ultimately to making the events answer precisely to the hero's or heroine's wishes, with the focus on love.

**Comedy of situation**: A comedy that grows out of a character's attempt to solve a problem created by a situation. The attempt is often bumbling but ends up happily.

**Comedy of manners**: A witty, cerebral form of dramatic comedy that depicts and often satirises the manners and affectations of a contemporary society. A comedy of manners is concerned with social usage and the question of whether or not characters meet certain social standards.

**Commedia dell'arte**: Very physical form of comedy which was created and originally performed in Italy. Commedia uses a series of stock characters and a list of events to improvise an entire play.

**Black comedy**: Comedy that tests the boundaries of good taste and moral acceptability by juxtaposing morbid or ghastly elements with comical ones.

**Melodrama**: Originally, a sentimental drama with musical underscoring. Often with an unlikely plot that concerns the suffering of the good at the hands of the villains but ends happily with good triumphant. Featuring stock characters such as the noble hero, the long-suffering heroine, and the cold-blooded villain.

**Tragedy**: A drama that treats in a serious and dignified style the sorrowful or terrible events encountered or caused by a heroic individual. The word "Tragedy" comes from the Greek word "Tragos" which is translated to "Goat". The original meaning may come from the mystery plays of the cult of Dionysos, which centered on the god being killed and his body ripped to pieces, and with a goat or other animal as a proxy for the bloodshed.

**Tragicomedy**: A drama that has a bitter/sweet quality, containing elements of tragedy and comedy.

**Domestic drama**: Drama that focuses on the everyday domestic lives of people and their relationships in the community where they live.
**Fantasy**: The creation of a unique landscape on which a hero goes on a quest to find something that will defeat the powers of evil. Along the way, this hero meets a variety of weird and fantastic characters.

**Morality play**: A morality play is an allegory in which the characters are abstractions of moral ideas.

**Opera**: A theatrical genre in which a story is told and emotion is conveyed primarily through singing (with instrumental music).

**Rock opera**: Concept albums and stage works performed in a dramatic context reminiscent of opera, except that the musical form is rock music.

**Physical theatre**: Theatrical performance in which the primary means of communication is the body, through dance, mime, puppetry and movement, rather than the spoken word.

**Theatre of the Absurd**: Term coined by Martin Esslin to refer to playwrights in Europe and the United States after World War II whose work reflected a sense of being adrift in a world where known values had been shattered. No playwrights ever dubbed themselves "Absurdists," although it has become commonplace to refer to Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Harold Pinter, and Jean Genet, among others, by this term. It can be seen as related to the philosophy of existentialism.

**Meta-Theatre**: A genre of theatre made popular with mostly modern audiences, although it did start back in the Elizabethan Era. Meta-Theatre is when a play often completely demolishes the so called "fourth wall" and completely engages the audience. Often about a group of actors, a director, writer and so on. It usually blurs the line between what is scripted and what goes on by accident.

**Grand Guignol**: Now broadly used to refer to any play with on-stage violence, the term originally referred to the bloody and gruesome melodramas produced at the Theatre du Grand Guignol in Paris, France.

**Total Theatre**: Most frequently invoked in reference to Richard Wagner's concept of a Gesamtkunstwerk, or "Total Art Work," in which music, drama, and dance operate together. It has also been used by artists such as Steven Berkoff, who created a style where the actors become both characters and set, often using just one prop throughout the entire play. The style uses features of Greek theatre (eg. a chorus or didactic message), exaggeration and surrealism.

**Poor Theatre**: Jerzy Grotowski coined the phrase "poor theatre" in reference to the work he was doing with his theatre troupe in Poland. Grotowski's style of poor theatre consisted of many important fine points. For one, there was not a separate stage and place for the audience; instead the actors and the audience shared the same space. There were no sets, props, lighting, music, or any other technical features. The actors were paramount, although their costumes were simple. Grotowski had his actors go through physical training, and even would spend many months rehearsing a play. Some of these poor theatre plays would only be performed once, to a small audience. This theatre style was very popular during the 1960's and 70's, and later on, was used by many acting troupes around the world.

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Absurdism

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Absurdism is a philosophy stating that the efforts of humanity to find meaning in the universe ultimately fail (and, hence, are absurd) because no such meaning exists, at least in relation to humanity. The word Absurd in this context does not mean "logically impossible", but rather "humanly impossible".

Absurdism is related to existentialism and nihilism and has its roots in the 19th century Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard. Absurdism as a belief system was born of the Existentialist movement when the French philosopher and writer Albert Camus broke from that philosophical line of thought and published his manuscript The Myth of Sisyphus. The aftermath of World War II provided the social environment that stimulated absurdist views and allowed for their popular development, especially in the devastated country of France.

Relationship with Existentialism and Nihilism

—Søren Kierkegaard, The Sickness Unto Death

| (Simplified) Relationship between Existentialism, Absurdism, and Nihilism |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 1. There is such a thing as "meaning" or "value" to be found in life | Atheistic existentialism | Theistic existentialism | Absurdism | Nihilism |
| Yes | Yes | Yes | No |
| 2. There is inherent meaning in the universe (either intrinsic or from God) | No | Maybe, but humans must have faith to believe there is | Maybe, but humans can never know it | No |
| 3. Individuals can create meaning in life themselves | Yes, it is essential that they do | Yes, it is essential that they do | Yes, but it is not essential | No, because there is no such meaning to |
### Table: The Pursuit for Meaning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. The pursuit for intrinsic or extrinsic meaning in the universe is a futile gesture</th>
<th>Yes, and the pursuit itself is meaningless</th>
<th>No, and the pursuit itself may have meaning</th>
<th>Yes, but the pursuit itself may have meaning</th>
<th>Yes, and the pursuit itself is meaningless</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>5. The pursuit for constructed meaning is a futile gesture</td>
<td>No, thus the goal of existentialism</td>
<td>No, thus the goal of existentialism</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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**Søren Kierkegaard**

Kierkegaard designed the relationship framework based in part on how a person reacts to despair. Absurdist philosophy fits into the 'despair of defiance' rubric. A century before Camus, the 19th century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard wrote extensively on the absurdity of the world. In his journals, Kierkegaard writes about the Absurd:

> What is the Absurd? It is, as may quite easily be seen, that I, a rational being, must act in a case where my reason, my powers of reflection, tell me: you can just as well do the one thing as the other, that is to say where my reason and reflection say: you cannot act and yet here is where I have to act... The Absurd, or to act by virtue of the absurd, is to act upon faith... I must act, but reflection has closed the road so I take one of the possibilities and say: This is what I do, I cannot do otherwise because I am brought to a standstill by my powers of reflection.

— Kierkegaard, Søren, *Journals*, 1849

An example that Kierkegaard uses is found in one of his famous works, *Fear and Trembling*. In the story of Abraham in the Book of Genesis, Abraham was told by God to kill his son Isaac. Just as Abraham was about to kill him, an angel stopped Abraham from doing so. Kierkegaard believes that through virtue of the absurd, Abraham, defying all reason and ethical duties ("you cannot act"), got back his son and reaffirmed his faith ("where I have to act"). However, it should be noted that in this particular case, the work was signed with the pseudonym *Johannes de Silentio*.

Another instance of absurdist themes in Kierkegaard's work is found in *The Sickness Unto Death*, which is signed by the pseudonym *Anti-Climacus*. In his examination of the forms of despair, Kierkegaard examines the type of despair known as defiance. In the opening quote reproduced at the beginning of the article, Kierkegaard describes how such a man would endure such a defiance and identifies the three major traits of the Absurd Man, later discussed by Albert Camus: a rejection of escaping existence (suicide), a rejection of help from a higher power, and acceptance of his absurd (and despairing) condition.

Note well, that according to Kierkegaard in his autobiography *The Point of View of My Work as an Author*, most of his pseudonymous writings are not necessarily reflective of
his own opinions. Nevertheless, his work anticipated many absurdist themes and provided its theoretical background.

Albert Camus

Although the notion of the 'absurd' is pervasive in all of the literature of Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus is his chief work on the subject. In it, Camus considers absurdity as a confrontation, an opposition, a conflict, or a "divorce" between two ideals. Specifically, he defines the human condition as absurd, as the confrontation between man's desire for significance/meaning/clarity and the silent, cold universe. He continues that there are specific human experiences that evoke notions of absurdity. Such a realization or encounter with the absurd leaves the individual with a choice: suicide, a leap of faith, or acceptance. He concludes that acceptance is the only defensible option.

For Camus, suicide is a "confession" that life is simply not worth living. It is a choice that implicitly declares that life is "too much." Suicide offers the most basic "way out" of absurdity, the immediate termination of the self and self's place in the universe.

The absurd encounter can also arouse a "leap of faith", a term derived from one of Kierkegaard's early pseudonyms, Johannes de Silentio (but the term was not used by Kierkegaard himself), where one understands that there is more than the rational life (aesthetic or ethical). To take a "leap of faith", one must act with the "virtue of the absurd" (as Johannes de Silentio put it), where a suspension of the ethical may need to exist. This is not the dogmatic "faith" that we have come to know; Silentio would call that an "infinite resignation" and a false, cheap "faith". This faith has no expectations but is a flexible power propelled by the absurd. Camus considers the leap of faith as "philosophical suicide". Camus, like Kierkegaard, rejects both this and physical suicide.

Lastly, man can choose to embrace his own absurd condition. According to Camus, man's freedom, and the opportunity to give life meaning, lies in the acknowledgment and acceptance of absurdity. If the absurd experience is truly the realization that the universe is fundamentally devoid of absolutes, then we as individuals are truly free. "To live without appeal," as he puts it, is a philosophical move that begins to define absolutes and universals subjectively, rather than objectively. The freedom of man is, thus, established in man's natural ability and opportunity to create his own meaning and purpose, to decide himself. The individual becomes the most precious unit of the existence, as he represents a set of unique ideals that can be characterized as an entire universe by itself.

Camus states in The Myth of Sisyphus: "Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death, and I refuse suicide."

The meaning of life

According to Absurdism, humans historically attempt to find meaning in their lives. For some, traditionally, this search follows one of two paths: either concluding that life is meaningless and that what we have is the here-and-now; or filling the void with a purpose set forth by a higher power, often a belief in God or adherence to a religion. However, even with a spiritual power as the answer to meaning, another question is posed: What is
the purpose of God? Kierkegaard believed that there is no human-comprehensible purpose of God, making faith in God absurd.

For some, suicide is a solution when confronted with the futility of living a life devoid of all purpose, as it is only a means to quicken the resolution of one's ultimate fate. For Albert Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, suicide is not a worthwhile solution because if life is veritably absurd, then it is even more absurd to counteract it; instead, we should engage in living and reconcile the fact that we live in a world without purpose.

For Camus, the beauty that people encounter in life makes it worth living. People may create meaning in their own lives, which may not be the objective meaning of life but still provides something for which to strive. However, he insisted that one must always maintain an ironic distance between this invented meaning and the knowledge of the absurd lest the fictitious meaning take the place of the absurd.

Camus introduced the idea of "acceptance without resignation" and asked if man can "live without appeal", defining a "conscious revolt" against the avoidance of absurdity of the world. In a world devoid of higher meaning, or judicial afterlife, man becomes absolutely free. It is through this freedom that man can act either as a mystic (through appeal to some supernatural force) or an absurd hero (through a revolt against such hope). Henceforth, the absurd hero's refusal to hope becomes his singular ability to live in the present with passion.

**Criticism**

Logotherapy, often called the "third Viennese school of psychotherapy," could be classified as an objection to absurdism. Logotherapy retains many existential conclusions, such as humanity's inherent responsibility for meaning. However, adherents to this school of thought would argue that there is, in fact, a purpose in man's ability to find meaning in an uncertain world. This is a rejection of Camus' belief that man-made meanings should never replace an acceptance of absurdity.

"Five Characters in Search of an Exit", an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, provides a counterpoint to absurdism: five seemingly random characters have woken up at different times in a seeming void, and a metaphorical search for the meaning of life reveals that they are dolls that have been collected for a charity drive. Rod Serling concludes, "Just a barrel, a dark depository where are kept the counterfeit, make-believe pieces of plaster and cloth, wrought in the distorted image of human life. But this added, hopeful note: perhaps they are unloved only for the moment. In the arms of children there can be nothing but love." Thus, the characters' purpose was to love and be loved by the children to whose lives they will enhance.

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3. Kierkegaard, Søren. *The Sickness Unto Death*. Kierkegaard wrote about all four viewpoints in his works at one time or another, but the majority of his work leaned toward what would later become absurdist and theistic existentialist views.
Theatre of the Absurd

The Theatre of the Absurd (French: "Le Théâtre de l'Absurde") is a designation for particular plays written by a number of primarily European playwrights in the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, as well as to the style of theatre which has evolved from their work.

The term was coined by the critic Martin Esslin, who made it the title of a book on the subject first published in 1961 and in two later revised editions; the third and final edition appeared in 2004, in paperback with a new forward by the author. In the first edition of The Theatre of the Absurd, Esslin saw the work of these playwrights as giving artistic articulation to Albert Camus' philosophy that life is inherently without meaning as illustrated in his work The Myth of Sisyphus. Though the term is applied to a wide range of plays, some characteristics coincide in many of the plays: broad comedy, often similar to Vaudeville, mixed with horrific or tragic images; characters caught in hopeless situations forced to do repetitive or meaningless actions; dialogue full of clichés, wordplay, and nonsense; plots that are cyclical or absurdly expansive; either a parody or dismissal of realism and the concept of the "well-made play". In the first (1961) edition, Esslin presented the four defining playwrights of the movement as Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Eugene Ionesco, and Jean Genet, and in subsequent editions he added a fifth playwright, Harold Pinter - although each of these writers has unique preoccupations and techniques that go beyond the term "absurd."[1][2] Other writers whom Esslin associated with this group include Tom Stoppard, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Fernando Arrabal, Edward Albee, and Jean Tardieu.[1][2]

Significant precursors

Though the label "Theatre of the Absurd" covers a wide variety of playwrights with differing styles, they do have some common stylistic precursors (Esslin [1961]).

Tragicomedy

The mode of most "absurdist" plays is tragicomedy.[citations needed] Besides his multifaceted influence in other areas, Esslin cites William Shakespeare, the first great playwright to use tragicomedy,[citations needed] as an influence on the "Absurd drama."[citations needed] Shakespeare's influence is acknowledged directly in the titles of Ionesco's Macbett and Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead. Though layered with a significant amount of tragedy, the Theatre of the Absurd echoes other great forms of comedic performance, according to Esslin, from Commedia dell'arte to Vaudeville[citations needed] Similarly, Esslin cites early film comedians such as Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy.
The Marx Brothers, and Buster Keaton as direct influences (Keaton even starred in Beckett's Film in 1965). \[\textit{citations needed}\]

**Formal experimentation**

As an experimental form of theatre, Theatre of the Absurd employs techniques borrowed from earlier innovators. Writers and techniques frequently mentioned in relation to the Absurdist include the following: 19th century nonsense poets like Lewis Carroll or Edward Lear; Polish playwright Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz; the Russian Absurdist Daniiil Kharms, Nikolai Erdman and so on; Bertolt Brecht's distancing techniques in his "Epic Theatre"; and the "dream plays" of August Strindberg. \[1\]

One commonly cited precursor is Luigi Pirandello, especially *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Pirandello was a highly regarded theatrical experimentalist who wanted to bring down the fourth wall utilized by Realism and playwrights like Henrik Ibsen (Jacobus). According to W. B. Worthen, *Six Characters*, and other Pirandello plays, use "Metatheater—roleplaying, plays-within-plays, and a flexible sense of the limits of stage and illusion—to examine a highly theatricalized vision of identity" (702).

Another influential playwright was Guillaume Apollinaire whose *Les Mamelles de Tirésias* was the first work to be called "surreal." \[\textit{citations needed}\]

**Pataphysics, Dadaism, and Surrealism**

One of the most significant common precursors is Alfred Jarry whose wild, irreverent, and lascivious *Ubu* plays scandalized Paris in the 1890's. Likewise, the concept of 'Pataphysics—"the science of imaginary solutions"—first presented in Jarry's *Gestes et opinions du docteur Faustroll, pataphysicien* (Exploits and Opinions of Dr. Faustroll, Pataphysician) was inspirational to many later Absurdist, some of whom joined the Collège de 'pataphysique founded in honor of Jarry in 1948 (both Ionesco and Arrabal were given the title Transcendent Satrape of the Collège de 'pataphysique). The Alfred Jarry Theatre, founded by Antonin Artaud and Roger Vitrac, housed several Absurdist plays, including ones by Ionesco and Adamov. \[1\]

Artaud's "The Theatre of Cruelty" (presented in *The Theatre and Its Double*) was a particularly important philosophical treatise. Artaud claimed theatre's reliance on literature was inadequate and that the true power of theatre was in its visceral impact. \[\textit{citations needed}\] Artaud was a Surrealist, and many other members of the Surrealist group were significant influences on the Absurdist. \[\textit{citations needed}\]

Absurdism is also frequently compared to Surrealism's predecessor, Dadaism (for example, the Dadaist plays by Tristan Tzara performed at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich). Many of the Absurdist had direct connections with the Dadaists and Surrealists. Ionesco, Beckett, Adamov, and Arrabal for example, were friends with Surrealists still living in Paris at the time including Andre Breton, the founder of Surrealism, and Beckett translated many Surrealist poems by Breton and others from French into English (Knowlson).

**Relationship with Existentialism**

The Theatre of the Absurd is commonly associated with Existentialism, and Existentialism was an influential philosophy in Paris during the rise of the Theatre of the
Absurd; however, to call it Existentialist theatre is problematic for many reasons. It gained this association partly because it was named (by Esslin) after the concept of "absurdism" advocated by Albert Camus, a philosopher commonly called Existentialist though he frequently resisted that label. Absurdism is most accurately called Existentialist in the way Franz Kafka's work is labeled Existentialist: it embodies an aspect of the philosophy though the writer may not be a committed follower. Many of the Absurdist were contemporaries with Jean-Paul Sartre, the philosophical spokesman for Existentialism in Paris, but few Absurdist actually committed to Sartre's own Existentialist philosophy, as expressed in Being and Nothingness, and many of the Absurdist had a complicated relationship with him. Sartre praised Genet's plays, stating that for Genet "Good is only an illusion. Evil is a Nothingness which arises upon the ruins of Good" ("Introduction"); but Sartre and Ionesco were still at times bitter enemies. Ionesco accused Sartre of supporting Communism but ignoring the atrocities committed by Communists; he wrote Rhinoceros as a criticism of blind conformity, whether it be to Nazism or Communism; at the end of the play, one man remains on Earth resisting transformation into a rhinoceros (Ionesco, Fragments). Sartre criticized Rhinoceros by questioning: "Why is there one man who resists? At least we could learn why, but no, we learn not even that. He resists because he is there" ("Beyond Bourgeois Theatre" 6). Sartre's criticism highlights a primary difference between the Theatre of the Absurd and Existentialism: The Theatre of the Absurd shows the failure of man without recommending a solution. Samuel Beckett's primary focus was on the failure of man to overcome "absurdity"; as James Knowlson says in Damned to Fame, Beckett's work focuses "on poverty, failure, exile and loss — as he put it, on man as a 'non-knower' and as a 'non-can-er'." Beckett's own relationship with Sartre was complicated by a mistake made in the publication of one of his stories in Sartre's journal Les Temps Modernes. 

**History**

The "Absurd" or "New Theater" movement was originally a Paris-based (and Rive Gauche) avant-garde phenomenon tied to extremely small theaters in the Quartier Latin. Some of the Absurdist were born in France such as Jean Genet, Jean Tardieu, Boris Vian, and Romain Weingarten. Many other Absurdist were born elsewhere but lived in France, writing often in French: Samuel Beckett from Ireland; Eugene Ionesco from Romania; Arthur Adamov from Russia; and Fernando Arrabal from Spain. As the influence of the Absurdist grew, the style spread to other countries—playwrights either directly influenced by Absurdist in Paris or playwrights labeled Absurdist by critics. In England some of whom Esslin considered practitioners of "the Theatre of the Absurd" include: Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, N. F. Simpson, James Saunders, and David Campton; in the United States, Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, Jack Gelber, and John Guare; in Poland, Tadeusz Różewicz, Sławomir Mrożek, and Tadeusz Kantor; in Italy, Dino Buzzati and Ezio d'Errico; and in Germany, Peter Weiss, Wolfgang Hildesheimer, and Günter Grass. In India, both Mohit Chattopadhyay and Mahesh Elkunchwar have also been labeled Absurdist. Other international Absurdist playwrights include: Tawfiq al-Hakim from Egypt; Miguel Mihura from Spain; José de Almada Negreiros from Portugal; Yordan Radichkov from Bulgaria; and playwright and former Czech President Václav Havel, and others from the Czech Republic and Slovakia.
Jean Genet’s *The Maids* (*Les Bonnes*) premiered in 1947. Eugene Ionesco’s *The Bald Soprano* (*La Cantatrice Chauve*) was first performed on May 11, 1950 at the Théâtre des Noctambules. Ionesco followed this with "The Lesson" ("La Leçon") in 1951 and *The Chairs* (*Les Chaises*) in 1952. Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* was first performed on the 5th of January 1953 at the Théâtre de Babylone in Paris. In 1956 Genet’s *The Balcony* (*Le Balcon*) was produced in London at the Arts Theatre. The following year, Beckett’s *Endgame* was first performed, and that may Harold Pinter’s *The Room* was presented at The Drama Studio at the University of Bristol. Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* premiered in the West End and Edward Albee’s *The Zoo Story* premiered in West Berlin at the Schiller Theater Werkstatt — both in 1958. On the October 28th of that year, *Krapp’s Last Tape* by Beckett was first performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London. Fernando Arrabal’s *Pique-nique en campagne* (*Picnic on the Battlefield*) also came out in 1958. Genet’s *The Blacks* (*Les Nègres*) was published that year but was first performed at the Théâtre de Lutèce in Paris on the 28th October, 1959. 1959 also saw the completion of Ionesco’s *Rhinocéros*. Beckett’s *Happy Days* was first performed at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York on the 17th of September 1961. Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* also premiered in New York the following year, on October 13th. Pinter’s *The Homecoming* premiered in London in 1964. Peter Weiss’s *Marat/Sade* (*The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*) was first performed in West Berlin in 1964 and in New York City a year later. Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead* premiered at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1966. Arrabal’s *Le Cimetière des voitures* (*Automobile Graveyard*) was also first performed in 1966. Beckett’s *Catastrophe*—dedicated to then-imprisoned Czech dissident playwright Václav Havel, who became president of Czechoslovakia after the 1989 Velvet Revolution—was first performed at the Avignon Festival on July 21, 1982; the film version (in *Beckett on Film* [2001]) was directed by David Mamet and performed by Harold Pinter, Sir John Gielgud, and Rebecca Pidgeon.

Echoes of elements of "The Theatre of the Absurd" can be seen in many later playwrights, from more avant-garde or experimental playwrights like Susan-Lori Parks—in *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* and *The America Play*, for example—to relatively realistic playwrights like David Mamet—in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, which Mamet dedicated to Harold Pinter.

**Essential traits**

Most of the bewilderment absurdist drama initially created was because critics and reviewers were used to the Realism of more conventional drama. In practice, *The Theatre of the Absurd* departs from realistic characters, situations and all of the associated theatrical conventions. Time, place and identity are ambiguous and fluid, and even basic causality frequently breaks down. Meaningless plots, repetitive or nonsensical dialogue and dramatic non-sequiturs are often used to create dream-like, or even nightmare-like moods. There is a fine line, however, between the careful and artful use of chaos and non-realistic elements and true, meaningless chaos. While many of the plays described by this title seem to be quite random and meaningless on the surface, an underlying structure and meaning is usually found in the midst of the chaos. According to Martin Esslin, Absurdism is "the inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose" (Esslin [1961] 24). Absurdist Drama asks its audience to "draw his own conclusions, make his own errors" (Esslin [1961] 20). Though Theatre of the Absurd may be seen as nonsense, they have something to say and can be understood" (Esslin [1961] 21). Esslin makes a
distinction between the dictionary definition of absurd ("out of harmony" in the musical sense) and Drama’s understanding of the Absurd: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless" (Esslin [1961] 23).

Characters

The characters in Absurdist drama are lost and floating in an incomprehensible universe and they abandon rational devices and discursive thought because these approaches are inadequate (Watt and Richardson 1154). Many characters appear as automatons stuck in routines speaking only in cliché (Ionesco called the Old Man and Old Woman in The Chairs "uber-marrionettes"). Characters are frequently stereotypical, archetypal, or flat character types as in Commedia dell’arte.

The more complex characters are in crisis because the world around them is incomprehensible. Many of Pinter’s plays, for example, feature characters trapped in an enclosed space menaced by some force the character can’t understand. Pinter’s first play was The Room – in which the main character, Rose, is menaced by Riley who invades her safe space though the actual source of menace remains a mystery – and this theme of characters in a safe space menaced by an outside force is repeated in many of his later works (perhaps most famously in The Birthday Party). Characters in Absurdist drama may also face the chaos of a world that science and logic have abandoned. Ionesco’s reoccurring character Berenger, for example, faces a killer without motivation in The Killer, and Berenger’s logical arguments fail to convince the killer that killing is wrong. In Rhinocéros, Berenger remains the only human on Earth who hasn’t turned into a rhinoceros and must decide whether or not to conform. Characters may find themselves trapped in a routine or, in a metafictional conceit, trapped in a story; the titular characters in Tom Stoppard’s Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead, for example, find themselves in a story (Hamlet) in which the outcome has already been written.

The plots of many Absurdist plays feature characters in interdependent pairs, commonly either two males or a male and a female. The two characters may be roughly equal or have a begrudging interdependence (like Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot or the two main characters in Rosencrantz & Guildenstern Are Dead); one character may be clearly dominant and may torture the passive character (like Pozzo and Lucky in Waiting for Godot or Hamm and Clov in Endgame); the relationship of the characters may shift dramatically throughout the play (as in Ionesco’s The Lesson or in many of Albee’s plays, The Zoo Story for example).

Language

Despite its reputation for nonsense language, much of the dialogue in Absurdist plays is naturalistic. The moments when characters resort to nonsense language or clichés—when words appear to have lost their denotative function, thus creating misunderstanding among the characters (Esslin [1961] 26)—make Theatre of the Absurd distinctive. Language frequently gains a certain phonetic, rhythmical, almost musical quality, opening up a wide range of often comedic playfulness. Distinctively Absurdist language will range from meaningless clichés to Vaudeville-style word play to meaningless nonsense. The Bald Soprano, for example, was inspired by a language book in which characters would exchange empty clichés that never ultimately amounted to true communication or true connection. Likewise, the characters in The Bald Soprano—like many other Absurdist characters—go through routine dialogue full of clichés.
without actually communicating anything substantive or making a human connection. In other cases, the dialogue is purposefully elliptical; the language of Absurdist Theater becomes secondary to the poetry of the concrete and objectified images of the stage. Many of Beckett's plays devalue language for the sake of the striking tableau. Harold Pinter–famous for his "Pinter pause"–presents more subtly elliptical dialogue; often the primary things characters should address is replaced by ellipsis or dashes. The following exchange between Aston and Davies in *The Caretaker* is typical of Pinter:

ASTON. More or less exactly what you...
DAVIES. That's it ... that's what I'm getting at is ... I mean, what sort of jobs ...
(*Pause.*)
ASTON. Well, there's things like the stairs ... and the ... the bells ...
DAVIES. But it'd be a matter ... wouldn't it ... it'd be a matter of a broom ... isn't it?

Much of the dialogue in Absurdist drama (especially in Beckett's and Albee's plays, for example) reflects this kind of evasiveness and inability to make a connection. When language that is apparently nonsensical appears, it also demonstrates this disconnection. It can be used for comic effect, as in Lucky's long speech in *Godot* when Pozzo says Lucky is demonstrating a talent for "thinking" as other characters comically attempt to stop him:

LUCKY. Given the existence as uttered forth in the public works of Puncher and Wattmann of a personal God quaquaquauqua with white beard quaquaquauqua outside time without extension who from the heights of divine apathia divine athambia divine aphasia loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown but time will tell and suffers like the divine Miranda with those who for reasons unknown but time will tell are plunged in torment...

1Nonsense may also be used abusively, as in Pinter's *The Birthday Party* when Goldberg and McCann torture Stanley with apparently-nonsensical questions and non-sequiturs:

GOLDBERG. What do you use for pyjamas?
STANLEY. Nothing.
GOLDBERG. You verminate the sheet of your birth.
MCCANN. What about the Albigensenist heresy?
GOLDBERG. Who watered the wicket in Melbourne?
MCCANN. What about the blessed Oliver Plunkett?
GOLDBERG. Speak up Webber. Why did the chicken cross the road?

As in the above examples, nonsense in Absurdist theatre may be also used to demonstrate the limits of language while questioning or parodying the determinism of science and the knowability of truth. In Ionesco's *The Lesson*, a professor tries to force a pupil to understand his nonsensical philology lesson:

PROFESSOR. ... In Spanish: the roses of my grandmother are as yellow as my grandfather who is Asiatic; in Latin: the roses of my grandmother are as yellow as my grandfather who is Asiatic. Do you detect the difference? Translate this into ... Romanian
PUPIL. The ... how do you say "roses" in Romanian?
PROFESSOR. But "roses," what else? ... "roses" is a translation in Oriental of the French word "roses," in Spanish "roses," do you get it? In Sardanapali, "roses"...
Plot

Traditional plot structures are rarely a consideration in The Theatre of the Absurd. Plots can consist of the absurd repetition of cliché and routine, as in Godot or The Bald Soprano. Often there is a menacing outside force that remains a mystery; in The Birthday Party, for example, Goldberg and McCann confront Stanley, torture him with absurd questions, and drag him off at the end, but it is never revealed why. Absence, emptiness, nothingness, and unresolved mysteries are central features in many Absurdist plots: for example, in The Chairs an old couple welcomes a large number of guests to their home, but these guests are invisible so all we see is empty chairs, a representation of their absence. Likewise, the action of Godot is centered around the absence of a man named Godot, for whom the characters perpetually wait. In many of Beckett's later plays, most features are stripped away and what's left is a minimalistic tableau: a woman walking slowly back and forth in Footfalls, for example, or in Breath only a junk heap on stage and the sounds of breathing.

The plot may also revolve around an unexplained metamorphosis, a supernatural change, or a shift in the laws of physics. For example, in Ionesco’s Amédée, or How to Get Rid of It, a couple must deal with a corpse that is steadily growing larger and larger; Ionesco never fully reveals the identity of the corpse, how this person died, or why it’s continually growing, but the corpse ultimately – and, again, without explanation – floats away.

Like Pirandello, many Absurdists use meta-theatrical techniques to explore role fulfillment, fate, and the theatricality of theatre. This is true for many of Genet’s plays: for example, in The Maids, two maids pretend to be their masters; in The Balcony brothel patrons take on elevated positions in role-playing games, but the line between theatre and reality starts to blur. Another complex example of this is Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead: it's a play about two minor characters in Hamlet; these characters, in turn, have various encounters with the players who perform The Mousetrap, the play-with-in-the-play in Hamlet.

Plots are frequently cyclical: for example, Endgame begins where the play ended – some lines at the beginning responding to some lines at the end – and it can be assumed that each day the same actions will take place.

Notes

1. Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961). (Subsequent references to this ed. appear within parentheses in the text.)

Works cited


**Further reading**


