

A photograph of a circus performance. At the top, a woman in a bikini is suspended in the air, holding a green hoop. Below her, two men in red and black patterned pants are performing handstands on a circular platform. The platform has three vertical poles. A woman in a purple top and blue jeans is sitting on the platform, leaning back. The background is a dark blue wall with star patterns and arched windows. The text 'The THEATRE EXPERIENCE' is overlaid in the center, and 'Edwin Wilson' is in the top right. '13e' is in the bottom right.

Edwin Wilson

The **THEATRE**
EXPERIENCE

13e

The Theatre Experience

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The Theatre Experience

THIRTEENTH EDITION

EDWIN WILSON

Professor Emeritus

Graduate School and University Center

The City University of New York





THE THEATRE EXPERIENCE THIRTEENTH EDITION

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About the Author

Edwin Wilson, as a teacher, author, critic, and director, has worked in many aspects of theatre. Educated at Vanderbilt University, the University of Edinburgh, and Yale University, he received a Master of Fine Arts degree, as well as the first Doctor of Fine Arts degree awarded by the Yale Drama School. He has taught at Yale, Hofstra, Vanderbilt, Hunter College, and the CUNY Graduate Center. At Hunter he served as chair of the Department of Theatre and Film and head of the graduate theatre program. At CUNY he was the Executive Director of the Segal Theatre Center. He was the theatre critic for *The Wall Street Journal* for 22 years and edited and wrote the introduction for *Shaw on Shakespeare*. He is the author of *The Theatre Experience* and a coauthor, with Alvin Goldfarb, of *Living Theatre*, *Theatre: The Lively Art*, and a coeditor of *The Anthology of Living Theatre*, all published by McGraw-Hill. He has served as president of the New York Drama Critics' Circle, as well as a member of the selection committees of the Pulitzer Prize in drama and the Tony awards. He is currently on the board of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and the John Golden Fund, and for many years was on the board of the Theatre Development Fund, of which he served as president. Wilson served as assistant to the producer for the film *Lord of the Flies* directed by Peter Brook and the Broadway play *Big Fish*, *Little Fish* directed by John Gielgud, was resident director for a season at the Barter Theatre in Virginia and the executive producer of the film *The Nashville Sound*. He co-produced the Broadway play *Agatha Sue, I Love You*, directed by George Abbott.

To my wife, Catherine

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Preface

ACTIVE AUDIENCE PARTICIPANTS, ACTIVE CLASS PARTICIPANTS

The Theatre Experience prepares students to be well-informed, well-prepared theatre audience members. With an audience-centered narrative that engages today's students, a vivid photo program that brings concepts to life, and features that teach and encourage a variety of skill sets students master core concepts and learn to think critically about theatre and the world around them. As a result, students are better prepared for class, and better prepared for theatergoing.

Engage with Your Role

- True to its original vision—to focus on the audience's experience of attending a live theatre performance—the 13th edition of *The Theatre Experience* **opens with three chapters that focus on the student as an audience member**. Topics include: the difference between being at a live performance and watching a dramatic performance on film, TV, or an electronic device; the enhancement of the experience aided by the proper preparation and background; and the awareness of the role of the audience in live theatre.



- **Dynamics of Drama** features illustrate some of the more challenging theatre concepts in a way that is easier for beginning students to understand and apply as audience members. For example, topics include realism and nonrealism (Chapter 1), and climactic and episodic forms (Chapter 7).
- **NEW Play Links**, a feature in *The Theatre Experience*, 13th edition, allows you to read many of the plays mentioned in the text online. Any play referenced in the text that can be found online is highlighted in blue typeface when first mentioned in a chapter. Should you want to read one of these plays, you can refer to the list that precedes the Glossary at the end of the book and find its URL. Titles are listed alphabetically.

The plays can be used to highlight key concepts and to complement the discussions found in *The Theatre Experience*, 13th edition. In addition, many of the new Thinking about Theatre and Experiencing Theatre exercises can also be supplemented and enhanced with examples from these plays.

Master the Basics

- **Parts 2, 3, and 4 cover the important elements of theatre:** acting, directing, playwriting, and design. The authors' efficient structure and succinct style set students up for a clear understanding of the basic concepts, freeing up valuable class time for deeper discussions and more personal engagement with course concepts.
- **Photo Essays and a dynamic art program** allow students to visualize the core theatrical concepts introduced in each chapter. Topics include modern domestic drama (Chapter 8), forms of comedy (Chapter 8), costumes and masks (Chapter 10), uses of stage lighting (Chapter 11), and others.

Think Critically and Engage Actively

- **NEW “Playing Your Part”** is a feature in each chapter that includes two distinct sets of questions and activities that emphasize thinking and engaging critically.
 - **“Experiencing Theatre”** activities help students actively to engage with the concepts of the text. These exercises ask students to undertake activities within the classroom or to understand how aspects of their everyday lives connect to core concepts discussed in the text.

PLAYING YOUR PART: EXPERIENCING THEATRE

1. If you were to write a play about your life, what would you choose as your opening scene? What would some of your complications be? Would there be a climactic moment?
2. If you were to write a play about a family you know (your own or another), what point of view would you take? Why? Are there strongly opposed forces or balanced forces in this family?
3. If you were told you were going to have to attend a play that lasted over four hours, what would your reaction be? Why? What are your traditional expectations about the space and time of a play?
4. After watching a popular film, describe how the opening scene aids in setting the action. Describe one or two of the complications in the film. Can you discuss the film's point of view?



- “Thinking about Theatre” questions challenge students to analyze and examine elements of a theatre experience.

PLAYING YOUR PART: THINKING ABOUT THEATRE

1. Think of a play you have read or seen where the main character encounters one impediment or roadblock after another. Describe the various obstacles that must be overcome before the end of the play.
2. Think of a play or musical you have seen or read where two major characters are in conflict with one another. Describe the two characters and explain the source of their conflict. How does it play out?
3. Think of a situation some people saw as very serious, but another person viewed as humorous. Explain what you believe led different people to see it so differently. What was your own feeling—was the incident funny or sad?



- NEW “In Focus” features include two categories:
 - “Global Connections” present the global reach and influences of theatre from various cultures. Topics include Augusto Boal’s “Theatre of the Oppressed” (Chapter 1), Asian influences on the playwrights Brecht and Wilder (Chapter 6), and global influences on Julie Taymor (Chapter 12).
 - “Historical Perspectives” features bring relevant topics about the past to life: women in Greek and Elizabethan theatres, performers’ status at different points in time, the evolution of the director.
 - NEW Marginal Definitions For the first time in The Theatre Experience, definitions of boldface words or terms in the text are provided in the adjacent margin.

Selected Chapter-by-Chapter Changes

Chapter 1 begins with a new section on the great diversity of contemporary theatre, first in terms of the variety of places in which theatre can be viewed: from the largest auditoriums or Broadway houses to regional, college, and community theatres, as well as small, informal spaces, and second, in terms of the extraordinary range of subject matter as well as ethnic and cultural material. The chapter then turns to the unique experience of live theatre that differentiates it from all other media. In this and all subsequent chapters, when a play is mentioned for the first time, it is set in blue type to signal its inclusion in the new “Play Links” feature. This indicates that the script of the play can be retrieved by means of a URL, which is provided at the end of the text.

Chapter 2 retains the core content about audience involvement, including background information and preparation that makes attending the theatre more meaningful and enjoyable. The chapter’s coverage of critics and reviewers has been extensively updated, now including new discussions of bloggers, social media’s impact on audiences, and audience behavior.

Chapter 3 has a new Dynamics of Drama feature, “Popular Performance Spaces,” which extends the coverage of venues where live performances take place. Material on stage spaces has been edited and updated.

Chapter 4 features minor updates to keep the content as current and engaging as possible. Information on the training, preparation, history, and techniques of acting have been retained from previous editions.

Chapter 5 expands anew the auteur director and the postmodern director. The material on the artistic director and managing director of nonprofit theatres has been revised.

Chapter 6 features a new introductory section on the playwright’s role in the creation of a script, explaining the playwright’s relationship to ancient storytellers. Also, information has been added on the context in which the playwright works, the demands and challenges of developing a script, and the unique requirements of a work for the stage.

Chapter 8 has been substantially edited and revised. There is a new opening section on the mood, tone, and point of view of a production that are conveyed to an audience in the opening moments of a production.

Chapter 12 features a new discussion of recent trends in stage musicals, together with up-to-date examples.

Chapter 13 features refined listings of playwrights and plays, updated with the latest names and productions from around the world. Material that was previously in Chapter 1 has been incorporated into this chapter.

TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES

Support for Instructors

The Theatre Experience offers a wealth of supplemental materials to aid both students and instructors. The Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/wilsonte13e is a resource for students and faculty. Instructors' resources are password-protected and include:

- Instructor's Manual.
- Test Bank.
- EZ Test Computerized Test Bank: McGraw-Hill's EZ Test is a flexible, easy-to-use electronic testing program that allows instructors to create tests from specific items in the text. It accommodates a wide range of question types, and instructors may add their own questions. Multiple versions of the test can be created, and any test can be exported for use with course management systems. The program is available for Windows and Macintosh.

Student Resources

The Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/wilsonte13e is a robust tool for students, providing a wide range of material to enhance learning and to simplify studying. Resources are keyed directly to this edition and include the following:

- Chapter-by-chapter quizzes for testing students.
- Essay Quizzes that can be e-mailed directly to instructors.
- The Theatre Goer's Guide is an excellent introduction to the art of attending and critiquing a play. This guide will assist students in everything from making theatre reservations and knowing when to applaud to evaluating a performance and doing web research.
- Detailed explanations and examples of Major Theatrical Forms and Movements.
- Synopses of Plays.
- Select Bibliography.



Craft your teaching resources to match the way you teach! With McGraw-Hill Create, www.mcgrawhillcreate.com, you can easily rearrange chapters, combine material from other content sources, and quickly upload content you have written, like your course syllabus or teaching notes. Find the content you need in Create by searching through thousands of leading McGraw-Hill textbooks. Arrange your book to fit your teaching style. Create even allows you to personalize your book's appearance by selecting the cover and adding your name, school, and course information. Order a Create book and you'll receive a complimentary print review copy in 3–5 business days or a complimentary electronic review copy (eComp) via e-mail in about one hour. Go to www.mcgrawhillcreate.com today and register. Experience how McGraw-Hill Create empowers you to teach your students your way.

Anthology of Plays

Anthology of Living Theater (978-0-07-351413-0) offers 18 plays for use with *The Theatre Experience*.

CourseSmart ebook

The Theatre Experience is available as an eTextbook at www.CourseSmart.com. At CourseSmart, students can take advantage of significant savings off the cost of a print textbook, reduce their impact on the environment, and gain access to powerful web tools for student learning. You can view CourseSmart eTextbooks online or download them to a computer. CourseSmart eTextbooks allow students to do full text searches, add highlighting and notes, and share notes with classmates. Visit www.CourseSmart.com to learn more and try a sample chapter.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I wish to thank Professor Alvin Goldfarb for his invaluable contribution to this edition of *The Theatre Experience*. My coauthor on *Living Theatre* and *Theatre: The Lively Art*, Al's ideas, his research and writing skills, his originality and imagination, and his persistence have been indispensable in completing this, perhaps the most audience-oriented and insightful version of *The Theatre Experience* of the entire series.

I first developed many of the ideas in this book while teaching a course in Introduction to Theatre at Hunter College of the City University of New York. To my former students and colleagues at Hunter, I express my continuing appreciation. Also, to those professors and other experts who have contributed importantly to prior versions, I express my deep appreciation. They include Alexis Greene, Naomi Stubbs, Susan Tenneriello, Donny Levit, and Frank Episale. In addition, I express my gratitude to Professor Jeff Entwistle for his prodigious contribution to the chapters on design, and I also thank Professor Laura Pulio for her helpful suggestions on acting. A special thanks also to Professor Oliver W. Gerland and his fellow teachers at the University of Colorado. I would also like to thank Professor Scott Walters, University of North Carolina-Asheville, for developing the first teacher and student study guide materials for Theatre Experience and Professor John Poole, Illinois State University, for his revisions that are now found on the On Line Learning Center.

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Through twenty-six editions of my three textbooks published by McGraw-Hill, my colleague Inge King, the incredible photography expert, has discovered every photograph that has appeared in every edition of every text, including this edition of *The Theatre Experience*. Inge is amazing as well as being an irreplaceable colleague. As I pointed out previously, through the years Inge has discovered thousands upon thousands of photographs from which she has helped select the ones that make up our extraordinary illustration program. There is no way adequately to acknowledge her taste, persistence, abiding loyalty to the project, and her creativity.

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The Theatre Experience

THIRTEENTH EDITION

1

The Audience

THE AUDIENCE

The basic encounter in the theatre is the exchange, the chemistry, the electricity between the audience and the actors performing on stage. The presence of the audience sets live theatre apart from all other forms of dramatic entertainment. Here the audience is gathered for a production of *Treasure Island* at the Colorado Shakespeare Festival in the Mary Rippon Outdoor Theatre on the University of Colorado, Boulder, campus. (© Steve Mohlenkamp/stevemohlenkamp.com)



1 The Audience:
Its Role and
Imagination

2 The Background
and Expectations
of the Audience

3 Theatre Spaces:
The Audience
Views the Stage



Part One

The Audience

We may not realize it, but when we attend the theatre, we, as spectators, are essential to the experience. To be complete, each one of the performing arts—opera, ballet, symphony concerts as well as theatre—requires an audience. Whether watching a classic like *Romeo and Juliet*, or a modern family play, for most of us, it is likely that our first encounter with a dramatic work was on film, television, or a handheld electronic device. No matter how impressed we were with seeing a play or a musical in this way, however, it

must be remembered that the experience of watching television or a movie is quite different from attending the theatre. With TV or movies, we are looking at a screen on which there are no live people but only images of people. And the experience of being in the presence of a living, breathing person makes all the difference. Another way of putting this is to say that the audience is not an incidental factor in a theatrical performance; if we are audience members, we become an indispensable element in what is occurring.

At a theatrical performance, we become keenly aware of the actors onstage. What we may not realize is that the actors are just as aware of our presence. Laughter at a comedy or a deep silence at a tense moment in a serious drama is communicated directly to the actors and has a very real effect on their performance.

In a number of events other than the performing arts, spectators often play a key role. For example, most sports contests—football, baseball, basketball, soccer, tennis, NASCAR races—elicit huge



Fans cheering at the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series auto race in Martinsville, Virginia. (© Don Petersen/AP Images)



President Barack Obama greeting the crowd after the oath of office was administered during his inauguration for his second term. (© Ann Hermes/The Christian Science Monitor via Getty Images)

interest from fans. This is true whether the sports event is at the high school, college, or professional level. In other spheres as well, the participation of viewers is crucial. Political conventions and political rallies depend on large, supportive crowds to be considered successful. A good example is a national nominating convention. The hall where the event takes place becomes a giant stage set, with a stagelike platform, backdrops, and carefully arranged positions for entrances and exits. The programs are carefully scripted to build to a climax, with a finale consisting of stirring music and literally thousands of balloons dropping from the ceiling.

Despite the similarity between theatre events and sports events, there is one unmistakable difference. Theoretically, a sports contest could take place in an empty stadium and still be considered complete: though the thrill and the excitement would be missing, the results would be entered in the record book, and the won-lost statistics would be just as valid as if the game had taken place before a large crowd.

This is not true for the performing arts. Each theatre, ballet, or opera performance, each musical concert, is intended specifically to be presented in the presence of an audience, which is an absolutely essential part of the event. Of course, any of these can be recorded

digitally or otherwise, but listening to or viewing one of these is not the same as attending a live event. In a very real sense, a theatre performance at which no audience is present is actually *not* a performance. It may be a rehearsal of some kind, but the performance occurs only when the actors perform in the presence of an audience.

In Part One we will explore who makes up the audience, how audiences are created, how they differ from one another, how they respond to what is happening onstage, and how they interact with performers.



The audience at a performance of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at Shakespeare's Globe in London. (© Gideon Mendel/Corbis)



The audience watching a 3-D movie. (© Image Source/Corbis RF)



1

The Audience: Its Role and Imagination

Live theatre: The performance of a dramatic event by a group of actors in the presence of their counterparts, the audience members.

For the past 100 years there have been persistent and dire predictions that live theatre would soon be dead. It has been argued that each one of a succession of remarkable technological innovations would make theatre obsolete. First there was radio, then silent film, talking film, and television, followed by video on computers and a myriad of handheld devices. Each one, it was pointed out, was far less expensive and far more accessible than live theatre. How could any art form survive this onslaught of continuously more and more advanced entertainment media?

Miraculously, theatre has not only survived, it has thrived. One measure of the amazing health of live theatre today is the astounding range of opportunities we have of attending theatre, with more locations, not only in the United States but throughout the world, presenting a greater variety of theatre offerings perhaps than ever before. For a long time Broadway was the fountainhead of live theatre in the U.S.A. Though it is still thriving and touring Broadway shows are regularly seen in major and mid-size cities throughout America, theatre that originates on Broadway is not as predominant as it once was. At the same time, performing arts complexes in all parts of the country, not only present Broadway shows, but often have other spaces which feature live theatre. These might include 1,000 seat, 500 seat, or 200 seat theatres that offer new plays, revivals, intimate musicals, and other types of dramatic entertainment.

In addition, during the last half century there has been a burgeoning of what are known as “regional theatres.” These are permanent, professional, nonprofit theatres that offer a season of first-class productions to their audiences each year. Their association,

◀ THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

The audience and the performers are the two essential elements of theatre: both are required for theatre to occur. The presence of the audience sets theatre apart from the experience of watching a theatrical presentation on film, on television, or in any other electronic medium. Here the audience gives the cast of Newsies a standing ovation in New York. (© Benjamin Norman/The New York Times/Redux)

the League of Resident Theatres, lists a total of 74 high-caliber such theatres scattered across the country. Added to the above are approximately 120 Shakespeare theatres found in virtually every state in the United States which feature, especially in the summer months, high-quality productions of Shakespeare and the classics as well as modern plays.

Another important component of today's theatre landscape is the many college and university theatres found in every one of the fifty states, as well as Canada and elsewhere. Many colleges have not one but perhaps two or three theatre spaces in which students and guest artists perform. There might be, for instance, a 500 or 600 seat theatre, a smaller 200 seat theatre with a different configuration, and a 100 seat "black box" for more experimental or intimate productions.

Finally, in every corner of the United States, there are an astonishing 7,000 so-called community theatres. These are semiprofessional and experienced amateur groups who present a series of plays each year to local audiences. It might surprise people to learn that these several thousand theatres present roughly 46,000 productions each year to audiences that number in the millions. Obviously, taken together, the total number of theatre events presented each year in the United States is a staggering, almost unbelievable figure.

It is not, however, just the vast range and number of annual productions that is surprising, it is the diversity of offerings. It begins with new plays and musicals, and moves to classics, revivals of old plays, and then encompasses experimental and avant-garde offerings. There are top-flight theatres that specialize in each of these types of theatre. Some theatres, like regional and university theatres, often encompass all of them. Still a different category encompasses site-specific theatre and performance art. The former are presentations offered in nontraditional theatre settings, such places as warehouses, churches, firehouses, street corners, and public parks. The idea is that the unusual locale together with a different approach in the material will make audiences conscious in a different way of what they are seeing and experiencing. Performance art is usually highly individual and presented by only one person but never by more than a small number. The content is usually quite personal, and may be combined with art, dance, film, or music.

Today, along with diversity in types of theatre and where it is presented, there is an incredible mix of ethnic and multicultural presentations. In addition to Anglo-American theatre, there is a rich mix of work from many other traditions and cultures. These include African American theatre, Hispanic theatre, Native American theatre, Asian theatre, Arabic theatre; in fact, virtually every type of regional, cultural, and national theatre imaginable. Contemporary theatre is also widely diverse, socially, politically, and culturally, and includes Gay and Lesbian theatre and Feminist theatre. One could argue that it is as inclusive and multicultural as can be imagined.

In addition, today's theatre, as we will discuss more fully later, is truly global. There are theatre traditions unique to nations across the world as well as international theatres that tour the world and integrate cross-cultural techniques and styles.

How can we explain all this? Today, not only are there movies in every neighborhood and television in all of our homes, there is ever-growing use of pads, tablets, and cell phones on which digitally transmitted theatrical presentations can be seen. In the midst of this why would any of us bother with theatre? How would we have the time or make the effort to see actual performances? The answer lies in the nature of live theatre—it happens at a given moment before our very eyes. We are there watching it and we are

actually participants in the event. The drama critic Walter Kerr (1913–1996) explained what it means for audience and actors to be together:

It doesn't just mean that we are in the personal presence of performers. It means that they are in our presence, conscious of us, speaking to us, working for and with us until a circuit that is not mechanical becomes established between us, a circuit that is fluid, unpredictable, ever-changing in its impulses, crackling, intimate. Our presence, the way we respond, flows back to the performer and alters what he does, to some degree and sometimes astonishingly so, every single night. We are contenders, making the play and the evening and the emotion together. We are playmates, building a structure. This never happens at a film because the film is already built, finished, sealed, incapable of responding to us in any way. The actors can't hear us or feel our presence; nothing we do, in our liveness, counts. We could be dead and the film would purr out its appointed course, flawlessly, indifferently.¹

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THEATRE AND FILM

As Walter Kerr suggests, one way to explain the special nature of live theatre is to contrast a drama seen in a theatre with one shown on film or television. Both present a story told in dramatic form—an enactment of scenes by performers who speak and act as if they were the people they represent. The same actress can play Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare (1564–1616) on both stage and screen. Not only the dramatization and the acting but also other elements, such as scenery and costumes, are often similar on stage and screen. In fact, many films and television specials have been based on stage productions: *A Chorus Line*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Les Misérables*, and numerous plays by Shakespeare. Also, one can learn a great deal about theatre from watching a play on film or television, which can also give us many of the same feelings and experiences that we have when watching a theatre performance. Moreover, the accessibility of film and television means that they play a crucial role in our overall exposure to the depiction of dramatic events and dramatic characters.

As important as the similarities are, however, there is a crucial difference between experiencing live theatre or watching it on television or on film. We are not speaking here of the technical capabilities of film or television, the ability to show outdoor shots taken from helicopters, cut instantaneously from one scene to another, or create special effects such as those in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *The Hobbit*, or *The Avengers*. No, the most significant—in fact, the overriding—difference between films and theatre is the performer-audience relationship. The experience of being in the presence of the performer is more important to theatre than anything else. With a film or with television, we are always in the presence of an image, never a person.

The American playwright Jean-Claude van Itallie (b. 1936) has explained the importance of the actor-audience relationship in theatre, and how theatre differs from films and television:

Theater is not electronic. Unlike movies and unlike television, it does require the live presence of both audience and actors in a single space. This is the theater's uniquely important advantage and function, its original religious function of bringing people together in a community ceremony where the actors are in some sense priests or celebrants, and the audience is drawn to participate with the actors in a kind of eucharist.²